(tē•kün) To mend, repair and transform the world.

# TIKKUN

**Current Debate**
*Nature & Domination*
*Steven Vogel vs. Michael Zimmerman*
■
*Tikkun Additions*
*to your Passover Haggadah*

A BIMONTHLY JEWISH CRITIQUE OF POLITICS, CULTURE & SOCIETY MARCH/APRIL 1989 $5.00

PAPERS FROM

## THE TIKKUN CONFERENCE (I)

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ABBA EBAN
MICHAEL LERNER
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TODD GITLIN
NAN FINK
LETTY COTTIN POGREBIN
ILENE PHILIPSON
ELI ZARETSKY



*Law & the Denial of Desire*
**Peter Gabel**

*On JAPs*
**Elisa New**

*Twice an Outsider*
**Vivian Gornick**

*When Welfare Reforms Fail*
**Howard Karger & David Stoesz**

*Nostalgia*
**Sven Birkerts**

*On Objectivity*
**Joan Wallach Scott**

**PLUS**

*David Cole on Midrash and Theatre; Rabbi Moshe Ish Shalom on Critiquing Orthodoxy From Within; Richard Elman on Malamud; Arthur Waskow on the Song of Songs; Jenefer Shute on Vietnam Movies; Marx Wartofsky on Picasso; Book Reviews by Daniel Gordis, Jefferson Morley, Elizabeth Lunbeck & Madeleine Tress; Fiction by Robert Cohen, Edith Pearlman; Poetry by Richard Chess, Florence Weinberger, L.S. Askoff & Caroline Finkelstein.*

# Spring, Passover, Anniversary, In That Order

You haven't changed, you weigh the same,
look the same. Yes, age, gray, the usual
way bones lose their heft and shrink
a little. Otherwise, hard and soft still.
Two exceptions: you didn't have a
moustache then; you didn't have a
scar from the hollow in your neck
to the bottom of your rib cage.

But I've changed, haven't I? A new
shape every ten years or so, I've been
thin with smoke and deprivation,
bland and round as a jar, hair short,
clothes sleek, I've followed every fad,
sat at the feet of gurus, pursued mystics,
fallen in love with analysts, soul
hungry. I begin to know me,
but who are we? Maypole and
dancer, North Star and seeker? Once
my poems were so obscure, I
wrote them on graph paper. Those who
understood them didn't, and those
who didn't, did. I hid desire like an
*afikomen* on Passover, the seder incomplete
until a child found the missing piece.

I dream a young girl comes to me and tells me
who she is. She always knew. I chose you
thirty-two years ago, myself hidden from self
like the sons in the story too insufficient
to ask the question, too simple to call it
love, too wicked to admit it.
The wise child hides behind the door,
listens to the voices, plots her life.

— *Florence Weinberger*

# TIKKUN

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# Letters

Tikkun *reserves the right to select, edit, and shorten all submissions to the Letters section.*

## Revising Israeli History

To the Editor:

Benny Morris claims (*Tikkun,* Nov./Dec. 1988) that "at no point during the war did Arab leaders issue a blanket call for Palestine's Arabs to leave their homes and villages and wander into exile." Furthermore, he erroneously states that there was no "Arab radio or press campaign urging or ordering the Palestinians to flee." Indeed, Mr. Morris emphatically states that he has "found no trace of any such broadcasts. . . ."

In contrast to what appears to be the selected research of Mr. Morris, there are quite a number of sources that prove not only that Arab broadcasts were a major factor behind the Palestinian exodus from Israel, but that these broadcasts were under the guiding influence of the Palestinian Arab leadership. One prominent source is the Jordanian daily *Filastin,* which wrote on February 19, 1949: "The Arab states, which had encouraged the Palestinian Arabs to leave their homes temporarily in order to be out of the way of the Arab invasion armies . . . failed to keep their promises to help these refugees."

In Cyprus, the Near East Arabic Broadcasting Station reported on April 3, 1949, that "it must not be forgotten that the Arab Higher Committee encouraged the refugees' flight from their homes in Jaffa, Haifa, and Jerusalem."

Edward Selim Atiyah, the secretary of the Arab League office in London, stated in his book *The Arabs* (Penguin, 1955) that the "wholesale exodus was due partly to the belief of the Arabs, encouraged by the boasting of an unrealistic Arab press and the irresponsible utterances of some of the Arab leaders that it could be only a matter of some weeks before the Jews were defeated by the armies of the Arab States. . . ."

The Research Group for European Migration Problems wrote (REMP Bulletin, Jan./Mar. 1957) that "the Arab League issued orders exhorting the people to seek temporary refuge in neighboring countries, later to return to their abodes in the wake of the victorious Arab armies and obtain their share of the abandoned Jewish property."

Mr. Morris outlandishly claims that there is "no contemporary reference to or citation from such a broadcast . . ." encouraging the Palestinians to flee. However, the London weekly *Economist* reported on October 2, 1948: "Of the


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62,000 Arabs who formerly lived in Haifa not more than 5,000 or 6,000 remained. Various factors influenced their decision to seek safety in flight. There is little doubt that the most potent of the factors were the announcements made over the air by the Higher Arab Executive, urging the Arabs to quit."

Perhaps the most sad but tellingly honest perspective was that of the Palestinian refugee who said in *Ad Difaa*—a Jordan daily, on September 6, 1954—"The Arab government told us: Get out so that we can get in. So we got out, but they did not get in."

The above references are just a few of the many records that clearly reveal that Arab leaders used the media to instruct the Palestinians to leave Israel during the war of 1948.

Benny Morris seems quite proud of the so-called new historians' claim that they represent a "maturing" Israel and a "more balanced and a more 'truthful' view of the country's history. . . ." As Mr. Morris so aptly notes, it says in Pirkei Avot: "On three things the world rests: On justice, on truth and on peace." The commentators point out that in order to ensure that the complete truth is revealed, justice requires a total investigation of the entire truth. Mr. Morris has certainly failed to serve justice, and as a result his analysis is far from being totally truthful!

Chaim Marmer
Downsview, Ontario, Canada

To the Editor:

Benny Morris's "Israel: The New Historiography" (*Tikkun,* Nov./Dec. 1988) challenges some well-rooted conventional wisdoms of Zionist history and for that it is welcome, but a significant omission takes much away from Morris's analysis. He observes that: "[A]part from the birth of the State of Israel, the major political outcome of the 1948 war was the creation of the Palestinian refugee problem." Not one but two refugee problems were created: a Jewish one and an Arab one. In expressing our concern for the Palestinian refugees and sympathy for their claims, we unintentionally adopt a double standard.

Pleased that the Jews who left and were forced to leave Arab territories were resettled, albeit imperfectly, in Israel, we forget that the responsibility for resettlement fell, as international law provides that it should have, on Israel. Similarly, responsibility for resettling the Palestinians who left and were forced to leave their homes in Jewish territory lay and continues to lie with Arab governments and their colleagues in the PLO. That responsibility has never been met, other than by attempts to seek retribution against Israel. If Israel is to compensate the Palestinians in land, rights, and money, then Israel should receive an appropriate quid pro quo for its cost, both human and monetary, incurred in resettling the uprooted Jews from Arab lands, not just hedged mutterings from Algiers that mutual coexistence with a truncated Israel might be possible. If Israel is to return the occupied territories, then the Arab nations should compensate the Jews for their lost and taken properties in their former homes. If Israel is to provide the Palestinians in their midst with rights, including the right to self-determination, then the Arab nations must provide similar human rights to Jews and other non-Arab peoples in their midst.

It is time we put our ingrained Jewish sense of equity to work not just in convincing ourselves that the Palestinians deserve far, far better treatment than they receive today (a point with which there should be no quarrel), but in convincing the world that compromise is a two-way street, and that it is time the Arab nations and the PLO abided fully by the traffic rules.

David D. Knoll
New York, New York

To the Editor:

I was very disturbed by Benny Morris's article (*Tikkun,* Nov./Dec. 1988). As a person who came to Israel as a fourteen-year-old in 1949 from Holocaust-ravaged Europe, was educated in Israel, served in the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) in the fifties, and whose children served in the IDF in the eighties, I have no choice but to take a very serious look at what Mr. Morris and the persons he quotes have to say. Did some of my friends, and later some of my students, die in battles just because Ben-Gurion was "not in a hurry" to make peace? I hope Mr. Morris can substantiate his statements, which I find to be very serious accusations against Israel's governments, starting with that of Ben-Gurion.

I strongly disagree with Mr. Morris's statements about the alleged IDF "overreactions" in Lod in July 1948. He himself admits that the Arabs attacked and started shooting first. Whatever the IDF did to the Arabs in Lod and Ramle was in self-defense. The fact that there are still a significant number of Arabs residing in Lod and Ramle proves the tolerance and generosity of the Israeli people in general and the IDF in particular. The IDF, as a general rule (discounting some "flukes," of which even the U.S. army is not clean), always preserved the *tohar haneshek,* the cleanliness of arms, in many cases at the expense of the blood of its members.

Daniel Tabak
Fairfax, Virginia

To the Editor:

Benny Morris does himself a grave disservice in "The New Historiography: Israel Confronts Its Past," (*Tikkun,* Nov./Dec. 1988) by lumping himself with Avi Shlaim (author of *Collusion Across the Jordan*) and Simha Flapan (*The Birth of Israel*). Simply put, there is no comparison between Morris and these authors.

In his own book, *The Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem,* Morris does a valuable service by painstakingly going through the archives and reconstructing hundreds of incidents. His tone is impartial, his conclusions are well-grounded, and his goal is to determine historical truth. But the same can hardly be said of the other two authors he discusses.

Shlaim's book suffers from an anti-Israel animus. He makes it his task to discredit those he calls "Zionist historians." In the process, he adopts some dubious positions. To take just one: Shlaim holds that David Ben-Gurion, even as he declared a Jewish-Arab alliance to be one of his main objectives, "deep in his heart, rejoiced at the flight of the Arabs." This is calumny, not serious history.

As for Flapan, the less said the better. His screed is an embarrassment, filled with inaccuracies and anti-Zionist venom. Again, one example: Flapan argues that the Arab states invaded Israel in 1948 not to destroy Israel but to stop King Abdullah of Jordan from achieving his dream of a greater Syria.

This argument is about as preposterous as claiming that Hitler invaded Poland to prevent it from falling into Stalin's hands. Flapan's book may be the worst book on Israel ever issued by a reputable publisher.

Having distinguished so sharply between Morris, and Shlaim and Flapan, I should like to point out one discouraging feature they share in common: all three are very familiar with Israel but have little knowledge and even less interest in the Arab countries. This imbalance leads, almost inevitably, to distortion. The authors see Israel in a vacuum. Like a host of American critics of Israel (Bernard Avishai comes first to mind), they focus so intently on the Israeli polity that they lose sight of the larger context in which Israeli actions take place.

In doing so, they closely resemble those many American historians interested only in the United States. Whoever looks at the cold war only from the American side is almost certain to blame its occurrence on Washington. The same goes for these people's analysis of every other foreign policy issue from the Berlin blockade to the INF treaty. Only with a larger perspective is it possible to understand such an issue in its entirety and judge its rights and wrongs.

Daniel Pipes
Director, Foreign Policy Research Institute
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

*Benny Morris responds:*

The myth that an Arab radio campaign and blanket calls by Arab leaders to the Arabs of Palestine to leave their homes, villages, and towns in advance of the Arab invasion of May 15, 1948, was a, or the major, cause of the Palestinian exodus is almost as old as the Judean Hills, and perhaps as ineradicable. Israeli and pro-Israeli propagandists have a fistful of quotes that are regularly trotted out in support (see Mr. Marmer's letter).

There was no Arab policy to achieve the exodus of the Palestinians; no outside Arab leader called upon the Arabs of Palestine to leave their homes. Not one of Mr. Marmer's quotes qualifies as solid, contemporary historical evidence to the contrary. Marmer's quotes originate in (1) Israeli propaganda, eventually picked up by Western officials and journalists (such as the *Economist*'s report from October 1948), and their Arab counterparts; and (2) inter-Arab feuding. The Palestinians, in order to justify and explain their weakness and spinelessness after the fact, were eager to blame the Arab leaders outside for their exodus. Similarly, some Arab leaders—such as the late Syrian leader Khalid al-Azm—for reasons of inter-Arab rivalry found it useful to blame other Arab leaders for what had happened in Palestine, including the mass evacuation.

No one has yet been able to produce a contemporary—meaning from April or May 1948—quote or even reference to such a radio call or order by an Arab leader. Israeli intelligence and British and American diplomatic posts in the Middle East monitored Arab radio broadcasts on a daily basis and produced reports quoting from, summarizing, or referring to these broadcasts. Not one Israeli intelligence or British and American report from this period contains such a quote, refers to such a broadcast, or, indeed, mentions the existence of such an Arab policy or a call by an Arab leader to the Palestinians of the sort that allegedly occurred.

The opposite is the case—and I would advise Mr. Marmer to read my book. In early May 1948, the Arab governments, in conjunction with Kaukji's Arab Liberation Army, launched a concerted campaign, on the radio waves and by other means, against the exodus, urging the population in Palestine to stay put and those who had already fled to return to their homes. There are Israeli intelligence reports and British diplomatic cables from those days quoting from these broadcasts or referring to their content. For example, at the end of June 1948, the Israeli intelligence service concluded that "the Arab Higher Committee [in the spring] had decided ... to adopt measures to weaken the exodus by imposing restrictions, penalties, threats, propaganda in the press [and] on the radio.... [It] especially tried to prevent the flight of army-age young males." On May 6, 1948, the Jewish Agency's Arab section radio-monitoring unit reported, in its daily monitoring report, that the previous day Radio Jerusalem and Damascus Radio had "announced in the name of the High Command: 'Every Arab must defend his home and property.... Those who leave their homes will be punished and their homes destroyed.'"

I challenge Mr. Marmer to find a single mention in an Israeli military or civilian government document or in a British and American diplomatic report written in April, May, or June 1948 of an ongoing Arab campaign urging or ordering the Arab population to quit Palestine, citing or quoting from a specific Arab radio broadcast or exhortation by a named Arab leader. There was no such campaign, and Mr. Marmer will find no such quotes. (Mr. Marmer may have noticed that in none of the quotations from later months that he (re)produces is any specific Arab leader, radio broadcast, or date mentioned. Why?)

Let me quickly add to this point that there were certain specific instances in which Arab political or military leaders urged specific communities to quit their homes—in Haifa in April, in various Judean Hills and Jezreel Valley villages in April and May. These cases are dealt with in my book. But there were no blanket orders; there was no general policy of promoted exodus.

I do not think that the Arab refugee problem, created in 1948, can be equated with the Jewish exodus from Arab lands, which took place mainly during the 1950s. The Jewish exodus—from Iraq, Morocco, Egypt, and other Moslem lands—deserves specific and full-scale study, and, no doubt, its historian will one day emerge. But certain things are fairly clear: while there were pogroms in some of the Arab states in 1948, triggered by the Arab-Jewish hostilities in Palestine, there was no mass expulsion of the Jewish communities from the Arab countries. The year 1948 triggered a wave of Jewish emigration from Arab lands, a wave promoted in large measure by Zionist emissaries and broadcasts. But the bulk of Iraqi Jewry left Iraq only in 1950 to 1951; the bulk of Moroccan Jewry, only in the early 1950s and early 1960s. To see these waves of emigration as merely the consequences of the 1948 war would be a vast oversimplification.

In my article in *Tikkun* I did not evince sympathy for the Palestinian refugees or anyone else. My purpose, Mr. Knoll, was not to prompt tears, but to delineate a change in historical perceptions of 1948. It is possible, if and when a settlement is negotiated,

that both exiled Palestinians and Jewish emigrants from Arab lands should be compensated. It is possible that a Palestinian state could and will arise side by side with Israel, on areas from which the IDF withdraws. Perhaps, as part of a comprehensive peace settlement, the terrorized or disadvantaged Jews of Syria and Yemen could gain release from their difficult existence. But all this is politics and really has nothing to do with my article.

As for IDF behavior in Lydda and Ramle in 1948, and elsewhere during the war, I suggest Mr. Tabak read my book. He will discover, among other things, that the population of Ramle did not fire upon the Israeli occupation force in July 1948. Therefore, whatever the merits or demerits of the concurrent expulsion from Lydda, its fate cannot be justified or explained with the same arguments. In general I would say, probably to Mr. Tabak's surprise (outrage?), that the IDF has progressively become a "cleaner" army. Its record, when it comes to *tohar haneshek,* was far better during the 1967 Six Day War and the 1982–1985 Lebanon war than in 1948—a point rightly and repeatedly made by Lieutenant General (Res.) Rafael Eytan, the much-maligned IDF chief of general staff during the Lebanon war.

I would like to thank Professor Pipes for his kind words about my book. I share some of his misgivings about Flapan's *Birth of Israel* and, to a lesser extent, about Shlaim's *Collusion.* But I am not sure that Pipes is justified in stating that "all three ... have little knowledge and even less interest in the Arab countries."

The fact that all the Arab states' archives are closed to researchers—Arab, Jewish, and gentile—inevitably impairs the writing of Middle East history. This also applies to the 1947–1949 period. The availability of most Israeli state papers, and of large collections of private Israeli political and military papers, and of British state and private papers, almost inevitably leads the historian to rely mainly on non-Arab sources. But this in itself does not necessarily produce distortion. In my book, I tried to make up for the area of darkness created by the absence of contemporary Arab documentation by culling heavily from Israeli intelligence and British and American intelligence and diplomatic reporting about what was happening on "the other side." I ended up feeling that I had in no small measure succeeded in understanding the thinking and functioning of "the other side" (and not merely Israeli, British, and American views of this side in 1948), and I think Professor Pipes's kind words about my book attest to his agreement with this subjective assessment.

I do not accept Professor Pipes's charge of losing "sight of the larger context." Shlaim does on occasion wander into jarring anti-Israel asides and unmerited anti-Zionist positions. But these problems notwithstanding, his book is a valuable and comprehensive piece of research. No, I do not think Shlaim is in error when writing that Ben-Gurion rejoiced at the Arab exodus in 1948. Indeed, most clear-thinking Israelis did so (though some did so with troubled consciences): the exodus solved the new state's major problem—the potentially catastrophic existence of a massive Arab minority.

Flapan's *Birth* is polemic rather than history. Yet that doesn't mean that everything he writes is wrong. Yes, the Arab leaders—save perhaps for Abdullah—invaded Palestine with the aim of destroying or harming the embryonic Jewish state. But the Syrian and Egyptian leaders were also driven by a desire to block Abdullah's territorial ambitions. People, states, armies often act out of more than one motive.

## For Our Trees

To the Editor:

As one associated with the Jewish National Fund (JNF), the agency which has planted 195 million trees throughout Israel since 1901, I take exception to the poem, "For My Tree in Israel," by Julia Vinograd (*Tikkun,* Sept./Oct. 1988).

"There is blood on my tree.... The tears of tear-gassed crowds / water the roots...." writes Ms. Vinograd. Actually, her tree may not even be standing in Israel anymore! Due to a new form of terrorism, arson, 1.2 million trees planted by JNF succumbed to flames during the summer of 1988. Arsonists set over twelve hundred fires, ravaging over forty thousand acres at a cost of over $40 million.

The arsonists set the trees on fire, the poet envisions blood all over them. It's a painful fact that even the trees cannot be left in peace! When JNF plants trees and creates forests, we provide a better quality of life for all Israelis. Ms. Vinograd, the next time you're in Israel, visit one of the JNF parks on any weekend. You won't see blood and tear gas; you'll see Israelis of many backgrounds, including Arab citizens, enjoying a tranquil atmosphere that's all too rare in the Middle East.

Stuart Paskow
Director of Communication
and Information
Jewish National Fund
New York, New York

To the Editor:

I read a poem recently. The poem was titled "For My Tree in Israel," and was written by Julia Vinograd. I, too, planted a tree in Israel. My tree was planted in loving memory of my young cousin, Danny, who had died of brain cancer. I also feel great pain and fear for the tree I planted. I fear that, like over one million other trees in Israel, it has fallen victim to the deliberate attempts of the destruction by members of the *intifada.*

The history of Israel is clear. It was the Palestinian Arabs who chose the path of war. It is the Arabs who chose terrorism and deceit, arson and stones. The history can not be ignored, despite Ms. Vinograd's desires. We did not choose war, but we will not allow the dream of Israel to be erased so that the Palestinians can have what they have wanted since 1947. Then, as now, they want it all. They cannot have Tel Aviv, they cannot have Jerusalem, and they cannot have Danny's tree.

Paula Stern
Coordinator, Pedagogic Services
Jewish National Fund
New York, New York

To the Editor:

I was most moved by the imagery in Julia Vinograd's poem, "For My Tree

---

ERRATUM

In "Peace Soon?" by Aaron Back and Gordon Fellman (Vol. 3, No. 6) on page 34, column two, the first complete sentence should read: "It has confined its criticism to statements opposing current Israeli policies, refusing to make a public endorsement of negotiations with the PLO and of a two-state solution."

in Israel." Perhaps nothing symbolizes the hope that Israel once represented for many of us as strongly as those trees: the swamp-draining, desert-reclaiming trees. . . .

It is not by accident that the planting of trees symbolizes so positively all that we wanted Israel to be. Trees are an important element of Jewish folklore, from the carob tree that hid and fed Rabbi Simeon ben Yohai, to the legend recounted of Honi Hama'agel, a wonder-worker of Jerusalem in the days preceding the Babylonian exile:

> One day, as Honi was riding upon a she-ass through the field, he saw a man planting a carob tree. So he said to the man who was planting the tree: "Friend, tell me, how long will it take before this tree which you are planting will grow up?" And the man replied: "It will take seventy years before it can produce fruit." Then he said to him: "My dear son, are you sure that you are going to live seventy years and eat of the fruit of the tree?" And the man answered: "My dear Rabbi, I found a carob tree when I came into the world, one that had been planted by my father. Therefore I will also plant a carob tree for my son after me. . . ."

Now there is blood on *my* trees. The ones that I planted as a child, and since—in memory of, in honor of. Some of the blood is of the Palestinian children killed needlessly during the *intifada*. Some of the blood is of trees uprooted by the Israeli army.

It is written: "When in your war against a city . . . you must not destroy its trees. . . ." (Deut. 20:19-20). Yet, one Israeli reaction to Palestinian resistance to the occupation has been the systematic destruction of trees on Palestinian land. Joel Greenberg documented it in a series of articles for the *Jerusalem Post*. In a special report to the Jewish conference on the WELL (*Tikkun* Online), sent June 10, 1988, *New Outlook* intern Mark Steinberg described his introduction to the reality of the occupation. He had traveled to the West Bank with members of Dai LaKibush (an Israeli peace group) to replant some of the trees uprooted by the army. Through subterfuge, some trees were planted, and others were given to farmers to plant once the army had gone (Note: The complete text of these reports is still available on the WELL.):

> So this was Beita. . . . I had come into contact with the . . . Israeli Defense Forces, not defending the country, but keeping their own citizens from offering an olive branch to the occupied.

Later, on July 15, after visiting the village of Husan he wrote:

> They only attack houses on the road. These tough, brave, courageous Jews only attack where they can easily escape. The houses in the village are safe, at least for now. Harassment by both the army and the nearby Jewish settlers continues. Every few hours. A knock on the door, stones thrown from passing Jewish cars. Olive trees uprooted.

This is the fruit born of the occupation: A generation of Palestinian youth who have known nothing but Israeli occupation, out into the streets and fields wielding rocks and stones, and, equally frightening, a generation of Israelis who have known nothing but the role of occupier.

Out of common sense, out of a desire for peace, or out of shock at the blood on our trees, Israel needs to negotiate with the Palestinians *now*. It is time to support the call issued by the *refuseniks* of Yesh Gvul and by other Israeli peace groups such as Dai LaKibush and Peace Now; a call issued by New Jewish Agenda and the IJPU; a call given voice in the pages of dozens of magazines including *New Outlook* and *Al Fajr* . . . by *Tikkun* magazine itself, over and over again. It's time for an international peace conference in which Israel will sit down with the PLO and negotiate peace. There is enough blood on our trees. It is time to learn to plant them again, Israeli and Palestinian, together.

Ari Davidow
Comoderator, Jewish conference on the WELL/*Tikkun* Online
Oakland, California

## Reforming Mamet

To the Editor:

This flow of perhaps angry words is not directed toward David Mamet (*Tikkun*, Nov./Dec. 1988). Rather, it is directed toward those who do not understand the concept of Reform Judaism and make no attempt to comprehend it, those who consider Reform Judaism a lower-class form of the Conservative branch.

I grew up in a Reform temple, and came away with a wealth of knowledge about Judaism and my identity as a Jew. This knowledge became startlingly obvious when I arrived at college. My university has a large percentage of Jews, but most of them are Jews in name only. I refer to them as "revolving-door" Jews. They do not incorporate Jewish ethics into their daily lives or show the compassion which I find throughout Jewish history and literature. International students who are curious about Judaism ask them how it contrasts with Christianity and they have no answers. These are kids who went to *shul* and always considered themselves Conservative. When I tell these people that I am Reform they look at me as if I am a second-class citizen. Yet, with my knowledge of Jewish history, holidays, and current Jewish topics and how they relate to international events, I could speak rings around these people.

I do sympathize with Mr. Mamet. I do recognize that places like he has described exist. However, he cannot place blame on the entire Reform movement.

Lee Ann Stanger
Coral Gables, Florida

To the Editor:

I pity David Mamet's experience in the Reform synagogue in which he was raised. At the same time, the implication of his article suggests a mindset which generalizes from the particular. My own experience growing up in a Los Angeles Reform synagogue thirty years ago was wholly positive. I hope others who grew up in Reform synagogues could relate experiences similar to mine, yet I would not presume to generalize from the particular.

Rather than using *Tikkun*'s pages merely to vent his anger at his Reform temple of thirty years ago, Mamet could have made a significant contribution by sharing with readers how he came to identify with his people and Judaism despite the odds against him. What were the influences in his family life or in his later experiences that enabled him to become a proud, active Jew?

The effect of Mamet's piece is to

*(Continued on p. 106)*

# Publisher's Page

*Nan Fink*

One of the greatest pleasures of my work is doing the cover for the magazine. I am always on the lookout for art I like, images that will "work" for the front cover. A few weeks before an issue goes to press, I take out my collection of slides, pictures, catalogues, and books, and search until I find an image that fits. I then experiment with colors and print until I am satisfied.

People sometimes ask me what kind of art interests me most for the cover. I seldom choose pictures that directly represent any of the articles or special features of the issue. I prefer ones that connect—sometimes in ways visible only to my eye—with the overall idea of the magazine.

I like to support contemporary artists by using art only from the last decade or so. I especially like showing the work of talented artists who have not yet been fully discovered, and I am interested in bringing more art by women to the magazine.

Images for the cover have been relatively easy to find; it has been harder, however, to find drawings for the inside of the magazine. I'd like to have a collection of thousands of drawings covering a wide range of subjects—and another thousand abstract drawings—so that at the last minute, as space opens up, I could select drawings from this inventory. As it is, our stock is low and I need help in replenishing it. Please pass along the word that artists can send me photocopies of their drawings (including sketchbook scribbles), and I'll put these drawings on file for possible future use.

* * *

*Goyim* bashing—snide, facetious, half-humorous remarks about the inferiority of non-Jews—is so much a part of Jewish life that some Jews don't recognize that it is harmful to the Jewish community itself. Given that Jews have historically suffered at the hands of non-Jews and that, even in America, Jews experience anti-Semitism, it is understandable that a certain level of hostility toward non-Jews exists. An argument can be made that the time-honored tradition of *goyim* bashing is a safe way to vent hostility, certainly better than physical violence.

However, even though Jews are almost always careful to make sure that this bashing is not done in the presence of non-Jews, *goyim* bashing is hurtful in several ways. First, it creates a painful dilemma for those Jews who have loved ones who are not Jewish. Because of the increasing number of intermarriages and conversions in this country, few Jewish gatherings take place that don't include at least some Jews who have non-Jewish spouses, lovers, parents, children, or in-laws; and it is especially painful for these people to hear ugly stereotypes perpetuated about anyone who isn't Jewish.

In Jewish settings, when talk turns to "we are better/they are worse," these Jews feel pulled between their loyalty to the Jewish community—in which it is often considered to be "bad form" not to join in the spirit of the bashing—and their loyalty toward their non-Jewish loved ones. This conflict makes them angry, and it is a factor in causing many of them to drop out of the Jewish world.

*Goyim* bashing creates a "we" that is glorified, and it creates a "they" that is denigrated. Granted, there is a certain pleasure in being part of the "we," but this thinking does bad things to the people who do it. It dulls their sensitivities. It allows them to avoid dealing with their own prejudices. And it reinforces the simplistic idea that they are right and the other is wrong. It's just this kind of thinking that so many of us fight against when it is used by whites in America against Blacks or other minorities. It's just this kind of thinking so many of us are worried about in Israel when it is "us," the Israelis, against "them," the Palestinians—and we see the results in the oppression of the Palestinians.

We can do better. Children go through stages of name-calling, but they grow into adults who can express their feelings in a mature manner. We can speak with each other about our anger at non-Jews, our fears of anti-Semitism, and our pain about our history—and we can do this without *goyim* bashing. We can teach our children to respect people from other religions and cultures in a way that doesn't keep any of us from expressing our own complicated feelings and recognizing our differences.

I was recently at a meeting where, after a *goyim* bashing statement by a member of the audience, someone spoke out against this kind of talk. To my surprise, the people in the audience clapped. If more of us take responsibility for making it clear that *goyim* bashing is unacceptable social behavior, it will make a difference. □

# Editorials

*Michael Lerner*

## *Mississippi Burning*

It's the classic trade-off when liberals work in the mainstream cultural institutions of American society. On the one hand, they get to present some important truths. On the other hand, they reinforce so many other distortions, misperceptions, and cultural stereotypes that it's hard to say if the net effect is more positive than negative.

So it is with *Mississippi Burning*. On the one hand, would that every person in America were required to see it, so that they could remind themselves of the violence that accompanies American racism and that sets the context for Black rage. And yet, how powerfully this film misses or distorts reality.

Much of the discussion about *Mississippi Burning* has focused on its most obvious distortion: that the FBI is portrayed as an organization of heroes, when, in fact, it was a *part of the problem*. The FBI played an integral role in fostering the political mentality that saw civil rights workers, indeed *all* social change agents, as subversive outsiders who were either Communists or dupes of the Communists, aiming to overthrow the American system. This way of seeing the world helped strengthen the conviction of the racists that it was appropriate for them to use violence to defend "a way of life" that was being threatened by the movement for equality. The FBI surveillance of Martin Luther King, Jr., and the dirty tricks used against social change organizations were only the most obvious manifestations of an organizational culture that was suffused with racism and bigotry.

Still, what is most glaringly missing from the film is the powerful role that social change movements actually played in altering the character of Southern politics. It was the willingness of thousands of Blacks and whites to risk their lives for their principles that made the civil rights movement's victories possible. The movement is invisible in the film, just as it is becoming increasingly invisible in the public discussion of our past.

It's easy for American culture to place our major racial problems in the past and to valorize individual heroes for saving us. Racism translates into "those bad Southerners in the past." And the heroes? The film says—the federal government working through the FBI. Popular culture says—Martin Luther King, who died for our sins.

Meanwhile, the week before the Super Bowl, an unarmed Black man in Miami is shot and killed by the police for a traffic violation. Miami's Black community explodes into a race riot—and many more Blacks are killed, wounded, or arrested by the police. In Long Beach, California, a Black policeman from a nearby community convinces a camera crew to follow him as he drives undercover through the city streets—so that the crew members can film the way innocent Blacks are harassed daily by white police officers in America's cities. The crew films an officer stopping the car, shoving the undercover policeman against the plate glass window of an adjacent store (shattering the glass), beating and then arresting him. Quite apart from poverty and discrimination in the world of work, this daily harassment of Blacks plays a major role in creating the "culture of the underclass" that conservatives blame on the victims. Racism has not been defeated; it is still pervasive in American society.

So where are our heroes? Only you and the people around you are possible candidates. And that is precisely what the search for heroes obscures. The only thing that can change our world is a social movement made up of ordinary, flawed human beings. It takes *our* actions, sometimes small actions, sometimes heroic actions, to change things.

The focus on heroes, whether they be the FBI or even, on the other hand, Martin Luther King, obscures this reality. It takes all of us off the moral hook—because we can tell ourselves: "I don't have the moral stature or courage of one of those heroes, so I'll just have to keep doing what I'm doing until some great leader comes along to do it for me. Those social problems are too big for me to handle."

Of course these problems are too big for any one of us. That's why political movements are necessary: these movements are composed of all the rest of us. Regular people who have decided to sacrifice part of their personal lives in order to make the world better in some way. These kinds of people were the ones who joined the civil rights and antiwar movements of the sixties and made decisive changes. Conversely, when these movements declined in the seventies and eighties (in part because the movement's participants mistakenly undervalued their own achievements), the media were able to rewrite history, eliminating the role of mass

participation and retelling the story as one of contending elites, with the occasional intervention of lone individual heroes "bucking the system."

Despite all the attempts to make us invisible, there are still millions of Americans who remain committed to the spirit of social change, and tens of millions more who would be involved if they could find a plausible way. George Bush's proposals to disperse this energy through "a thousand points of light" is one strategy to prevent this energy from coalescing into political action. If everyone is involved in local self-help projects that have been explicitly formed as the alternative to a national plan for solving the problems, these people are unlikely to be mobilized into national movements.

Still, Bush's plan may backfire. Anything that encourages people to act on their idealism can potentially get out of hand. If principled liberals involve themselves in the thousand-points-of-light projects, they may begin to raise important questions about the economic and social reforms that are necessary to solve the problem rather than merely ameliorate the situation. Indeed, why not call for a national convention of all these local helpers (say, in two years from now) to discuss our experiences and suggest what national programs might make this local work more effective? Let's call the convention "A Thousand Points of Light"—won't its call for new national policies shine brightly?

*There is an intense and ongoing struggle in America about how much we can do to change this society. That battle rages not just in newspapers or in Congress but in the psyche of every American.*

The bottom line is this: there is an intense and ongoing struggle in America about how much we can do to change this society. That battle rages not just in newspapers or in Congress but in the psyche of every American. Every one of us is constantly trying to decide how much energy we should expend on larger causes outside our personal lives. Movies, TV shows, news reports, and other media tend to reinforce the position of one side or the other in this struggle—either making us believe that there is no point in worrying about anything other than ourselves (because the world is too scary and irrational, because everyone else is out for themselves so we'd be foolish to act on any other principle, because the people who make a difference are better than we, because you can't count on other people to be guided by moral motives, because nothing ever changes in the world, because things are changing anyway and we'd be fooling ourselves to think we make a difference, and so on), or else giving us some reason to hope that in trusting others and working with them something might be accomplished. Next time you watch a seemingly apolitical movie or TV show or news report, ask yourself which message is being conveyed.

## *Shamir: New Packaging, Old Intransigence*

We would rejoice if Yitzhak Shamir's "new" peace proposals actually represented a change of heart, a sign that Shamir was going to be like Begin and de Gaulle and Nixon—right-wingers who decided that their national self-interest required a willingness to make peace with their enemies. Unfortunately, Shamir's message as he visits the U.S. in the spring of 1989 is the old intransigence with new packaging. His goal is a PR victory that will give him political capital to prolong the occupation and avoid talking to the PLO.

Shamir needs a PR victory in the U.S. because he is losing the battle for public opinion in Israel. Polls in Israel now indicate that a majority of Israelis favor direct negotiations with the PLO. The Bush administration should be aware that Shamir is not speaking for a majority of Israelis when he refuses to talk directly with the Palestinian leadership.

Shortly before introducing his new peace plan, Shamir told Menachem Shalev of the *Jerusalem Post* why he was desperately seeking non-PLO Palestinians with whom to negotiate. Since the PLO has an "ideological commitment" to a Palestinian state, reasoned Shamir, "it cannot agree to less. The [non-PLO] Palestinians, on the other hand, those who want to live their lives freely, they are capable of realizing that they cannot attain everything they want."

The point is significant because it helps make clear that Israel's refusal to negotiate with the PLO is not merely a blind spot—a reaction to the past deeds of terrorists. In light of the dramatic moves by Yasir Arafat to jump through all the linguistic hoops set up for him—renouncing terrorism and accepting the existence of the State of Israel—and the consequent U.S. decision to open direct discussions with the PLO, one might have hoped that Shamir would change his stance.

Instead, Shamir and Rabin continue to make themselves look ridiculous by attempting to anoint West Bank Palestinians as "the alternative" to the PLO. The latest such move, Yitzhak Rabin's consecration of Faisal al-Husseini as a bright new hope—only a few days after Husseini had been released from "administrative detention" where he had been held without charge for

five months and labeled a promoter of terrorism—was repudiated by Husseini himself. "It's a desperate attempt to create an alternative to the PLO," he told the *New York Times* on February 1, 1989. "It will just delay the peace process." Husseini went on to say what everyone but the Israelis already recognize: If the Israelis want peace negotiations, "they must talk to the PLO." Israelis must, Husseini continued, "confront the monster, and the monster is their own fear."

There has been considerable debate about how seriously one should take Arafat's renunciation of terrorism and his recognition of Israel. As Letty Cottin Pogrebin points out in this issue, if the words were meaningless, it would have been easier for Arafat to have said them long ago in order to achieve propaganda advantages. The intense denunciations of Arafat's words by Islamic fundamentalists and extremist factions of the PLO show that *they* take the words *very* seriously—which is precisely why Arafat was unwilling to risk saying them until he was sure he could get the majority support of his own organization.

In January, two months after Arafat's renunciation of terror, Israeli Defense Force (IDF) leaders confirmed that Fatah, Arafat's majority faction of the PLO, had not been involved in any terrorist activity since the time of Arafat's statement. Could there be a more reliable source than the IDF to validate that Fatah was in fact attempting to comply with Arafat's promises?

Yet, in some fundamental way, the question of trusting the PLO misses the point. None of us in the peace camp is urging Israel to accept a solution that would require trust. Our call for a demilitarized Palestinian state whose borders and demilitarization would be carefully supervised does not rely on the belief either that Arafat is in fact a moderate, or that Palestinian moderates will always be in power in a Palestinian state. Once Israel was genuinely committed to a demilitarized Palestinian state, we would certainly support its demands for ironclad guarantees on the issue of demilitarization. The point is that negotiating directly with the PLO does *not* commit Israel to accepting an adverse outcome to the negotiations—or to a solution that would depend on the good faith of any present or future Palestinian leadership.

Once negotiations begin, Israel should settle for nothing less than a demilitarization that its military leaders judge to be enforceable. So, those of us in the peace camp who support direct negotiations with the PLO do so not because we necessarily trust Arafat or think that the PLO has undergone a recent collective conversion. While there is no doubt that a growing number of Palestinian leaders *are* adopting a new realism and accepting the necessity of living in peace with Israel, one need only study recent statements by PLO leaders, or "slips" by Arafat, to see that many Palestinians still hope to conquer all of Israel. Yet, the creation of a demilitarized Palestinian state—giving the Palestinians something to lose, a stake in the existing reality—will probably weaken these fantasies; and, in any case, a carefully enforced demilitarization would render the Palestinian destruction of Israel militarily impossible.

In fact, once Israel seriously commits itself to a demilitarized Palestinian state, the Palestinians will be the ones who are on the spot. They will have to produce a leadership willing to accept a solution that permanently dashes the hopes of the Palestinian expansionists. There are many signs that the Palestinian movement is beginning to create such leaders. And if we are wrong here—wrong that new Palestinian leaders are willing to live alongside Israel—then an offer of a demilitarized Palestinian state will not hurt us. On the contrary, it will show that the Palestinians are the rejectionists, and Israel will thereby regain the moral high ground.

But the shocking fact is this: Shamir is ideologically locked into a rejection of any Palestinian state, even if that state were prepared to live in peace with Israel. And that is why his peace-package charade must be rejected as fundamentally meaningless. Shamir tests every aspect of his plans against one criterion: is it sure to prevent the creation of a Palestinian state? If he can be reasonably sure that it blocks that development, he is for it.

Is it any wonder, then, that most Palestinians will not agree to a plan that calls for a cessation of the *intifada,* in exchange for elections to choose representatives to negotiate? The negotiations are defined from the start as concerned solely with how to implement the very "autonomy" plan that Shamir now thinks will best prevent the development of a Palestinian state.

Meanwhile, we are likely to see the predictable gang of American Jewish leaders lining up to have their pictures taken with Shamir, rejoicing in his proposals, declaring them a great advance toward peace, and otherwise yipping it up for the newest strategy of Israeli rejectionism. Will the American and Israeli media once again represent to the public that these people speak


## *Tikkun* Interns

*Tikkun* interns work on all aspects of the magazine—editorial, production, promotion, education (for example, conferences and the Committee for Judaism and Social Justice), and office work. The internships require a minimum of twenty-five hours per week from September 1989 to June 1990. We will also accept interns for the summer of 1989, to work at least thirty-five hours per week. Send writing samples and a detailed self-revealing letter discussing why you should be accepted as an intern and what ideas you have for the magazine.

for all American Jews? Or is there a growing awareness, perhaps sparked by the *Tikkun* conference, that many of these leaders don't even represent their own members when it comes to the issues upon which they pontificate?

There is one encouraging development from Israel. A significant group of Labor party Knesset members, as well as others in the party, have rallied around Uzi Baram, the Labor party chair who resigned his position in protest after Labor joined the national unity government. Of course, there's an element of rational self-interest in their opposition to Peres's capitulation to Shamir: they understand that at the next election Labor voters may wonder if voting for other parties like Ratz or Mapam might not be a more effective way to show their displeasure with Likud than voting for a Labor party that has twice in a row formed governments that allowed Likud to determine policy toward the Palestinians. But there is also a growing moral revulsion—extending far beyond the Israeli left into the heartland of Israeli voters—at the Shamir-Peres-Rabin axis. Many Labor voters would have voted differently had they thought they were empowering a government with Shamir as prime minister, Moshe Arens as foreign minister, and Rabin as defense minister. Unfortunately, it will be many years before Israelis will be able to express that revulsion in a new election.

Meanwhile, our task as American Jews is simple: to make clear to Israel that Shamir does not have a blank check from us to continue the occupation. Israel must negotiate with the PLO about the conditions under which Israel would allow for Palestinian self-determination and the creation of a Palestinian state. Mr. Shamir, can you read our lips? Negotiations now.

## *Yitzhak Rabin: Repeating the Mistakes of Pharaoh*

Every Passover we remind ourselves of the incredible self-delusions that seem to cloud the vision of oppressors. Intoxicated with their own power, surrounded by advisers who tell them they can perform magic to sustain the status quo, these oppressors lose their ability to hear the cries of those upon whom they inflict pain. Even when the oppressed begin to rise in rebellion, the oppressors are unable to see them as anything more than a petty annoyance whose demands cannot be taken seriously.

This is what the Torah means when it says that "God hardened the heart of Pharaoh." At the beginning of the process, during the first plagues, it was Pharaoh himself who freely chose to harden his own position. Yet eventually, once Pharaoh had been on his path long enough, it was almost as though the choices were out of his control; almost as though God had hardened his will, eliminated his flexibility, made him into a rigid and unbending person.

Neither Yitzhak Shamir nor Yitzhak Rabin are Pharaoh. They have not ordered the annihilation of a people in the way that Pharaoh ordained the death of all first-born Jewish males.

Yet they resemble the prototypical oppressor whom Pharaoh has come to symbolize for most of Jewish history. It is sometimes hard to tell whether their actions are still under their own control, whether they can be faulted for continuing to make immoral and stupid judgments—or whether their inflexibility and rigidity have become so great that they are like Pharaoh, victims of a hardened heart.

Consider Rabin, the Israeli Labor party's contribution to the newly formed national unity government. When the *intifada* began some sixteen months ago, Rabin promised it would be quickly suppressed. When normal levels of force didn't work, he ordered physical beatings. When physical beatings didn't work, he ordered arrests and "administrative detentions," which have resulted in thousands of Palestinians' continuing to sit without trial in hot desert camps for months on end. When detentions didn't work, he ordered expulsions. When expulsions didn't work, he ordered the use of plastic bullets. When the bullets didn't work (because of restrictions on their use), he ordered that they be used against people burning tires or erecting barricades. When that didn't work, he ordered entire towns of people confined to their homes under extended curfews—collective punishment for the offenses of a few. When the curfews didn't work, he ordered the dynamiting of the homes of people whose children had been accused of throwing stones. When the dynamiting didn't work, he ordered that all schools be closed indefinitely. And still nothing works.

Do you think he'd get the message that he can't use force to stop a mass insurrection of an oppressed people? No. Not for a minute.

Or do you think that Shamir would listen to his own soldiers in the IDF who plead with him to stop attempting to suppress the *intifada*? When confronted by angry soldiers who repeatedly told him that there was no way to carry out their job except to use oppressive methods that made them ashamed and that violated their ethical standards, Shamir refused to pay attention.

A growing number of Israelis are beginning to talk about immediate withdrawal as the only practical solution to the *intifada*. Their argument is simple. There is no plausible way to construe the Palestinians as a military threat to the State of Israel. All that Israel need do is withdraw its army to the current borders (the Jordan River and the Green Line) and use the army (and the

air force) to interdict the delivery of any heavy armaments. Small contingents of soldiers could be left inside the existing Jewish settlements on the West Bank and Gaza to defend the Jewish settlers from attack, but all other new settlements should be canceled and settler attacks on Palestinians vigorously prosecuted as an offense under military law. Without Israeli troops to patrol Palestinian cities and villages, there would be a dramatic de-escalation in the confrontation with the Palestinian people. Similarly, if Israeli troops stopped trying to "show them who is boss" (the stock-in-trade of every oppressor—see also Pharaoh in Exodus) by insisting that stores open when *they* say they should open and close when *they* say they should close, and by insisting that no Palestinian flags or slogans or parades or demonstrations be allowed—confrontations would be far less likely.

We prefer a negotiated settlement rather than immediate withdrawal. But we can easily understand why, if negotiations are simply another method to prolong the occupation, some Israelis are discussing withdrawal as an intermediate step. It would certainly save lives and injuries on both sides of the conflict.

Still, oppressors are not always able to hear even the cries of those *on their own side* who are beginning to realize that the cost of repression is too high. Plague after plague was visited on the Egyptians, yet Pharaoh hardened his own heart. It was only after his own son had been killed that Pharaoh had a temporary change of heart—and even that change was quickly repudiated as he sent his hosts to their deaths in the Red Sea in a vain attempt to retake the Israelites.

What price will Israelis have to pay before their leaders realize that the occupation and oppression of another people must be terminated? We know the price that the Palestinians have paid: hundreds of people killed, thousands of young children injured, tens of thousands of people beaten or hurt. But how many more Israelis must die; how many more must be injured; how many more must grow ashamed of their own country and its army; how many more must become *yordim* (emigrants) seeking an alternative home in the U.S.; how many more—before Yitzhak Rabin realizes that his name will live in history as a disgrace to the Jewish people and to the Zionist vision of Israel?

This Passover many of us will be thinking of the Palestinians as we celebrate our own national liberation struggle. What a tragedy that today a group of Jews is playing a role that in important ways is similar to that of Pharaoh. Today the Palestinian people are the ones who cry "Let My People Go." *Tikkun* has prepared a supplement to the Passover haggadah, which you can pull out of the current issue and use during your seder. It's an old Jewish tradition to use the seder as a time to discuss the current state of our struggle for liberation. This year, our struggle for our own liberation requires us to disentangle ourselves from the role of being another people's oppressors.

There are many Jews around the world who are sickened by the recent actions of the Israeli occupation forces in the West Bank. Stop the killings; stop the beatings; stop the destruction of houses; stop the curfews. Stop soiling the sacred history of our people.

## *No Arms for the Saudis*

Saudi Arabia is one of the most oppressive and inhumane societies in today's world. But, because of its immense oil reserves, when the Saudis' interests are threatened (as they were perceived to be during the recent Iran-Iraq war), Saudi Arabia can count on direct U.S. intervention on its behalf. Recent history demonstrates that the Saudis do not need and would not use the U.S. weapons currently being proposed for sale to defend themselves against a perceived threat from neighboring Arab states. The only possible use of these weapons is against Israel—whose destruction remains a central focus of Saudi political and religious aspirations. America should be telling Israel that it can count on U.S. support and defense if Israel were to create a demilitarized Palestinian state. Selling arms to the Saudis gives the opposite message: that America is an unreliable friend more interested in the economic benefits of its own corporations than in the military survival of Israel. Those Congressional leaders who support pressuring Israel to move forward on peace talks with the Palestinians have an obligation to reject any new arms deals for Saudi Arabia or other Arab states that continue to show hostility toward Israel. □


**Assistant Editor Position at *Tikkun***

Being an editor at *Tikkun* requires top notch editorial and language skills, a deep understanding and commitment to the editorial philosophy and perspective of the magazine, a sophisticated understanding of contemporary issues in American politics and culture, Judaism and Israel, plus a willingness to work endless hours editing, reading and responding to manuscripts, and promoting the magazine in public forums. Salary $22–$38,000 depending on experience. Send a self-revealing letter telling us in detail (1) why you're the person for this job (2) a few paragraphs on what you understand to be the central ideas that make *Tikkun* unique, and (3) your specific suggestions for articles, direction, or changes in the magazine. Send also a sample of your writing. Job will begin summer 1989.

# Dukakis's Defeat and the Transformative Possibilities of Legal Culture

*Peter Gabel*

The defeat of Michael Dukakis should be an occasion for progressive people—and by this I mean people who want to create a more humane and socially just society—to fundamentally rethink their ideas about the nature of politics. Although Dukakis might have barely won the election if he had been more charismatic or had "looked more presidential" or had had a more experienced staff or had defended the L-word earlier on in the campaign, the deeper truth revealed by this year's election is that the Democratic party and progressive forces generally are currently unable to articulate a vision of what they (we) stand for that is as compelling as that articulated by the right. All of us who worked for Dukakis because we hoped to bring the Reagan era and Republican cultural hegemony to an end, and to re-release the passion for creating a better world that animated our younger years, could not but feel the same old feeling that we have now come to associate with virtually every Democratic campaign from 1952 to the present—that our campaign is somehow hemorrhaging, that our candidate, although a fundamentally decent person, is somehow not able to say what we mean in a way that seems convincing, while the Republican is able to speak with more confidence and to draw more social support to him, even though the world that he stands for is the wrong world and will fail to realize the deepest needs of even his own supporters. Unless we want to spend our old age in either bitterness or pathos, we had better change the way we think about contemporary political and legal culture and come up with a better way of manifesting ourselves and our aspirations for human society in public space.

What I want to argue in this paper is that the basic error in contemporary progressive thought is the failure to fully grasp the social or intersubjective nature of desire, to understand that as social beings, people are animated by the need for mutual recognition and confirmation as much as they are by any physical or biological need like the need for shelter, medical care, or food. A principal truth about human history and about contemporary reality is that this social desire for mutual confirmation is unrealized in people's social existence, leaving them feeling chronically isolated and "underconfirmed" in their everyday family and work lives. I have elsewhere tried to show in some detail how this problem of underconfirmation gives rise to a chronic narcissism in the development of the normal self and how it also accounts for the construction and reproduction of social hierarchies. But what I want to emphasize here are the implications of this unrealized desire for progressive politics and for those seeking to bring about social change through law. The specific point that I want to make is that for progressive forces to succeed today, they must manifest themselves in public space in a way that lifts people out of their sense of isolation and enables them to feel part of a community of meaning within which their desire for social confirmation might be realized. This means that all concrete proposals for the expansion of economic benefits, for the implementation of new social policies, and for the extension of political rights must be framed within an evocative moral vision that "enlivens" these proposals with a sense of social connection and purpose.

In recent years, it is the conservatives who have understood and spoken to the pain and isolation resulting from underconfirmation. However much the left and the liberal media sought to portray Ronald Reagan as an unintellectual performer who could lure the American people into voting for him by being an experienced actor and a "great communicator," the fact is that Reagan always put forward the conservative economic and social agenda as a way of recovering a sense of social meaning and purpose that could make people feel connected to one another through participation in the nation, the family, and the church group. George Bush also ran a campaign that was successful not primarily because of unanswered negative attacks on Dukakis, but because he focused on the same psychological and ethical needs that Reagan had spoken to. His appeals to the flag and the pledge of allegiance

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linked his candidacy to a commitment to community, loyalty, and solidarity; his repeated call for a kinder, gentler America linked the post-Reagan Republican party with evocative qualities of social experience that were both corrective of the selfishness and aggressiveness that to some extent characterized the Reagan years and also expressive of some of the better qualities embodied by Bush himself. Although the moral vision of the conservatives has been to a large degree imaginary because it has not been coupled with an economic and social agenda that could realize in practice the longing that people have to live in a real world imbued with love, cooperation, and mutual respect, the right's symbolic discourse has recognized the centrality of social desire to politics and has offered at least compensatory fantasies to alleviate, at the intrapsychic level, the alienation of everyday life.

In contrast, the left (including liberals, left-liberals, and radicals) has remained bogged down in a blend of economism, social policy analysis, and process-oriented civil rights consciousness that no longer has a morally compelling, socially constitutive meaning for the large masses of the American people. In its original incarnation, the New Deal was much more than a set of economic programs and social policies—it was expressive of a profound, compassionate response by the Democratic party to the suffering of working people, and its programs and policies were experienced as the embodiment of a new sense of social purpose and direction. In the same sense, the expansion of political rights during the 1960s was understood as a morally redemptive act on the part of the entire country that enabled many middle-class whites as well as minorities and poor people to feel part of a meaning-giving community through which "we" were connected with one another toward the realization of a common vision of a better world. In their respective historical contexts, it was this link, between the creation of new entitlements and rights and the possible realization of what I am calling social desire, that gave the Democrats their evocative appeal.

Today this link no longer exists in any organic, self-evident way, and as a result, the Dukakis campaign's student loan, health care, and child care proposals—although they were good proposals that responded to the objective needs of most Americans—seemed flat and socially meaningless. With the exception of a portion of his acceptance speech at the Democratic convention, Dukakis never articulated a moral vision, drawn from the cultural particularity of this historical moment, that could make these proposals politically compelling to those who would benefit from them economically as well as to those who would not. In fact, slogans like "a good job at good wages" or benefit programs that appear to be mere redistributions of money are actually experienced as psychologically repressive to the degree that they implicitly define politics in a way that treats people's emotional context—their sense of unconnectedness and underconfirmation—as fixed and inevitable. By making the State appear to be a neutral conduit of material resources, rather than a potential locus of transcendent collective meaning, Dukakis ironically made the Democrats appear to be the party of psychological and ethical individualism while allowing Bush to be the spokesperson for the creation of community. Dukakis's programmatic proposals could have been put forward as concrete expressions of a vision of a more humane community that would have been practical and realizable in contrast to the pseudocommunity offered by Bush's appeals to patriotism, and Dukakis could have challenged Bush on precisely that issue. But as it was, Dukakis put himself forward as a competent manager of the State-as-money-machine, leaving Bush to run unopposed in the realm of meaning.

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It is hard to say why the Democratic party and progressive forces generally have such difficulty understanding the ideas that I am outlining here, but my own sense is that the reason may be a partially rational streak of paranoia about what I will shortly call "the desire of the other" that is embedded in our liberal (postfeudal) political unconscious. The right can frame its message in moral terms and appeal to images of community because it has no intention of actually bringing into being a society based upon mutual recognition or confirmation; such a society implies a kind of reciprocal openness and trust that would challenge the values of the competitive market and the hierarchies of power which the right is fully committed to maintaining. The left, however, because it defines itself as reaching out toward others in the name of equality and social justice and because this impulse implies a potential real dissolution of the distance between self and other that is quite threatening in light of our personal and cultural histories, tends to be more ambivalent about articulating the truly social dimension of its "wish" for social change. No one who has participated in more-radical movements

for social change can fail to see the way that they perpetually undercut their own alleged aims through the hysteria and quasi-intentional irrationality that tends to corrode their internal dynamics, and it may be the same "fear of success" that leads liberals to displace the heartfelt spirit that animates them into technocratic and narrow policy-based or economistic thinking. Seen through this social-psychological prism, Bush and Dukakis can be understood as engaging in a kind of unconscious collusion—the former offering fantasies and the latter offering "programs"—which is designed to avoid confronting the real alienation and blockage of social desire that is our most serious problem as a people.

If we want to experience any real movement toward progressive social change in our lifetime, we must develop an approach to politics that makes the generation of social connection and social meaning its central objective. I will now describe in a somewhat more detailed way what I mean by underconfirmation and the blockage of social desire and indicate how this limitation on the full realization of our social being is embodied in one politically constitutive public arena—the realm of legal culture.

## The Blockage of Social Desire: The Circle of Collective Denial and the Problem of the Rotating Lack of Confidence in the Desire of the Other

Desire is a word whose meaning has been shaped in large part by the split-off nature of sexuality in our recent cultural history, a notion of sexuality that has been taken over by psychoanalytic theory and made into a more or less immutable fact about human nature. Within this cultural context and its associated conceptual framework, desire has become associated with "the id," with an instinctual force that pulses through us and that we must seek to control through the development of our consciousness during childhood and adult life. This model has had a number of destructive effects on our ability to understand the world, all of them with normative implications unconsciously intended to prevent this understanding from occurring. Among these destructive effects are the objectification or quasi-mechanization of desire as a "force" which "aims" at an "object" and whose meaning is therefore not intelligible or accessible to the comprehension of human insight; the dissociation of desire from knowledge, analogous to the dissociation of passion from reason, leading to a belief in the possibility of a non-intuitive, dispassionate method of interpreting social phenomena (I would include here everything from positivist social science to structuralism and systems theory); the "individualization" of desire, because if desire is a


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"force" emanating from a series of organisms, if it is a drive which aims at an object, then it cannot be intersubjective or social in its very nature; the privatization of desire, because if desire is conceived to be an individual and unintelligible instinctive force inside of us and outside of our control, then it cannot be something public and shared whose meaning we can discuss and come to know together.

This characterization of desire is actually an effect of the process that I now want to talk about, which is the process by which we become alienated from the desire for mutual recognition and confirmation that I referred to earlier. As social beings, we do not originally enter the world divided up into a sexual, instinctive part and a mental, perceptual-rational part, but rather as a unified, sensual-expressive someone seeking a confirmation, by the other, that is at once sensual and conscious. This is perhaps easiest to see in the infant who seeks the sensual, intersubjective nurturance of mother's breast as well as the recognition that animates his or her search for eye contact. But if we are honest with ourselves, it is quite easy to see this also in the efforts we each make to give and to receive this sensual-expressive confirmation in our own lives. In fact, if we are honest with ourselves, this desire is constantly visible to us in the pain that covers the surface of the world and that reveals, self-evidently, the simple reciprocity that people want and are unable to achieve in their relations with one another.

The problem that confronts us is that from the time that we are born, this desire for mutual confirmation is resisted and even opposed by those around us who have learned, owing to the fragility of their own cultural and personal histories, to deny this desire in themselves. The medium of this opposition is well-captured by what the French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan called "misrecognition," a process by which the parent, instead of confirming the infant in his or her being, "throws" the infant and later the child into a series of roles that to a significant degree alienate the child, in his or her social identity, from the centered desire that is the social dimension of the child's soul. The child experiences the parent as denying his or her own desire for full recognition and confirmation and as conditioning the child's recognition and acceptance on becoming the uncentered, role-based "good child" that the parent seeks. Once this distance between the child's desire and his or her social self has been installed in the child's heart and mind, the child will then tend to reproduce this split in others with whom he or she comes in contact, including his or her own children. To the degree that we are all fundamentally animated by the desire for true confirmation, the child will continue to strive for this confirmation for the rest of his or her life—but to the degree that the child has internalized the sense that this



desire must not be manifested because it will lead to the loss of what recognition and sense of self the child did receive, the child will repeatedly disown the movement of this desire and short-circuit its aim, returning to the safety of the earlier, validated forms of social connection.

This is not to say that the alienation of the child is the fault of bad parenting or even that the parent-child relationship is the key social location for understanding how alienation originates. It is only the first such location for each person, but the problem should be seen as located everywhere, to the degree that we are all being conditioned and conditioning each other to maintain this distance between our desire and our social selves—in the family, in the schools, in passing each other blankly as strangers on the street, and in the workplace. As I showed in a recent article published in *Tikkun* ("The Bank Teller," Vol. 2, No. 1) a corporate hierarchy is actually a perceptual-imaginary grid that a group of people collectively superimpose on their social relationships in order to regulate, through an ordering of disciplinary gazes accompanied by a conceptual schema (president, vice president, etc.), the flow of intersubjective availability and recognition. By remaining within the "decentered" artificiality of one's "role" as secretary, supervisor, vice president, and so on, and by apprehending this role-performance as occurring within a top-down ordering through which the constraints of one's role-performance are enforced through what Foucault called "disciplinary observation,"

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# Killing the Princess: The Offense of a Bad Defense

*Elisa New*

Mass art, routinely maligned for distorting social reality, is often guilty only of mirroring it too truly. The tabloid tale of bunny born to mom cuts straight to our anxiety about bioengineering; the contemporary horror novel exhumes communal nightmares of feminist empowerment, single-parent homes, peer pressure. Even supermarket sci-fi, which projects Reagan's Evil Empire somewhere beyond our fraying ozone, sheds uncanny light on fears that "Meet the Press" somehow leaves dark. Mass art—not unlike cubism—skips syntax, qualification, and the weighing of claims to display on one flat plane its logic of feeling. Shallow, yes. But in its very shallows one can sometimes discern—as from the air—the true grade and contour of what we think before we think about it. Thus it is that our current wisdom about that oft-blamed victim, the Jewish American Princess, is disconcertingly reflected in Shirley Frondorf's current page-turner, *The Death of a "Jewish American Princess": The True Story of a Victim on Trial* (Villard Books, 1988). The interest of Frondorf's book lies in this: by credulously parroting the best arguments of Jewish feminists, Frondorf unintentionally exposes the weaknesses of these arguments as defenses either of Judaism or of women. Wholly unaware of where her advocacy shades into apologetics, her feminism into sexism, her tolerance and pluralism into sellout, Frondorf ends up celebrating a Jewish fulfillment that depends on female disempowerment. Her book is an object lesson in the ways a well-intentioned but unsophisticated Jewish feminism can backfire.

In May of 1981, a man named Steve Steinberg killed his wife Elana by stabbing her with a carving knife taken from the kitchen of their Scottsdale, Arizona, home. Elana's children heard their mother's screams as she was stabbed twenty-six times in her silver and white bedroom, and though Steve Steinberg himself disclosed the murder, calling the police with the story of two bushy robbers, it wasn't long before the police discovered that his story was false. He was put on trial for the first-degree murder of Elana Steinberg. But less than a month after the trial began, Steve Steinberg went free, declared temporarily insane by reason of sleepwalking, and thus innocent of killing his wife—whose alleged extravagance, shrewishness, and sexual parsimony made her the prototypical JAP and, as the defense implied, a menace better-off dead. Though defense attorneys saw no reason why Steve Steinberg should not return to a society to which he posed no further hazard, they left jurors with little doubt that society was safer minus the woman whose postmortem diagnosis their paid forensic psychiatrists obligingly produced: Jewish American Princess.

Frondorf's account of the murder and subsequent trial of Steve Steinberg succeeds as an exposé par excellence: lurid in detail, high-pitched in its outrage; sermonic, commercial, and an easy read. A psychiatric social worker before becoming a prosecuting attorney, Frondorf is canny and deft as she reveals abuses of law and psychiatry in the courtrooms of America. The extent to which the law can be used as an instrument against women is nicely dramatized in Frondorf's villainous portrait of Phoenix defense attorney Bob Hirsh, who assured Frondorf, "I've had women clients. They just don't come to mind." And she has a field day with Martin Blinder, the forensic psychiatrist made famous by providing the lawyers of Dan White (the San Francisco County supervisor who killed Mayor George Moscone and Supervisor Harvey Milk) with the infamous "Twinkie defense," testifying that Dan White was driven temporarily mad by too much junk food. Against the evidence of such luminaries, Frondorf marshals her own case: Steve Steinberg was a compulsive gambler who killed his wife out of panic and rage brought on by an avalanche of gambling debts. Frondorf understands Steinberg's horrendous crime, like his gambling, as the result of unresolved Oedipal guilt he had carried ever since, at the age of twelve, his father had died of a coronary brought on by—what else?—a father-son wrestling match. Frondorf's picture of the Steinberg marriage draws, accordingly, on classic models of gambling codependency. The worst that can be said of Elana Steinberg, argues Frondorf, is that she acted as the too-loyal wife, covering for Steve until he killed her; and then, finally, tragically, she took the fall for a crime that was none of her doing.

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For Frondorf, the idea of the Jewish American Princess is a chimera, the slur a term of opprobrium hardly deserving the dignity of comment. That is why when she engages the issue made so prominent by the title of her book, she falls apart. Though she is certain that Jewish American Princesshood is neither grounds for murder nor a psychiatric malady, she is lost when it comes to any deeper understanding of the term, especially of what it might mean for Jews. As if to entertain even the semantic intelligibility of so noxious a term were to admit that Elana Steinberg deserved to die, Frondorf holds the term at arm's length by putting it in quotes. This gesture is symptomatic of the automatic and undigested nature of Frondorf's analysis. For one senses that though she is herself a veritable stranger to Jewish American culture, she has been well briefed in the contemporary arguments of Jewish feminists who debunk the idea of the Princess.

Not that the arguments Frondorf cribs are without merit. Take her two central tenets, tenets one finds rehearsed all over the best-intentioned protest literature about the Princess. Tenet One specifies that the epithet is sexist inasmuch as it allows Jewish men arbitrarily to project their own self-hatred onto women. This is undoubtedly so. One female Jewish lawyer I know recounts how male colleagues greet her return from lunch with inquiries about where she spent it—at Bloomingdale's? Such a taunt reveals the sexism of some Jewish men, who try to deflect their uneasiness not only about their own love of loot, but about female competition—and female competence.

Tenet Two suggests, trenchantly enough, that the term is anti-Semitic, only a new twitch to the old Christian reflex that couples the Jew with a dollar sign. Like the sexist motive, the anti-Semitic motive is concealed by an artful projection. By disparaging Jewish materialism, Christians can jettison their own ambivalence about worldly gain. Moreover, as proponents of Tenet Two often point out, Judaism is nowhere ascetic. Blessed with the bounties of this world, Jews may enjoy with clear consciences what Christians enjoy at the peril of their souls.

As helpful as these theses may be in pointing to the sources of the term "Jewish American Princess," they fall far short of explaining its peculiar potency. Try, for example, to synthesize the two tenets into an argument, and they self destruct: even as the argument that JAP-bashing is anti-Semitic celebrates Jews' robust enjoyment of the material world, the argument that JAP-bashing is sexist implicitly delegitimizes such enjoyment when it passes off the hot potato of that gusto to the materialistic Jewish man. Such contradictions nestle at the heart of the Jewish American Princess problem, a problem not to be solved by surgically excising the term. For the truth is that once we have stuck up for the woman that the term defames, we are still stuck with a certain kind of parvenu materialism that other intracultural jokes lampoon (the gag about the high holiday fashion shows ... the gag about the bar mitzvah safari ...); we are still stuck with the fact that many Jewish women wear the title Jewish American Princess as a badge of honor; and we are still stuck queasily wondering about something driven, something desperate, in the self-expression of certain women we know, or even of ourselves in certain moods. Our critics may urge us to swallow this strain of self-expression or risk self-hatred, but our instincts still shriek: *treyf.*

If, in other words, out of the highest of motives we are tempted to naturalize Jewish behavior we find abhorrent and to sentimentalize female behavior that we find retrograde, then an afternoon of reading Shirley Frondorf may be just the tonic we need. Ambivalent about the Jewish woman whose T-shirt proclaims "born to shop," we absorb her so as not to ally ourselves with her persecutors; Frondorf, like some preternatural Charlie McCarthy, one-ups us: she defines as traditionally *Jewish* and as normatively *female* a code of values that is enough to choke the most tolerant. In so doing, she offers a vision of moribund Jewish American culture and of tortured female identity more damaging than any slur.

The evidence before her is chilling: a man and wife who seem matched by little more than their spending habits, a network of friends brought together by the thresholds of their credit cards, Jewish men enraged at their wives, Jewish women illogically testifying to the stupendous excesses of a woman each protests "was one of my very best friends." Even as the Steinbergs zealously preserve the Jewishness of their social circle, living in a so-called Jewish "ghetto," and even as the murder of Elana takes place only a few weeks after a family trip to a bar mitzvah, the Steinberg's Judaism is not just supported by but realized in their lifestyle. Defining their Jewishness through observances of display and consumption, Steve and Elana's identities are likewise attenuated in twinned, cameo roles: the Gambler, the Shopper.

Need it be emphasized that nowhere are Jews commanded to gamble or shop? Shopping and gambling are, on the contrary, secular activities of sacral mystique, activities that live off our homesickness for awe, for miracle, for release, even as they invest us more and more heavily in a culture where the House always wins. But beyond their connections to magic, gambling and shopping synthesize the American dream of winning in an afternoon's rush. To gamble is to have a career in five minutes, to freebase one's parents' struggle for success

all in one day. It is no coincidence that Steve Steinberg is recalled as a frequenter of banks and other financial institutions which he "played" for the capital to finance his real vocation; nor is it contradictory, as Frondorf points out, that Steve was described by co-workers as a workaholic. Gambling, speculating, and business are all spawn of one American mythology that prizes best the success that risks the most: hence, the man who "loses his shirt" is our portrait in virility; hence our recent obsession with the entrepreneur. Similarly, anyone who has shopped compulsively, or knows compulsive shoppers, understands the shopping high, the promise of self-transformation, of the "make-over" that complements the "self-made" man's autogenesis. Exchanging the old her for the new me, one enjoys a charged interval wherein having substitutes for being.

Now, if "professional" shopping is no more a crime than legal gambling, neither is it a terribly reliable means to a stable sense of self. Both activities put a maximum of strain on identity: gambling ruthlessly separates winner from loser, rending self from self as the chips fall, while shopping shears the self to an appendage of what it buys, clipping identity to performance. It is both telling and poignant that without knowing the effects their words would have, friends of Elana's testified without subpoena not only to her supernal "glamour" but to how that glamour was driven by a ruthless worship of appearances. Upon sharing with Elana the news that her business was failing, one friend told Frondorf how Elana seemed shocked, finally urging: "Don't tell anybody that! Just say that you sold it." Others described not only the beauty but the theatricality of Elana's house, the flamboyance of her spending habits. One friend summed up Elana with this anecdote:

> Elana was effervescent, jokey, loud, she was fun. She would say right out what she thought, like a child. I'll give you an example. When we first came out here from Chicago, she said, "Dennis, you look terrible. Your hair is getting gray. You've got to color it and lose some weight." I told her, "Are you crazy Elana, I'm not going to do that." But I went back to the motel and I finally ended up getting some hair color and I did it. I got black all over my forehead, and it didn't come off for weeks. But Elana said "Dennis you look wonderful," and she kissed me on the forehead. That whole exchange—that describes Elana.

It is difficult to find anything "fun" about this incident, either for Elana or for the friend whose privacy she so savages out of concern for his looks. Thus, as Frondorf—bent on restoring Elana's good name—collects accolades to Elana's exacting "taste," marvels at Elana's apron with its special pocket for Windex, *kvells* over Elana's training of her two "exquisitely raised" children (who, Frondorf is glad to report, have inherited their mother's "gutsiness"), one begins to feel a kind of vertigo admixed with guilt, a nagging self-reproach for not better appreciating so stirring an example of Jewish Womanhood. For it is as Jewish paradigm, no less, that Frondorf sees Elana. Doubt that Elana has fun, is fun, and you not only conspire with her killer, you simultaneously threaten the whole tradition from which she comes. To make a joke of Elana, Frondorf sermonizes, is to mock at the same time her immigrant forebears who posed for photos on boats gliding to dock at Ellis Island: "The objects of the joke are the daughters and granddaughters of the women with grave expression who hold bundles of household goods and babies in yards of dresses."

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*Exiled in her modern kitchen while her children went out for Chinese food, she was made superfluous by the same ideology of helplessness and the same laborsaving devices that stranded her Main Street counterpart at home.*

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This is sentimentality of the most dangerous kind, sentimentality that falsifies not out of tenderness but out of an ideological imperative that equates the self-expression of any Jew with Jewish self-expression, that would preserve the thread that connects Elana with her foremothers, however tenuous that thread has worn. Undergirding this effort, of course, is the sad premise that Jewish culture is in such short supply one better not waste any. That aside, Frondorf's perversity is almost inevitable, born as it is of two mutually exclusive imperatives: first, the imperative to defend the uniqueness of Jewish culture against an American readership that might not understand; and second, the imperative to define *as* Jewish certain American cultural phenomena that *if not so defined one would not so defend.*

We can look straight at the values that made Steve Steinberg so unhappy and Elana his miserable victim without calling them Jewish values. What Frondorf misses, in her scramble to glorify as Yiddishkeit the Steinbergs' consumerism, is an understanding of the vexed relationship of American Jews to material culture; of their belated discovery of that culture in a Gilded Age already recoiling from itself; and finally, of the dynamic that a whole tradition of Jewish American

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# The Nostalgia Disease

*Sven Birkerts*

*Once there was another city here, and now it's gone. There are almost no traces of it anymore, but millions of us know it existed, because we lived in it: the Lost City of New York.*

*It was a city, as John Cheever once wrote, that "was still filled with river light, when you heard the Benny Goodman quartets from a radio in the corner stationery store, and when almost everybody wore a hat." In that city, the taxicabs were all Checkers, with ample room for your legs, and the drivers all knew where Grand Central was and always helped with the luggage. In that city, there were apartments with three bedrooms and views of the river. You hurried across the street and your girl was waiting for you under the Biltmore clock, with snow melting in her hair.*

—Pete Hamill, "The New York We've Lost"

My subject here is not the great, perhaps vanished, city of New York, but rather nostalgia, that peculiar condition wherein memory fuses with desire to create a pain that is very nearly pleasurable. Or a pleasure verging upon pain. I picked the opening passage of the lead essay from a special issue of *New York* magazine (December 1987—entitled "You Must Remember This") to identify a particular frequency or tone. But almost any passage from any of the other essays could have served as well, so limited are the options of the mode. The writer assembles luminous details from the archive of the remembered—or fantasied—past. The details declare an order that was once natural and whole, against which the present is viewed as hopelessly fallen. And it works. Even though I had no experience of the city in those storied times, I felt a bittersweet pang. Like everyone, I have my own New Yorks, my own lost better days.

I cited the Hamill passage, too, because it was handy—I'd saved the magazine to brood over. But in truth I could have lowered my net almost anywhere: our culture is awash like never before in repackaged bits of the past. We find them on screen and radio, in books and magazines, even in the posturing about patriotism and "family values" that so recently confused our electoral process. Our appetite for the stuff is bottomless. We have just emerged from eight years of a nostalgia presidency—a grand, collective bathing in the images and pieties of an earlier, less cynical and compromised era (what an irony: here was the most ruthless cynicism, here were the gravest compromises!)—and there is no sign that the impulse is slackening. Indeed, nostalgia now threatens to become a permanent feature of our cultural life, a kind of ground bass against which we play our changing ideals and aspirations.

Consider just a few of its recent manifestations. On television, the closest thing we have to a national psyche, we not only have shows like "thirtysomething," "Wonder Years," "China Beach," and "Almost Grown," but every second commercial comes wrapped in the musical and visual tissue of the past. The radio dial lands on oldies and rock "classics" with each turn of the wrist. Or else it gets stuck on yet another repeat broadcast of one of Garrison Keillor's down-home Lake Wobegon monologues. Recent movies that have more or less successfully mined the vein include *1969, Eight Men Out, Bull Durham* (an odd instance of nostalgia filtered through the present), *Tucker, Stand By Me, Everybody's All-American,* and *Imagine: John Lennon,* to name just a few. And wherever we look we see headlines beaming the return of Elvis, or yet another anniversary special on JFK, Marilyn, or 1968.... The barons of mid-cult have grasped the formula for success. Processions of what we've somehow lost—once we've been tipped off that that's what they are—are as irresistible as sex and scandal. It appears that our desire for the clarity and certainty of the imagined past will batten repeatedly on certain surefire images. Country roads, weathered barns, city scenes with fedoras and oldfangled cars, beaded hippies flashing peace signs: all that matters is that these emblems tell us how we were before self-consciousness and fragmentation afflicted us. Before everything changed.

Some might argue that nostalgia has always been with us, that we find the longing for a better past in Sappho and Homer, as well as in Norman Rockwell and Currier & Ives. And to be sure, all of us, as individuals, experience nostalgia sharply at times—more sharply, I think, as we grow older. This was as true of our great-

*Sven Birkerts recently published* The Electric Life: Essays on Modern Poetry *(William Morrow and Co., 1989).*

grandparents as it is now of us. But something is different. The impulse has deepened and strengthened; it has become commodified. Where once it may have waxed and waned in the self and the culture, it is now a constant—we live by looking over our shoulders. The reasons for this are many. But chief among them is the fact that we now have a technology for collective cultural experience that did not exist even fifty years ago. Pulsations did not then move through the whole of the body politic, certainly not at such a rate or intensity. We were not joined, as we are now, by a finely meshed electronic net. We were not then alerted at every instant to the universalized state of things. We brooded over the disappearing past privately, more fitfully.

Technology and media are part of the equation; changing historical circumstances are another. Nostalgia could not have thrived so vigorously in an earlier day because people were not so mesmerized by the past. Present and future held too strong a claim on the attention—there was too much to be done just to survive, to inch forward into the future. No longer. In the past few decades everything about the way life is lived has altered. At some point in the post-World War II period, technological and societal changes attained critical mass. Suddenly (at least from a historical vantage point) the bedrock certainties about our experience of reality shifted and assumed new configurations. We are now squarely—and perhaps irrevocably—stuck in a fragmented and self-conscious condition that some have labeled "postmodernism" (I will take this up shortly). And nostalgia is now no longer an occasional fibrillation in the psyche—it is more akin to the persistent sensation felt by the amputee in his or her "phantom" limb.

The reasons for this change are fairly obvious, at least on the surface. We are, psychologically, all creatures of habit, programmed to desire constancy and security. But it happens that we now find ourselves in a world that is locked into an ever-intensifying spiral of change. One could argue that our fundamental modes and rhythms have been altered more since the 1940s than during all the millenia that came before. Until then—and I must generalize—we lived in relation to an ancient and familiar paradigm of country and city. True, we had mass-production industries and air travel. But most individuals could, if pressed, have found the continuity between their way of life and the age-old human pattern.

Things are radically different now. For most of our hundreds of millions of citizens, the city-country distinction has been exploded into the anonymous surround of the megasuburb. We can no longer just look around to see where we fit into the scheme. Analogously, the physical ties of family and community have come unraveled, only partly replaced by the pseudoimmediacy of telephone communications. And how we do what we do—not to mention the *what* itself—has been revolutionized past recognition. Information crisscrosses the country on screens and via fax machines; business gets conducted from terminal to terminal. We look up from the panel just long enough to see whether we need our galoshes or sunglasses. And at the end of the day we cushion our spent selves with vivid washes of music and the numbing flicker of televised images.

*Nostalgia is the response elicited by the simplified and stylized image—*
*the general store,*
*the old porch swing,*
*grandma handing out lemonade.*

I exaggerate, of course. But it is to make a point: that our private and public worlds are changing faster than our response mechanisms can cope. Change itself is changing, upping its rate with merciless regularity. And the threat of the world—headlined by AIDS, drugs, political corruption, nuclear arms, environmental panic, and violent crime—looms larger than ever before. On top of this, there is now the sense that the changes are final, that we are not going to rouse ourselves and go back to old ways. The momentum is too great; it is beyond the control of any government or organization. If once we moved expectantly into the future, we now cower before it. What we hope, above all else, is to squeak through without getting hurt too badly.

Our longing for what we perceive as the certainties of the past is, of course, only partly conscious. We carry it around as a need, as something akin to a biological drive. Or a defense, a place to run to. Or a mode of orientation. Our picture of the past, preserved, amplified by the incessant images that envelop us, becomes an internal compass; the more lost we feel, the more often we need to refer to it. A fact, as I have suggested, that is hardly lost on our politicians and imagebrokers. Their instincts zero in on the true condition of the populace more quickly and accurately than any market survey could hope to. As our need intensifies—it does so daily—so does the purveying of packaged offerings. More and more every day, the past is being offered to us as a commodity for consumption. We learn to react to our sense of loss by taking out our pocketbooks.

Nostalgia is the easy response of the individual who feels cut off from the past, from the secure continuity of tradition. It is a compensatory reflex before the anxiety of disconnectedness. The psyche avoids the hard

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work of mourning and tries to fill its void with a set of images. Here I should clarify one thing: that these are almost never images of the real thing. For the real thing, truly recalled, places one in danger of grief. Nostalgia is the response elicited by the simplified and stylized image—the general store, the old porch swing, grandma handing out lemonade. The more stylized it gets, the closer we are to kitsch. Nostalgia is a look at the past, an attempted emotional connection, that comes *after* desire has falsified and colorized it. There is little or no true relation to the event as we might have experienced it while embedded in the then-uncertain present.

This brings us, in not all that roundabout fashion, to a consideration of the so-called postmodern condition. Postmodernism, as Todd Gitlin pointed out in a recent essay in the *New York Times Book Review* ("Hip-Deep in Post-Modernism," November 6, 1988), has become the buzzword of the late 1980s. Pundits invoke the term to explain anything from shifts in the styles of art to all-embracing transformations in the world at large. The sifting of applications will go on for some time. Still, a general ground of assumptions, or contentions, can be identified.

Briefly, postmodernism espouses the view that a permanent change has taken place in Western culture in the past few decades. The time line, which was the indicator of progress, of directional movement into the future, has shattered. The great eras of growth and innovation are ended. We are postindustrialist, post-everything; there are no more terrestrial frontiers. What's more, cultural energies (like our natural resources) are depleted. The kinds of transformations that now lie in store for us are mainly organizational—they involve new distribution of information and refined modes of processing (computerization), as well as a more thorough saturation of every societal sphere by the electronic media. In the arts, the subject of so much postmodernist theorizing, we no longer look to an avant-garde pushing its vector into the unknown; we no longer think of art as discovery. Instead, we have an aesthetics of combination, the presentation of old materials.

Gitlin sums up this aesthetic quite concisely in his essay:

> Post-modernism ... is indifferent to consistency and continuity altogether. It self-consciously splices genres, attitudes, styles. It relishes the blurring or juxtaposition of forms (fiction-nonfiction), stances (straight-ironic), cultural levels (high-low). It disdains originality and fancies copies, repetition, the recombination of hand-me-down scraps. It neither embraces nor criticizes, but beholds the world blankly, with a knowingness that dissolves feeling and commitment into irony. It pulls the rug out from under itself, displaying an acute self-consciousness about the work's constructed nature. It takes pleasure in the play of surfaces and derides the search for depth as mere nostalgia for an unmoved mover.

Among the proponents of this aesthetic, Gitlin cites artists like David Byrne, Robert Wilson, John Ashbery, Laurie Anderson, Spalding Gray, David Hockney, Italo Calvino, and Don DeLillo. Of the "vision" itself he writes:

> In effect, post-modernism expresses the spiritless spirit of a global class linked via borderless mass media with mass culture, omnivorous consumption and easy travel. Their experience denies the continuity of history; they live in a perpetual present garnished by nostalgia binges. Space is not real, only time.

I would disagree only with the last sentence. A sense of time wherein all events and products can be viewed as contemporaneous is hardly "real." The whole point of the postmodern project is to affirm that our connection to history has been ruptured. We have left the old perspective—which saw styles and expressions as naturally bound to their times—and have embraced a perspective of hyperconscious pluralism. Overrun with

*(Continued on p. 117)*

# Welfare Reform: Maximum Feasible Exaggeration

*Howard Jacob Karger and David Stoesz*

*In many if not most of our major cities, we are facing something very like social regression.... It is defined by extraordinary levels of self-destructive behavior, interpersonal violence, and social class separation intensive in some groups, extensive in others.*

—Daniel Patrick Moynihan,
*Came the Revolution*

Two decades ago proponents of the War on Poverty, the last effort at progressive welfare reform in the United States, were roundly criticized for advocating the modest notion that the poor should have some say in antipoverty programs. By 1968, "maximum feasible participation," the requirement that one-third of Community Action Program (CAP) directors be poor, had come to symbolize the excesses of the Great Society, and the requirement—along with the War on Poverty—was dumped. With the Family Support Act of 1988, conservative proponents of welfare reform are waxing hyperbolic about a different notion—that those on welfare should work. In fact, Thomas Downey, chair of the House Subcommittee on Public Assistance, has gone so far as to claim that the new welfare reform is "the most significant change in the welfare system since its inception over 53 years ago." In suggesting as much, Representative Downey indulges in maximum feasible exaggeration. With few exceptions, the welfare reform produced at the end of the Reagan administration should be recognized as the most punitive and inadequate addition to American welfare since the workhouse.

Curiously, the direction that welfare reform has taken has caught the left off guard. In the 1950s and 1960s, even hard-boiled social scientists such as Harold Wilensky and Charles Lebeaux predicted "the expansion of public programs." Indeed, most liberals theorized about an expansive welfare state grounded in universal and nonstigmatized services. Few writers foresaw a 1980s welfare state that had more in common with conservative nineteenth-century social philosophy than with post-World War II welfare statism. From the late 1950s to the late 1980s, the activities of the welfare state went from promise to inaction, and from retreat to virtual defeat. By 1988, even the most optimistic liberals could hold out little hope for the revival of a strong welfare state.

Characteristic of the demise of the American welfare state is a subtle change in its meaning which has been rendered by conservatives. To the public, social welfare has ceased to mean those insurance and grant programs established by the Social Security Act of 1935—social insurance for unemployed and retired workers, and cash grants for the poor who are unable to participate in the labor market. Now "welfare" has been redefined to mean benefits for only those people below the poverty level. This winnowing of the nonworking poor from other populations dependent on public social programs isolates the most destitute from other citizens who are portrayed as "more deserving" by virtue of their status as workers. Consequently, references to "welfare" address the poor, and discussions of "reform" are couched in terms of reducing poor people's reliance on public social programs.

In addition to limiting the discussion of welfare reform to the poor, the redefinition of welfare has served to cloud its relationship to American political and economic institutions. The United States has, instead of a viable welfare state, a set of welfare programs that are prone to crisis—Social Security in the early 1980s, Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) in the late 1980s, and Medicare forthcoming. The fragmentation of the welfare state tends to obscure its deterioration, a fact that is painfully evident in the case of the Family Support Act of 1988. This act should be construed less as legislative commentary on the deterioration of poor American families, than as evidence of deep flaws in the socioeconomic structure of American society.

The Reagan administration's economic policy has precipitated enormous deficits that have pushed the economy to the brink. Provisions of the Gramm-Rudman-Hollings deficit-reduction bill not only require additional

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cuts in social programs when budget-balancing targets are not met, but also eliminate the possibility of using further debt for social programs. As a result, there remain two revenue sources for social programs—taxes and the Social Security surplus—both of which will be avoided by politicians at all possible cost. In all likelihood, throughout the next four years a Republican White House and a Democratic Congress will engage in brinkmanship. While each waits out the other to see who is first to suggest increasing taxes or raiding Social Security, the economy will teeter closer to the abyss. A recession, likely after so many years of expansion, will require Draconian measures to salvage the economy—measures that include cuts in entitlement programs. Social Security and Medicare may be considered for cuts because of their sheer scale. In the eventuality that social insurance programs are cut, the Reagan administration will have accomplished, *after* it closes up shop in Washington, an objective that had eluded it since the early 1980s. Progressives should recognize that it is an illusion to regard the Family Support Act of 1988 as welfare reform. Furthermore, they should begin to support a redesigning of the American welfare state so that it addresses the needs of America's most destitute communities and proves to be a positive force in the nation's political economy.

## The Family Support Act of 1988

Budgeted at $3.34 billion over a five-year period, the Family Support Act emphasizes workfare, essentially changing AFDC from an income support to a mandatory work-and-training program. The stated objective of the act is to encourage self-sufficiency among welfare recipients; to carry out this goal, the bill requires states to develop workfare programs that compel women on welfare who have children under age three (at state option, age one) to participate in a work-and-training program. By 1990 each state will be required to enroll at least 7 percent of its AFDC recipients (by 1995, 20 percent) in a state basic-education or job-search program, or in job training or work experience.

Adoption of the AFDC-UP (Unemployed Parent) program will become mandatory for all states, although they can decide to limit enrollment for two-parent families to six months a year. In one of its more controversial sections, the act states that beginning in 1992 one family member of an AFDC-UP household will be required to spend at least sixteen hours per week in an unpaid job in return for benefits. Although initially only 40 percent of AFDC-UP recipients will be expected to be in such a job program, by 1997 that number is slated to increase to 70 percent. Among the more progressive provisions of the bill are transitional benefits—the extension of eligibility for day-care grants and Medicaid for one year after leaving AFDC for private employment. Dan Rostenkowski, chair of the House Ways and Means Committee, which oversees most welfare legislation, estimates that an additional 65,000 two-parent families will receive benefits, that 400,000 people will participate in workfare by 1993, and that 475,000 will be eligible for transitional Medicaid benefits under provisions of the bill.

*With few exceptions, the welfare reform produced at the end of the Reagan administration should be recognized as the most punitive and inadequate addition to American welfare since the workhouse.*

The act emphasizes parental responsibility for child support through three provisions. First, states are compelled to take measures to establish paternity through checking and recording parental Social Security numbers. Second, mandatory child support payments will be automatically deducted from an absent parent's paycheck, even though the payments may not be in arrears. Third, the bill allows states to require that a welfare recipient under age eighteen live with a parent or in a "supervised environment" in order to receive benefits.

Passage of the Family Support Act represents an important shift in the character of public welfare. With few exceptions, welfare reform in 1988 was clearly a conservative triumph. "By replacing liberal tenets of entitlement, self-determination and Federal responsibility with more conservative notions of contract, compulsion, and states' rights," observes professor of social work Mimi Abramovitz, "welfare reform erodes some of the fundamental principles that support the U.S. welfare state."

Perhaps the clearest example of the extent to which welfare reform has become regressive is found in the way income has been reapportioned from poor families to workfare officials. In 1988 only three states had AFDC cash benefit levels (for a family of three) that reached 75 percent of the poverty line, and in thirty-two states AFDC benefits were below 50 percent of the poverty threshold. Seven states provided a single parent of two children with less than $200 per month in AFDC benefits, and two of those states provided $120 or less. Except for Alaska, the maximum benefit level for a family of three ranged from a low of 15.6 percent of the

poverty-line income (in Alabama) to a high of 83.7 percent (in California). In a typical state, AFDC benefits for a three-person family were $359 per month, or 47.5 percent of the poverty line. In other words, the amount provided for a family of three totaled $12.10 per day, a paltry amount even when compared to the subsistence-level federal poverty guidelines of over $24.25 a day.

These benefits are even lower than they appear, because from 1970 to 1988, the effect of inflation lowered the median state's AFDC benefit by 35 percent. Had AFDC simply kept pace with inflation, beneficiaries in 1988 would have received $5.88 billion more than they did. The welfare reform act, in effect, proposes to "reallocate," over a five-year span, only 57 percent of this lost income ($3.34 billion) back to the poor, primarily through compulsory workfare. For the poor, the welfare reform of 1988 represents little more than a diversion of a portion of the income supplement lost since 1970 to welfare managers who operate stringent workfare programs. From this perspective, there is little in welfare "reform" that represents a net improvement in the lives of families living in poverty.

The Family Support Act of 1988 is linked only tenuously to the economic reality of American society. The act is grounded on two major premises: the need for total self-sufficiency (getting off welfare completely) and the belief that the private sector has the capacity to absorb those people currently dependent on AFDC. These premises fly in the face of what we know about the American economy. For many people dependent upon a service-oriented economy, total self-sufficiency remains an elusive, if not unreachable, goal. Although unemployment hovers around 6 percent, 44 percent of the new jobs created under Reagan were part-time, service-sector jobs that paid less than $7,400 per year. Furthermore, these jobs provided little career mobility, virtually no opportunity for occupational growth, and few, if any, benefits. In general, these dead-end jobs were lodged in the underbelly of the service sector, and those people who occupied them were assured of immersion in the world of the working poor.

The current welfare reform act is flawed in other ways. In 1987 there were 7.1 million unemployed workers as well as several million working poor who, even though they were working full-time, did not earn enough money to escape poverty. If these people were unable to find work, or earn enough from the work they had, how can welfare recipients be expected to become self-sufficient? Moreover, even though overall unemployment levels have been reduced, unemployment is differentially distributed. Relatively well-off sections of the country (Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Cali-

*(Continued on p. 118)*

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# Toward a Jewish Dramatic Theory

*David Cole*

Is there a characteristically Jewish way to think about theater? Asking this question is not the same as asking whether there is such a thing as "Jewish theater." Clearly there are Jewish stage traditions (the modern Yiddish and Hebrew theater movements), Jewish theater forms (the Purim play), a Jewish dramatic literature (*The Dybbuk, The Golem*), and even something of a contemporary Jewish "theater scene" (thirty-odd production organizations currently active in North America alone). Beyond this, one might well feel that whole areas of Jewish life—Hassidic worship, talmudic study-circles—reflect a displaced theatrical impulse; or even that Jewish life itself, considered as an inevitable dialectic of adherence to/departure from "what is written," bears a certain resemblance to theater work. (A small, select group goes off by itself to perfect its performance of the actions specified in a text whose author's view of experience the group seeks to embody—have I just given a description of Jewish life under religious law or of rehearsal work on a script?)

It is not, however, an inquiry into Jewish theater, but the possibility of a Jewish inquiry into theater, that I wish to pursue. My question is whether Jewish intellectual and spiritual tradition might conceivably provide the concepts and images out of which a model of the theatrical process could be fashioned.

It certainly does not set out to provide them. The Talmud contains no tractate on dramatic theory, and, on one of those rare occasions when an early rabbi alludes to the stage, he does so in the following way: "I thank Thee, Lord, that I spend my time in the temples of prayer instead of in the theaters."

How can one interrogate a tradition concerning matters to which it is clear the tradition itself has never given a thought? With respect to theater, such an inquiry is not so hopeless as it appears. For though Jewish thinkers have not lavished much reflection upon theater, many of the questions upon which they incessantly reflect are also questions that theater constantly asks itself. Jewish tradition may not have much to say about the three unities or the well-made play or "the illusion of the first time," but it has plenty to say about interpretation, textuality, representation, and enactment—all of which are, inevitably, central concerns of dramatic theory. Suppose, when midrash, Talmud, and scripture speak upon these topics, one were to insist on hearing them as if they were speaking about theater. What would one hear? Midrash, I will suggest, may be heard as propounding a Jewish model of the acting process; Talmud, a Jewish model of the dramatic text; and certain biblical episodes, a Jewish model of the theatrical event itself.

Midrash is a rabbinic interpretive practice that, as midrashic scholar Barry Holtz puts it, "comes to fill in the gaps" of scripture, "to tell us the details that the Bible teasingly leaves out." What kind of fruit did Adam and Eve eat: an apple, a grape, or a fig? Why did the serpent seek the fall of humankind? Where was Adam during the temptation of Eve? These are the sorts of questions midrashic commentators routinely ask. But they are also the sorts of questions actors routinely ask. The actor, too, is concerned with establishing physical circumstances (this fruit I hold in my hand is a ... ), with supplying the subtextual basis of dialogue (I urge her to disobey God in the hope that ... ), with constructing a through-line of action (after I leave her alone onstage I proceed to ... ). To act, one might say, is to deliver a midrash on role, to fill in the details that the dramatic text "teasingly leaves out."

Consider, for example, the actress Uta Hagen's preliminary note for her work on the role of Martha in Edward Albee's play *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* "The house is *messy*.... Loose records lying around. The *Eroica*? Or the *Missa Solemnis*?" To ascertain exactly what "familiar music" is always ready to come on full blast in George and Martha's living room the moment the right button is pushed is a typically midrashic project, not only in the fact that a detail is sought but in the motive for seeking it. "From believing in the truth of one small action," writes Constantin Stanislavski in *An Actor Prepares,* "an actor can come to ... have faith in the reality of a whole play." It matters to Uta

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Hagen whether the music George and Martha move to is the *Eroica* or the *Missa Solemnis* for the same reason it matters to the midrashist whether the fruit Adam and Eve ate was an apple or a fig. The criterion for actor and midrashist alike is: which detail will be more of a revelation?

The midrashic commentator needs to know, as actors performing the episode would need to know, exactly *how* Cain kills Abel. (With a staff-blow to the throat, according to Midrash Genesis Rabbah.) Of course, the midrashist does not go on to deliver the staff-blow he has imagined, but to recognize this fact is less to distinguish midrash from acting than to state the relation between them. What the actor does is, precisely, to *enact* the sort of reading undertaken by the midrashist. The midrashic commentator fills in the blank of the text with imagined connections. The actor, having imagined the connections, fills in the blank of the role with him- or herself.

If midrash provides a Jewish prototype of acting, or at least of the actor's way of reading the dramatic text, Talmud, the other major mode of Jewish commentary, provides a prototype of the dramatic text itself. One might argue for such a parallel simply on the grounds that the Talmud, like most plays, is written in dialogue—a dialogue that often becomes quite "dramatic," in the colloquial sense. But there are dramatic texts that are not written in dialogue (Samuel Beckett's *Act Without Words,* Peter Handke's *My Foot My Tutor*), and there are texts written in dialogue that are not written for the stage (Walter Savage Landor's *Imaginary Conversations,* Nathalie Sarraute's *The Golden Fruits*). The real analogy between a script and a page of Talmud is at once less apparent and more fundamental than the fact that both are written in dialogue.

From one point of view, the Talmud presents itself as a transcription of earlier conversations between rabbis: what Sumchus said, what Samuel objected to, what Rav Judah replied, and so on. But from another point of view, the Talmud presents itself as a pre-scription for future conversations between its teachers and students, who, in their classrooms and study groups, will reenact the rabbinic conflicts it preserves. The talmudic text is thus "located" somewhere between an earlier oral interchange that it professes to record and a later oral interchange that it hopes to instigate.

This "in-between" status is precisely that of the dramatic text. A printed play, too, offers itself as at once a transcription of an earlier exchange (what the Ghost said to Hamlet that night on the battlements) and, at the same time, as a pre-scription for future exchanges (what the actor playing the Ghost will say to the actor playing Hamlet tomorrow night at 8:47). In this respect, the Talmud models a key characteristic, perhaps even the defining characteristic, of the theater script. The question posed by Jacques Derrida in *On Grammatology*—whether writing really does "come after" the speech that it claims to be only setting down, or whether it in some sense "comes before" speech—is a question already posed by the nature of the talmudic and dramatic texts. Like each other, but unlike every other sort of text, the Talmud and the playscript each present us with a writing that somehow comes both before *and* after speech—before the speech of actors, which it pre-scribes, and after the speech of characters, which it transcribes. Set in juxtaposition with the Talmud, the dramatic text reveals its dual nature as transcript and prescription.

*Theater had better be a source of subversive energy, and the ambition to make it such is clearly shared by Moses himself.*

Turning to the Bible itself, we find plenty of episodes that suggest theatrical performance and theater work. When Ezekiel eats a scroll containing the prophecies he is to deliver (Ezekiel 2–3), we may well take his conduct as an image of the acting process; for actors, like prophets, begin by introjecting the word of Another, which they then seek to "realize" in significant actions. Or when Ezra, the "second Moses" (as he is known in later Jewish tradition), reads aloud to the refugees from Persia (Nehemiah 8) the very laws that Moses himself had once read aloud to the refugees from Egypt (Exodus 24), we may feel we have before us an image of performance as *the reenactment of reading.*

But as my chief example of a biblical text that, while not setting out to speak of theater, may nonetheless be *heard* as speaking of theater, I propose to examine the Exodus account of Moses' shattering the Tablets of the Law in response to Israel's worship of the Golden Calf (Exodus 32:5–6, 15–19):

> [5]Aaron] built an altar in front of [the Golden Calf] and . . . issued this proclamation: "Tomorrow shall be a feast to the Lord." [6]They rose up early in the morning and offered up burnt offerings and brought peace offerings. Then the people sat down to eat and drink and rose up to play. . . . [15] Then Moses turned and went down from the mountain with the two tablets of the testimony in his hand. . . . [16] The tablets were the work of God, and the writing was God's, engraved on the tablets. [17] When Joshua heard the uproar which the people were making, he said to Moses: "There is the sound of war in the

camp." [18]But Moses answered: "It is not the sound of the cry of victory, / Nor the sound of the cry of defeat; / It is the sound of singing that I hear!" [19]As soon as he came near the camp and saw the calf and the dancing, he became enraged, and he flung the tablets from his hands and shattered them at the foot of the mountain.

It is certainly not difficult to find theatrical resonances in the Golden Calf ceremony. Organized around the appearance of a god, featuring song (v. 18), dance (v. 19), and audience participation (v. 6), the worship of the calf is a communal rite of the very sort that, in ancient Greece and elsewhere, gave rise to theater.

What, however, warrants seeing Moses' activity here as, in any sense, theatrical? For one thing, it clearly has the character of (and has traditionally been interpreted as) a symbolic enactment. Moses shatters the tablets to symbolize the shattered state of the covenant between God and Israel. This symbolic performance constitutes a precedent for what scholars of later Hebrew prophecy refer to as "acted prophecies": Jeremiah going about with a yoke on his neck to symbolize the necessity of submission to Babylon (Jeremiah 27); Ezekiel knocking a hole in the city wall, packing his bags, and "setting off into foreign parts" as an image of the coming Exile (Ezekiel 12); and so on. In the absence of anything approaching theater in ancient Israel, the prophets themselves sometimes approached it; and in this, as in every other aspect of the prophetic vocation, Moses, traditionally regarded as the first and greatest of the prophets, is the prototype.

But Moses' symbolic miming does not simply offer an alternative to the calf-worship; it amounts to a *counterperformance,* replying to and commenting on the calf ceremony point for point. Moses hears the calf-worshippers singing (v. 18), and *he* immediately bursts into song (the poetry of v. 18). He sees the calf-worshippers dancing (v. 19), and *he* promptly comes up with some symbolic movement of his own: he shatters the tablets. Moses, one might say, is fighting theater with theater.

What gives point to the contention between these rival "theater pieces" is that each depicts essentially the same situation—the dilemma of those who would make theater in the face of the Second Commandment's prohibition against making images of any kind: "You shall not make for yourself an image, or any likeness of what is in the heavens above or the earth below." The injunction clearly prohibits the worship of the calf, but the tablets also seem to be a visual sign of the sort that the Second Commandment forbids. That the calf, upon which the Israelites' performance centers, is meant as a sign *of* God, rather than a substitute *for* Him, is clear from the people's initial reaction to it: they take one look and exclaim, "This is your God, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt" (Exodus 32:4). Aaron, moreover, describes the upcoming ceremony in honor of the calf as "a feast *to the Lord* [emphasis added]" (32:5). The seeming inadequacy of a calf to serve as an image of the divine—a detail over which generations of exegetes have puzzled (why not a golden bull or serpent or lion?)—reflects the inadequacy of *any* sign to perform such a task. But the tablets, upon which Moses' "performance" centers, are also a sign—a sign of the covenant between God and Israel. And if the Calf "Show" culminates in an act of transgression directed toward the sign in question, so does the Tablets "Show," though in a slightly different way: the people "r[i]se up to play" before the calf; Moses "breaks the Law."

All these parallels suggest that Moses does not simply dismiss the vision of theater put forward by the Calf "Company." Rather, he offers a performance that, by its very similarities to the Calf Show, seems to acknowledge the valid impulse in that ceremony. In fact, he then goes on to do more powerfully the very thing that the Calf Show has attempted. The Calf Show wants to be subversive, transgressive, a "theater of revolt," in Robert Brustein's phrase. And rightly so! Theater had better be a source of subversive energy, and the ambition to make it such is clearly shared by Moses himself. His smashing of the tablets is a far more radically transgressive gesture than anything the calf-worshippers can manage.

For how, after all, do the members of the Calf Company commit their transgression? They first prostrate themselves before a sign (the calf) and then go off to release their subversive energy at random, in the orgy or riot described in verse six. Moses' counterperformance, his shattering of the tablets, seems to comment: "In your orgy before the calf, you first prostrate yourselves before a sign and then release your subversive energies at random. In my breaking of the tablets, I release my subversive energy *into the act of shattering the sign.* In fact, I *make my performance* out of shattering the text with which I have been entrusted."

To make a performance out of shattering the texts with which one has been entrusted—this, it seems to me, is the model of theatrical production that Moses offers, a model that reconciles the Jewish obligation to shatter signs with the theatrical obligation to make a performance—or rather, reveals these obligations to be two different aspects of a single commitment.

"Shattering the text" may well stand as a trope for theatrical activity as such. To rehearse a script is to break it down into scenes or sections, and to break the scenes

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# Twice an Outsider: On Being Jewish and a Woman

*Vivian Gornick*

When I was growing up, the whole world was Jewish. The heroes were Jewish and the villains were Jewish. The landlord, the doctor, the grocer, your best friend, the village idiot, the neighborhood bully: all Jewish. We were working-class and immigrant as well, but that just came with the territory. Essentially, we were Jews on the streets of New York. We learned to be kind, cruel, smart, and feeling in a mixture of language and gesture that was part street slang, part grade school English, part kitchen Yiddish. We learned about politics and society in much the same way: down the block were a few Orthodox Jews, up the block a few Zionists, in between a sprinkling of socialists. For the most part, people had no politics at all, only a cautious appetite for the goods of life. It was a small, tight, hyphenated world that we occupied, but I didn't know that; I thought it *was* the world.

One Sunday evening when I was eight years old my parents and I were riding in the back seat of my rich uncle's Buick. We had been out for a drive and now we were back in the Bronx, headed for home. Suddenly, another car sideswiped us. My mother and my aunt shrieked. My uncles swore softly. My father, in whose lap I was sitting, said out the window at the speeding car, "That's all right. Nothing but a bunch of kikes in here." In an instant I knew everything. I knew there was a world beyond our streets, and in that world my father was a humiliated man, without power or standing. By extension, we were all vulnerable out there; but *we* didn't matter so much. It was my father, my handsome, gentle father, who mattered. My heart burned for him. I burrowed closer in his lap, pressed myself against his chest. I wanted to warm the place in him that I was sure had grown cold when he called himself a kike.

That was in the middle of the Second World War—*the* watershed event for the men and women of my generation. No matter what your social condition, if you were a child growing up in the early 1940s you entered the decade destined for one kind of life and came out of it headed for another. For those of us who had gone into the war the children of intimidated inner-city Jews, 1945 signified an astonishing change in the atmosphere. The end of the war brought frozen food and nuclear fission, laundromats and anticommunists, Levittown and the breakup of the college quota system. The trolley tracks were torn up, and the streets paved over. Buses took you not only to other parts of the Bronx but into Manhattan as well. When my brother graduated from the Bronx High School of Science in 1947 my father said, "Now you can become a salesman." But my cousin Joey had been a bombardier in the Pacific and was now one of the elite: a returned GI at City College. My brother sat down with my father and explained that even though he was not a genius he had to go to college. It was his right and his obligation. My father stared at his son. Now we were in the new world.

When I was sixteen a girl in the next building had her nose straightened; we all trooped in to see Selma Shapiro lying in state, swathed in bandages from which would emerge a person fit for life beyond the block. Three buildings away a boy went downtown for a job, and on his application he wrote "Arnold Brown" instead of "Arnold Braunowitz." The news swept through the neighborhood like wildfire. A nose job? A name change? What was happening here? It was awful; it was wonderful. It was frightening; it was delicious. Whatever it was, it wasn't stasis. Things felt lively and active. Chutzpah was on the rise, passivity on the wane. We were going to run the gauntlet. That's what it meant to be in the new world. For the first time we could *imagine* ourselves out there.

But who exactly do I mean when I say we? I mean Arnie, not Selma. I mean my brother, not me. I mean the boys, not the girls. My mother stood behind me, pushing me forward. "The girl goes to college, too," she said. And I did. But my going to college would not mean the same thing as my brother's going to college, and we all knew it. For my brother, college meant getting from the Bronx to Manhattan.

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*Vivian Gornick is a New York–based writer. Her last book was a memoir called* Fierce Attachments *(Farrar Straus & Giroux, 1987). This essay was delivered as part of a symposium on "Judaism and Otherness," held in November 1986 in celebration of the tenth year of the Spindel Lectureship in Jewish Studies at Bowdoin College, Brunswick, Maine.*

But for me? From the time I was fourteen I yearned to get out of the Bronx, but get out into *what?* I did not actually imagine myself a working person alone in Manhattan, and nobody else did either. What I did imagine was that I would marry, and that the man I married would get me downtown. He would brave the perils of class and race, and somehow I'd be there alongside him.

*A nose job? A name change? What was happening here? It was awful; it was wonderful. Chutzpah was on the rise, passivity on the wane.*

The greater chain of social being obtained. Selma straightened her nose so that she could marry upward into the Jewish middle class. Arnie changed his name so that he could wedge himself into the Christian world. It was the boys who would be out there facing down the terrors of the word "kike," not the girls. The boys would run the gauntlet, for themselves and for us. We would be standing not beside them but behind them, egging them on. And because we knew we'd be behind them, we—the girls—never experienced ourselves directly as Jews. I never shivered inside with the fear of being called a kike. I remember that. Somehow I knew that if I were insulted in that way I might feel stunned, but the fear and shame would be once removed. I knew I'd run home to Arnie, and I'd say, "Arnie, they called me a kike," and he'd look miserable, and I'd say, "Do something!" and the whole matter would be out of my hands the minute I said "Do something." It was Arnie who'd have to stand up to the world, search his soul, test his feelings, discover his capacity for courage or action. Not me. And that is why Arnie grew up to become William Paley, and the other boys on the block—the ones who sneered and raged and trembled, who knew they'd have to run that gauntlet, get into that new world like it or not, and were smart and sensitive, and hated and feared and longed for it all—they grew up to become Philip Roth and Woody Allen. Me and Selma? We grew up to become women.

The confusion is historic; the distinction is crucial.

Woody Allen is exactly my age. I remember as though it were yesterday listening to Allen's first stand-up comic monologues in the late fifties at the Bitter End Cafe. We were all in our twenties, my friends and I and Allen. It was as though someone on the block had suddenly found it in himself to say to a world beyond the street, "Listen. You wanna know how it is? This is how it is," and with more courage than anxiety he had shaped our experience. This wasn't Milton Berle or Henny Youngman up there, a Borscht Belt comic speaking half Yiddish, half English, all outsiderness. No, this was one of us, describing how it felt to be our age and in our place: on the street, at a party, in the subway, at home in the Bronx or Brooklyn; and then out there, downtown, in the city. Half in, half out.

Philip Roth, of course, cut closer to the bone. His sentence structure deepened the experience, drove home better than Allen could the pain and the excitement, the intelligence and the anguish, the hilarity and the madness of getting so close you could touch it and *still* you weren't inside.

Behind both Allen and Roth stood Saul Bellow, who made the words "manic" and "Jewish" synonymous, whose work glittered with a wild flood of feeling that poured from a river of language, all pent-up brilliance, the intelligence driven to an edge of hysteria that resembled Mel Brooks as much as it did Philip Roth. Although Bellow had been writing since the forties, it was only now in the fifties and sixties that his work and its meaning traveled down from a small community of intellectual readers to the reading populace at large. Here was a street-smart writing Jew who was actually extending the American language, using us—our lives, our idiom—to say something about American life that had not been said before. In the process, he gave us—me and my contemporaries—the equipment to define ourselves, and therefore become ourselves.

These men are on a continuum. From Milton Berle and Mel Brooks to Saul Bellow, Philip Roth, and Woody Allen—the subtle alterations of tone and voice among them constitute a piece of social history, chart a progress of the way Jews felt about themselves in America, embody a fine calibration of rage, resentment, and hunger.

My mother hated Milton Berle, and I understood why—he was hard to take. But I laughed against my will, and I knew he was the real thing. To see the idiom of your life coming back at you, shaped and enlarged by a line of humorous intelligence as compelling as a poem in the sustained nature of its thesis and context, was to experience one of life's deepest satisfactions. When that famous chord of recognition strikes, it is healing—illuminating and healing.

Milton Berle was my first experience of an artist's work applied to the grosser materials of my own environment. Berle, operating at a lower level of genius, was just as sinister as the Marx brothers. It was the wildness of his humor and the no-holds-barred atmosphere that it generated. Berle was coarse and vulgar, fast and furious, frightening in the speed of his cunning and his rage. My mother was repelled. She knew this was Jewish self-hatred at its most vicious.

Mel Brooks was more of the same, only ten years younger, and the ten years made a difference. A few years ago Brooks reminisced about how, when he began writing for Sid Caesar, his mother asked him how much money he was making, and he told her sixty dollars a week. He knew if he told her what he was really making she'd have a heart attack. "The heart," he said. "It would attack her." That story was for us: Woody Allen built on it. Brooks—also marked by a Borscht Belt coarseness that spoke to an uneducated sense of America, a lack of conversance with the larger culture—was still the shrewd, wild Jew talking, but his tone was a bit sadder, a bit quieter than Milton Berle's, less defended against the fears that dominated our lives. The lessened defense was the sign of change.

With Woody Allen, we passed through into a crucial stage of development. Allen built a persona, an identity, a body of work out of the idea of the mousy Jew who makes a fool of the gentile rather than of another Jew. This had not happened before. Its meaning was unmistakable.

The Woody Allen character is obsessed with getting laid. Everyone else does it; he alone can't do it. Everywhere he goes—in the street, on the subway, at a party—he gazes mournfully at the golden shiksas all around him, always beyond reach. It's not a Jewish girl he's trying to get into bed; it's Diane Keaton. The Jewish girl is Brooklyn; Annie Hall is Manhattan.

And what does sexual success mean? It means everything. It means the defeat of all that life bitterly witholds, already characterized by the fact that one has been born a Jew instead of Humphrey Bogart. If Allen can just get that blue-eyed beauty into bed. He wants it so bad he's going to die of it. He's going to expire from this hunger right there before your eyes.

The humor turns on Allen's extraordinary ability to mock himself. He's as brilliant as Charlie Chaplin at making wonderful his own smallness. And he's as successful as Chaplin at making a hero of the little man, and a fool of the withholding world in the person of the pretty girl. When Diane Keaton wrings her hands and moans, "I can't," and Allen blinks like a rabbit and says, "Why? Because I'm Jewish?"—he accomplishes a minor miracle on the screen. The beautiful woman is made ridiculous. The golden shiksa has become absurd, inept, incapable: the insincere and the foolish cut down to size so that Allen can come up to size.

When was the first time I saw it? Which movie was it? I can't remember. I remember only that at one of them, in the early seventies, I suddenly found myself listening to the audience laugh hysterically while Allen made a dreadful fool of the girl on the screen, and I realized that he had to make a fool of her, that he would always have to make a fool of her, because she was the foil: the instrument of his unholy deprivation, the exasperating source of life's mean indifference. I said to myself, "This is dis-*gust*-ting," and as I said it I knew I'd been feeling this way all my life: from Milton Berle to Saul Bellow to Woody Allen. I had always laughed, but deep inside I'd frozen up, and now I saw why. Milton Berle with his mother-in-law jokes, Saul Bellow with the mistresses who hold out and the wives who do him in, Mel Brooks and Woody Allen with the girl always and only the carrot at the end of the stick. Every last one of them was trashing women. Using women to savage the withholding world. Using us. Their mothers, their sisters, their wives. To them, we weren't friends or comrades. We weren't even Jews or gentiles. We were just girls.

At that moment I knew that I would never again feel myself more of a Jew than a woman. I had never suffered as men did for being a Jew in a Christian world because, as a Jew, I had not known that I wanted the world. Now, as a woman, I knew I wanted the world and I suffered.

Hannah Arendt, watching the Nazis rise to power in Germany, had denied the meaning of her own Jewishness for a long time. When she acknowledged it, she did so by saying, "When one is attacked as a Jew, one must

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# Malamud

*Richard Elman*

The late Natalie Wood once expressed interest in making a movie out of my *Lilo's Diary.* My heroine was eighteen; Wood was then in her indeterminate thirties. When I told my colleague Bern Malamud that I had the eye of Natalie Wood, he advised me not to write the screenplay. He had done screenplays with *The Fixer* and one other property, I believe, and had been unsuccessful. "They'll tell you anything," he said, of Hollywood people. "Don't believe them unless they enclose a check."

Though nothing ever came of the Natalie Wood project, Bern and I got to be on friendly terms.

It wasn't always that way.

In the summer of 1966, in Bennington, Vermont, in a hallway between our two offices, Malamud introduced himself to me with a prophecy: "Your writing will do very well up here, but you'll probably drive yourself a little crazy, and end up unhappy and divorced ... and you won't be the first."

* * *

This small frail person, with his jaunty little mustache, was about to go off on a Guggenheim to Cambridge; I was his replacement. We'd been working most of the summer in the sauna-heat of the old wooden College Barn, three offices apart, without either of us letting on that we knew the other. Two or three months previous to my being offered the job at Bennington, I'd been sent *The Fixer* for review, along with a very fine account of the Beilis case, on which Malamud's book is based, by the belletrist and translator Maurice Samuel. My review pointed out that *The Fixer* was overwrought and full of solipsism, not the highest-quality Malamud, and it was very strange to compare his Yacov Bok, the prisoner, to the actual Mendel Beilis in Samuel's account.

I wrote as I did, presuming Malamud and I would never meet. Even after the job as his replacement was offered to me, I assumed we would not run into each other, for he would surely be away while I was in residence.

I moved my family to Vermont, and went about that summer revising a novel for publication. There was an office down the hall from which I occasionally heard the sounds of typing. I didn't immediately presume that the sign over the door listing office hours under the sobriquet "Bernard Malamud" meant it was he behind the door composing.

So it was that we worked that summer in an odd kind of tandem, trying as best we could to be unaware of each other, though once, after a furious barrage of typing down the hall, I got up from my machine and peered into the corridor and saw this thin, mustached face peering back at me. He must have been in his late forties at the time. As I ducked away, cursing my bad timing, I knew good form dictated that I use the next available opportunity to introduce myself formally to Mr. Malamud.

The next time I heard typing coming from behind that door, I knocked and Malamud appeared. We stood in the doorway and he issued his prophecy of sorts, in an affable-enough manner, though he insisted on calling me "Elman."

"I hope you have a good time up here, Elman," he says. "I really do."

Then the prophecy. Then I wish him an equally productive year at Cambridge and we say goodbye.

By the time we met a year or so later, everything he'd prophesied had come more or less true.

How had he known? Guessed?

He said, "You reminded me a lot of Howard Nemerov, and things like that were always happening to Howard."

It was an attack of thinking I could read people's minds like an omniscient author that had me briefly committed to Bellevue the first time. I later wrote an article about my experience, which made the cover of *New York Magazine.*

I was subsequently invited to appear on a number of television programs to discuss my ordeal. One of the panelists was identified as Natalie Wood's sister, and she kept telling the MC and the audience that I must be seriously disturbed. "You're not exactly the picture of mental health," I replied. Screen went to black, and then a commercial.

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*Richard Elman is the author of twenty-one books, including the recently published collection of stories* Disco Frito *(Peregrine Smith, 1988), and a recently completed novel* Uganda.

When we came back on, Natalie Wood's overweight sister started in again on my problems. Did my family know?

"We haven't been on speaking terms for many years," I said. Screen to black again.

Bern may have seen that show. He was not a soft man, but he became rather concerned about me. He sent me letters recommending more distance from experience in my writing. As though to bestow a kindness with his criticism, he recommended me for one of the very first NEA grants, and, later, was often generous and kind to me in small hospitable ways whenever I was in Bennington.

When I eventually remarried and he invited me and my second wife to dinner, he would often tease Alice about the number of girlfriends he believed I once had, and whether she had used good judgment in marrying a man so much older than herself, like me.

Bern really liked Alice, I suppose. He tended to like to talk to women more than to men at parties. He was avuncular, or courtly, or eminent, but always just a little flirtatious. He confessed to both of us, once, that he'd always written in a very disciplined way. When he was younger he often had been envious of those who could afford the time to consort with women. Bern said he truly felt a little deprived in that respect; I suppose we were all supposed to feel a little deprived in other respects by such a confession of his own dedication, as though the pages of our lives had been dog-eared by our devout concern with living. I often wondered what his wife Ann, who was usually present, made of such confessions.

We were colleagues off and on for nearly two decades at Bennington, and we got along OK. He told me once he was always pleased to get my criticisms of his work, and they were usually apt. He also told me he admired my tenacity, even though, apparently, he was of the opinion it would come to naught.

Bern had a habit of seeing some people as others. If you were a complete ne'er-do-well, you were like the dilettante art critic and poet Gene Baro. If you were troubled and problematic, you were "more like Howard" (Howard Nemerov). I truly admired Bern's short fiction, and his shorter novels, such as *The Assistant* and *A New Life,* and, later, *God's Grace,* which I reviewed favorably when it was panned by others. I committed very few of my admirations to print, and usually kept my opinions to myself, unless he came up to me after a reading and asked. That happened after he wrote a piece through the mind of Virginia Woolf. I told him I thought it vague, ersatz, and silly. Bern pretended he didn't really care, but he avoided me for a while. He later told me he had written reviews for his friend Ben Bellitt, when Bellitt was an editor of the *Nation.* The rare-book dealer Glenn Horowitz has also discovered in Bern's papers a pseudonymously published kid's book he wrote with a neighbor when he was living in Oregon, using his own photo on the dust jacket.

Bern also told me he admired the Russians but had learned more from Virginia Woolf.

We were never really close friends, and I never cared to be a protégé. We simply didn't admire each other in ways either of us cared to recognize. Bern reminded me too much of some of my reproachful Midwood High School teachers; he'd taught high school math at Erasmus in Brooklyn at one early point in his career, and the valedictorian of my high school class at Midwood was his good friend. For his own tastes, on the other hand, I was too manically wild, and socially inept.

Bern could be a very prudent man. At dinner parties he'd sometimes enjoy watching others make asses of themselves by attempting to entertain the company while he hung back and flirted with the most attractive woman at the table. His flirtations seemed much more innocent than those of his literary protagonist, the biographer William Dubin. Mostly he seemed to wish to know things he felt excluded from by virtue of gender or experience. How did it feel to be a married woman having an affair with an impecunious and crazy poet? What did falling in love feel like to a well-brought-up WASP from Tuxedo? He despised some of his colleagues in the art department for taking advantage of some of the Bennington girls, when that school was for young women only, but he was not beyond importuning these young women with very personal questions about their lives when they were in tutorial (counseling) with him.

When he made money, Bern told me it would go into bank certificates of deposit and other safe bets. He bought a lovely house in Old Bennington, but he kept the same wife, and a few of the same old habits. Bern didn't like playing fliers. He and Saul Bellow were friends, but Bern did not attempt to show off his intellectual powers with Bellow, or with anyone else. He was intense; not modest, just extremely careful. He told me once that he'd figured out he needed an advance of fairly large proportions every five years or so from his publisher to complete his next project, and supplement his teaching and other income, and this he achieved sedulously until the end. I believe Bern died fairly well-to-do.

His books went through numerous complete drafts. He tried to research every fact, and was meticulous with details about a piece of sculpture, or an English department policy; he saved every draft he made. After a while, he was publishing nearly everything he wrote and finished. When something displeased him he filed

it away. It must have cost him a hurt or two to abandon his profiles of women: Virginia Woolf, Alma Mahler; there were some others. They weren't what they should have been because they couldn't be Malamud. He seemed to know it.

One of my most embarrassing moments took place one summer at a Malamud reading during the Bennington Workshops. My in-laws were visiting, and Malamud, my mother-in-law claimed, was the one writer she really wanted to hear.

Bern's talks and readings to the workshop students were often charming, and genial. He would appear the Master they so much desired to encounter when they came to the workshops. Bern would answer questions about his work and career, or read from something he was working on or had recently finished. He paid the students the high compliment of reading his work in manuscript, unfinished work. He might begin, "I suppose you all want to know what I think of the movie of *The Natural*?"

The summer my in-laws visited he read a fine new story about an aging Jewish woman who buys herself a wig when her hair starts to thin. Malamud was able to offer us the woman from the inside out, with the wry care of the parable-teller, who could abstract from that behavior of display a lesson about eros and love. It was a moving experience, first-rate short fiction, masterly in control. My mother-in-law, who had probably considered wigs, was made extremely nervous, anxious, embarrassed by Malamud's ironical empathies. In the middle of the reading she cried out, "Oh, no. . . ."

Malamud peered up from his text, startled, in the darkened hall, and then returned to it again. My mother-in-law's anxiety got the better of her again: "What does he know about wigs?" I heard her, sotto voce. "How dare he?"

It was altogether involuntary, an exclamation, a rudeness, at best. She was also expressing openly the same embarrassments and anxieties Malamud was trying to dramatize through his wig-buying woman.

To show I was not a party to any of this, I put my hands over my face as Malamud read on in that dark hot hall.

I apologized afterwards to Bern, who seemed far less upset than I. "Everybody has relatives," he pointed out. "I guess my story touched a certain . . ."

"Wig," I pointed out.

He had open heart surgery in California, and then a stroke, and when I next saw him he looked very small and unwell. He complained of loss of memory. He was still writing, he said, as much as he could.

The last thing I heard him read was from a work in progress about a Jewish peddler in nineteenth-century Arizona who gets kidnapped by Indians, is made a member of their tribe.

I was heading for the Southwest in a matter of weeks to teach at the University of Arizona. In Nogales I heard about a Jewish family that could trace many Indian connections through intermarriage from Malamud's period. I wrote to Bern suggesting he correspond with the family to document certain parts of his protagonist's Southwest existence, even as a comic figure. He wrote back to say he would surely look into the matter.

Some weeks after that, Bern dropped dead in the kitchen of his New York apartment while preparing a tuna fish sandwich for himself after a stint at writing. He was alone, as he had seemed in so many ways those last years of his illness. Bern did not lack for loving company, but he seemed to regard being ill and failing as a terrible embarrassment and isolation. How much he wanted to get better, to write again with his whole being. The stroke and recuperation were somehow an intimidation to him. He could recuperate, though taking good care of himself was like walking on eggs. He didn't always seem to know where to put his old weight and authority, with which foot.

I never knew Bern to be small or meanspirited toward me, then, despite his sufferings. He usually managed to appear like a ghost of himself at parties, bestow certain blessings, entertain himself as much as he could, and leave early.

His wife Ann and I had this thing at parties. I was the fellow available for her to bum cigarettes from when she became anxious. I would see her watching him sometimes, supervising him, and I would appear with my cigarettes, or a drink. In those days Bern was often pleased to chat with men, as well as women, at Bennington gatherings.

He'd taken on the honorific of the presidency of the PEN, and he seemed to be working at it, after the first stroke, as a way of distracting himself from his writing problems.

I asked him once when he first thought of becoming a writer. He told me that when he was a boy his mother died, and in his grief he began to express himself in various ways, and the thought must have occurred to him then. I heard him express other explanations to other people at other parties. Bern wasn't being deceitful. He was quite worried about himself, and when he started reflecting on his life many different things occurred to him, with rue, and he was just a little tired of being asked so many questions anyway. He only wished another chance to remember, to focus, and to write. □

# The Problem with Halakhic Ethics

*Moshe Ish Shalom*

It is 1996 at the Hadassah Hospital in Jerusalem. Either Israel has been transformed into a complete theocracy, or the religious political parties have become strong enough to get a series of laws passed, including a law stating that no one may be criminally prosecuted for observing halakha (Jewish religious law). Sounds innocent enough, especially to assimilated Jews who are returning to their roots. In fact, it makes them damn proud (in a romantic sort of way) that, after two thousand years, a Jew can never be hurt again for observing ancestral rites and customs. So most Jews have supported the legislation.

One of the most brilliant surgeons on the ward is a very presentable Jew, quite religious, with a long but well-groomed beard. Quite by accident, it is discovered by someone in the mortality statistics department that over the past ten years this surgeon has operated on three thousand patients. Seventy percent of the Jews have survived. Seventy percent of the non-Jews (most of whom are Christians) have not survived. Futhermore, of the Jews who have died, 90 percent were secular.

The doctor is arrested on suspicion of mass murder, and the case is brought to trial. His defense attorney has a simple argument. He cites the authoritative sixteenth-century compendium of Jewish law, the *Shulkhan Arukh* (Yoreh Deah 158), which states quite clearly that it is forbidden to save the life of an idolater or of a Jew who brazenly rejects the kosher dietary laws or any other religious law. This prohibition applies also to a Jew who is an *apikores*—someone who does not believe that the dead will be resurrected someday or that a descendant of David will be the Messiah. The law is directed especially at doctors, who should withhold treatment from such people. In fact, the *Shulkhan Arukh* suggests ways to get rid of such people, including spreading rumors about them that will eventually lead to their being killed, or removing the ladder from a place to which they have fallen and have no other means of escape (in this way, the man or woman simply starves to death). The attorney cites supporting evidence that the rights of an idolater in Israel are nonexistent and adds that Maimonides asserted (in his Laws of Idolatry) that, when Jews have a secure military hold on Israel, the above-mentioned laws do not go far enough. Idolaters must not be permitted to be in the land at all. It is not clear from the context whether, if they refuse to leave, idolaters are to be "transferred" (to quote a popular euphemism for expulsion) by force or simply killed.

In light of these halakhic precedents from the greatest of the codifications of Jewish law, the case against the surgeon is rather weak. The prosecuting attorney makes a feeble attempt to raise the issue of *mishum aivah*—the law, cited by the *Shulkhan Arukh* itself, that if such action will cause hatred of the Jew then it is not to be done. But the defense attorney neatly rejects this charge because *mishum aivah* expresses an exilic concern with Jewish safety in the midst of an idolatrous host society and therefore is clearly not halakhically relevant in a militarily strong Israeli state.

The prosecuting attorney also attempts to echo the sentiments of Jewish religious liberals (there are still a few) who state that compassion is an essential component of what it means to be Jewish. In fact, he cites the same Maimonides, who says that one of the essential characteristics of a Jew is his compassion. Of course, all this argument does is impugn the character of the defendant; it cannot possibly make him criminally liable. But the defense attorney disputes even this point. He puts his client on the stand, and the doctor tells the judges that he is a man of great compassion. He works with widows and orphans, and he offers personal assistance to the poor. Of course, all of those he helps are religiously observant people, since he is obligated to hate those who are not, because they fall under the category of *rasha*—the wicked. Furthermore, he gladly confesses his actions in the hospital and feels that he was simply fulfilling his halakhic obligations. Finally, he claims that even though idolaters are wicked, he had compassion for them and did not allow them to bleed to death slowly. Rather, at the risk of being discovered, he made sure to eliminate key steps in the operations so that they would die quickly.

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*Moshe Ish Shalom is a pseudonym being used by an Orthodox rabbi who was ordained by Yeshiva University. In explaining his use of a pseudonym, Rabbi Shalom says, "I'm not prepared to sign this piece because there has been a decrease in openness within the mainstream of the Orthodox world toward discussing difficult issues such as these, and I would be unable to remain unscathed by people's anger and adverse reactions were I to give my name."*

The case is dismissed. The non-Jews and secularists of Israeli society scramble to establish their own hospitals, and, in the back of their minds, they make plans to leave. And so the horror begins....

Is this scenario impossible? I do not know, but I do know that we who are committed to halakha have not even begun to face some very tough questions about what it means to be religious and ethical in the twentieth century. And if we are not careful, the rule of the mob or the forces of history—not our great tradition of ethics—will determine our spiritual consciences. The fundamental question for a contemporary halakhist must be how s/he responds to laws that, by standards of personal conscience, are morally repugnant. This is not the place to prove it, but it seems clear to me (from studying Jewish texts for the past fifteen years) that now is not the first time in Jewish history that halakhists have had to struggle with this issue. It seems that, at some juncture, the laws about killing a wayward son; wiping out whole cities of idolatrous Jews; forcing a woman suspected of adultery to drink a potion; allowing capital punishment, polygamy, and slavery; and prohibiting women from going out in public all became problematic to many rabbis.

The major problem, however, is that rarely, if ever, did halakhists categorically state that a law was wrong or morally problematic. Instead, the rabbis effectively eliminated the Deuteronomic extermination laws, for example, by claiming that they referred to the seven nations of ancient Canaan and that those nations no longer exist. But this method of modifying the law is extremely dangerous, since it eliminates honest discussion of the moral problem of the mass murder of men, women, and children. The law is conveniently consigned to the dustbin of halakhic history and is not attacked from the universalist perspective of fairness, tolerance, and compassion, or from the broader Jewish perspective embodied by the many other prophetic and rabbinic texts that display extraordinary moral sensitivity and deep respect for all human life, which is created in the image of God.

To take account of this broader Jewish perspective is to confront the agonizing contradictions that I, a halakhic Jew, struggle with in the *Shulkhan Arukh*. Specifically, the *Shulkhan Arukh,* in addition to the aforementioned problematic laws, also contains an extraordinary discussion about protecting one's life in situations of danger. That discussion is intimately related to a whole series of laws, codified by the *Shulkhan Arukh,* about not being permitted to put someone else in danger. In fact, one critical law states that one must not sell weapons to those who will use them to kill, because one ends up being an accomplice to the crime—murder being one of the seven prohibitions that all people, regardless of religion, are halakhically bound to observe. (This law, incidentally, makes a large chunk of the taxes collected by every modern state for the purposes of weapons production and sales halakhically questionable—yet another halakha conveniently ignored.) Technically, the law against selling these weapons comes under the halakhic rubric of not putting a stumbling block before a blind person, which is a powerful example of a compassionate, moral law of ancient Judaism.

*The halakhic body of laws will be used with increasing frequency as a battering ram against Palestinians and anyone else, Jewish or gentile, who gets in the way of an amoral ultranationalism.*

How does one struggle with such deep ethical contradictions in the halakhic system? I think the only answer is to do it honestly, and halakhists make a tragic mistake when they continue to gloss over these problems by apologetically claiming that this or that law is not relevant in such and such a circumstance of contemporary life. Another favorite method used by halakhists is to quote the small portion of the laws of idolatry that states that one must support the idolatrous poor as well as the Jewish poor for the sake of peace, while completely ignoring the surrounding laws which are neither humanitarian nor peaceful.

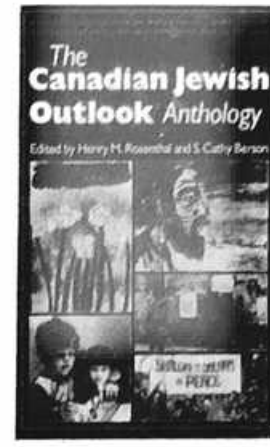
We cannot avoid these tough problems anymore; the stakes are now too high for apologetics because apologetics leaves open a moral Pandora's box. Imagine that instead of the United States' having said unequivocally that nonwhites and women have the right to vote, it had said that the blacks who came from Africa were not really human and the women of yesteryear had minds like children, but that today's blacks and women are no longer that way, so they have voting rights. Doesn't this claim leave the door open for racist senators in the year 2000 to destroy civil rights in this country?

If we as halakhists do not struggle with laws that are morally problematic, if we do not honestly confront the paradoxes of the halakhic system, we are bound for disaster in the new age of halakhic power. We must unequivocally acknowledge, despite the miserable moral track record of Western civilization, that there are universal moral principles (many derived from our own prophets) that dozens of great minds have agreed upon and to which we owe allegiance. We must acknowledge that great moral ideas come from great moral minds

created in the image of God. The human mind is not our sole allegiance, but to replace the mind with obedience to the written word *alone* is extremely dangerous. To do so is to be untrue even to the halakhic system itself, which allows for honest ethical struggle that can, when necessary, lead to the overriding of something morally repugnant from the past. The old adage continues to be relevant: the Torah is like water; it can grow either beautiful flowers or weeds.

When I was in yeshiva I had some extraordinary teachers. Two particularly memorable ones taught me Talmud and Bible. Both men were survivors of World War II, and both were the gentlest men I have ever known. I remember how we never seemed to dwell on the portions of Genesis that involved Jewish cruelty, such as the section about the sons of Jacob wiping out the city of Shekhem. And I was told time and again that Abraham was the father of our people because he showed so much compassion for the stranger and even for the cruel people of Sodom. I remember that I never learned about the Ten Plagues without also learning that we do not say Hallel, the prayer of praise, on the last six days of Passover because the midrash states that God reproached the Israelites for singing at the Red Sea while His creatures (the Egyptians) were drowning. And the list of moral ideals that I was taught goes on. I know that the people who teach in yeshiva now are not emphasizing these principles. The essential teaching today focuses on survival, angry survival. And I shudder to think of what might be taught tomorrow.

Moreover, I have to say that, despite my love for those teachers, they were wrong for not discussing in class what was in their heart of hearts—namely, that there are elements of the tradition that do not coincide with the ideal Jewish way of life that they believed in; that the *erlekh*, good Jew that they loved and admired would not have, indeed could not have, mass murdered a city of idolaters or put someone to death for violating the Sabbath. It was wrong to shove the issue under the table because doing so left the door open for a generation today that is profoundly influenced, even impressed, by the weaponry and violence of the world of nation-states; this generation openly embraces the very values that these saintly Jewish rabbis of old found most repugnant in their exilic host societies. When I sat in a minyan (quorum for prayer) with these rabbis and I said with them, at the end of the prayer service, "These with chariots and these with swords, but we will trust in the name of God," I knew very well with whom I was praying and to which God we were praying. Now I am not so sure on either score. Now I am sure only that I must call upon my religious colleagues to build a contemporary halakhic structure that is not a desecration of the Divine Name but, on the contrary, is a sanctification of that Name—the Name that brings this world closer to redemption.


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The hypothetical case that I have raised is not an isolated problem of one difficult law regarding idolaters. People who are well-versed in Jewish law know this to be true. The problem involves a huge body of Jewish law that has been rather carelessly applied to all non-Jews both in ritual and in civil law. Most important, this body of laws will, in the years ahead, be used by some people, with increasing frequency, as a battering ram against Palestinians and anyone else, Jewish or gentile, who gets in the way of an amoral ultranationalism.

We already see a Jewish world in which everyone picks and chooses the central elements of his or her religiosity. For many, the laws governing the observance of Sabbath are not relevant to their lives, while for others, who are fanatical about observance of the Sabbath and the kosher dietary regulations, the laws governing business ethics and pursuit of peace are nonexistent. We have to be prepared for the likelihood that in the near future some people will make the laws governing the elimination of idolaters from the land of Israel a central tenet of their Judaism. These laws have already become a great excuse for abusing the Palestinians.

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Certainly, blame for Jewish hatred of the gentile, particularly the Palestinian, cannot be placed squarely on the halakha. The reasons are numerous, many of them understandable if not justifiable. We did not ask for two thousand years of senseless persecution, right up to and including the brutality of the PLO, but the psychological damage that such persecution has wrought is unmistakable. Sometimes, as I read a popular Jewish newspaper, I get confused by the overwhelming number of articles telling me whom I am supposed to hate most: Palestinians; Arabs; Russians; Nazis; neo-Nazis; Black Muslims; Democrats; nascent anti-Semitic groups in the West, the South, Connecticut, Argentina; Jimmy Carter; anyone not Israeli who indicates obliquely that even one Palestinian is suffering or who in fact even uses the words "Palestinian" or "Arab refugee"; self-hating Jews; and so on. . . . There is no doubt that we have a right to be sick of persecution, but we are also increasingly sick *from* persecution, and it is time to admit that this sickness has blinded many of us to the concrete steps that can be taken to resolve conflicts with non-Jews, especially Palestinians.

We must not allow halakha to become a vehicle of murderous or suicidal illness, and we can easily accomplish this goal in two ways. First, we must continue what enlightened Orthodox and Conservative halakhists have already begun—namely, the articulation of the many high moral standards that the traditional texts demand of Jews. Second, we must acknowledge the context in which much of the halakha concerning non-Jews was written and face squarely what we are to say and do about the morally problematic laws. There was a very sad mutual hatred between Jew and Christian that prevailed for thousands of years, and this mutual hatred made it extremely difficult for Jews to develop an objective, moral, halakhic perspective on the status of the gentile.

I know that for most Jews the issue of the divine origin of Jewish law is of little consequence. But for some Jews, myself included, the notion that Jewish law is of divine origin is extremely important. Consequently, I agonize tremendously over anything that I find problematic in Jewish religious tradition. One thing that I cannot do—and that we as a people cannot do—is ignore the fundamental religious assumption that lies at the core of the biblical and rabbinic corpus, an assumption that serves as a beacon of eternal truth. And that assumption is that there is a God: a God who created a magnificent, awesome universe and who is good and compassionate for having given us that universe; a God who wants us to be the same—creative, compassionate, and good. We cannot allow certain laws to be revived by irresponsible people in the name of a spiritual "authenticity" when these laws by themselves actually call into question the moral and spiritual message of a three-thousand-year tradition.

I am fully aware that I have not, in this short essay, even scratched the surface of these complicated laws; indeed, it was not my purpose to do so. My purpose was to alert us to the potential danger that lies ahead if halakha begins to play a more dominant role in Israeli life, and also to stimulate discussion about the possibility of the growth of halakhic ethics. I am aware that there are counterquotes and that some halakhic theorists and *poskim* (rabbinic authorities) have more humane treatments of the gentile, the idolater, and the righteous and the wicked than do the actors in the theoretical case I've described. However, the interpretation I have presented is a real factor in the religious world and threatens to have a growing influence unless a counterdefinition of an ethically informed halakha is created. There are two possible reactions to the increasing role of halakha in political and social life. One is to reject it and its proponents as ethically ill-suited to confront the problems that we face. Another reaction, however, is to refuse to leave halakha in the hands of those who do not care about the horrifying possibilities of the above-mentioned laws and instead to develop it and struggle with it as has been done for three thousand years. The latter approach would be a far healthier and more authentic Jewish response, and it would wrest authenticity from those who have extraordinary attachment to ritual observance but little knowledge of Judaism's many moral laws and insights.

It is high time we developed, out of the embarrassingly dusty stock of ethical halakhas, a serious ethic of social responsibility. The results of such a development, wedded to the best moral insights—both Jewish and gentile—of our day, could have a profound impact on the popular and intellectual life of the Jewish people. □

# The Bible's Sleeping Beauty and Her Great-Granddaughters

*Arthur Waskow*

One of the most interesting critiques of modernity has gone beyond condemnations of capitalism to describe all forms of modern life (including those that call themselves socialist) as dominated by technology, patriarchy, hierarchy, and alienation, all focused on the race for mastery of the earth and of society. This critique finds its roots in the life experience of women; it affirms the earth-web of life, and celebrates a kind of spirituality that wells up from community.

According to this view, the religious traditions based on the Hebrew Bible—with their strong emphasis on the Father-God in Heaven and male leadership on earth—not only are the sources from which patriarchy and the drive for technomastery originated, but also continue to propound the most rigidly role-ridden, male-dominant versions of how men and women should live in the world. Sometimes this critique looks upon modernity as the beginning of liberation from these old oppressions.

I think this view is partly right—and partly mistaken. I want to look at some strands of biblical tradition that may preserve some prebiblical understandings of the importance of women, of women's spirituality, and of the earth-web. Indeed, whether or not these texts are actual deposits of such a prebiblical history, I think that when they are looked at by eyes that have lived through the modern age, they may help our own generation rebalance mastery and mystery, women and men, human beings and the earth.

These strands may almost be seen as a Sleeping Beauty, hidden away in the most secret chambers of the biblical faiths. Hidden away so deeply that only the elaborate public places of male dominion have seemed to make up the reality of the traditions. Yet this Sleeping Beauty of women's energy may all along have been quietly breathing life-energy into the public places. And now it may be possible for her to awake to fuller life when she is kissed awake by her great-great-granddaughters. (And perhaps by some grandsons too.)

*Arthur Waskow is a member of the faculty of the Reconstructionist Rabbinical College. Among his books are* Seasons of Our Joy *(Bantam, 1982) and* These Holy Sparks *(Harper and Row, 1983).*

If we look into the Hebrew Bible for its richest, deepest explorations of the place of men and women in the world and of the relationships of human beings with the earth, we find two mythic tales: the Garden of Eden and the Song of Songs. I think that the first is a tale of the painful awakening of the human race from an unconscious infancy into a tense adolescence and a drudging adulthood, and that the second is a vision of that adulthood renewed, refreshed, made fully playful and conscious at the same time. In short, the Song of Songs is Eden for grown-ups.

Seen from one angle, the story of Eden seems to embody and command the dominion of men over women, as well as rigid roles of life for both women and men. And this is indeed the way most of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam have viewed the story. The dominant figure, the "real creation," seems to be a man, and woman is merely an afterthought. The woman is weak: she hearkens not to God but to the cunning serpent, challenges God impetuously, brings sin and trouble into the world, visits upon all future women their subservience to men and their pain in childbirth. From this angle of vision, all of it—the whole story—seems to be both warrant and command to keep women in their place.

Now let us give the story a twist, a turn like the one we give a kaleidoscope in order to see all its elements in a new context. Let us experiment with seeing it as a tale of growing up. A story not of disaster and sin, but of the troublesome spiral of growing, returning, growing, returning.

Suppose that humankind begins not as "male," or "man," but as embryonic or infantile "androgyne"—the Adam of Genesis 1. Is there any warrant to see the story this way? Yes—for this is where the Bible not only asserts that human beings are created "male and female, in the Image of God," but also, in the same breath, has God speak of the Divine Self not as "My Image" but as "Our Image"—as if to say, "I too am Male and Female." Genesis 1 and 5 describe Adam sometimes as "he" and sometimes as "they," shifting back and forth from singular to plural as if the Bible were trying to say simultaneously that there is a single humanness in both men and women, and that in this single humanness there

is also a doubleness—maleness and femaleness—both of which are real, and both of which have a part in making the one human form.

At this point in the Creation story, all the elements of "male" and "female" and all the other aspects of humanity are still cloudy, unclear, undifferentiated. The human being is close cousin of the dark, moist, earthy humus; so *Adam* and *Adamah*, as the Hebrew calls the human and the humus, are a great deal like each other.

And as the first stage of growth, the two "sides" of the human, which we call male and female, begin to separate. As the Adam of Genesis 2 evolves, from this "s/he" is removed the "she"—as a rib from the body, as a specific figure from the undifferentiated ground. Indeed, the female aspect becomes clearer, more focused, more active first. Its emergence necessarily, dialectically, defines what remains as male. Why is it the woman who emerges from what then remains defined as man? Why does the man not emerge from, why is he not birthed by, the woman—as we who read the story might expect? Perhaps to suggest that in the Garden of Delight, a man could give birth; in Eden, the roles we know to apply in ordinary history are not locked in. Even after this birth, this separation, it is clear that the two remain bone of each other's bone, flesh of each other's flesh.

But then the woman side takes another step. The Snake faces her with the necessity of choice—and she chooses. Why is it the woman who makes this choice? Perhaps because the text is again teaching us that in the Garden of Delight, the gender roles that we know have applied in most of "ordinary" history are not locked into place: just as in Eden a man can give birth, so in Eden a woman can make history—indeed, start history going.

Since choosing is itself an act of distinction making, it is no surprise that the woman chooses to take fully into herself the consciousness of distinctions, differences. *All* differences; but the difference that becomes most apparent, once this choice to make choices is made, is the difference between "good" and "bad."

Why this focus? Because the advance in consciousness that discovers "separation" also signals and requires a separation—that of human beings from their embeddedness in Mother Earth. And this separation is painful. There is some sense in which all earth shrieks out in protest at this painful birthing—and warns us of the resulting difficulties we will face. The knowledge of death will come into the world, as will the struggle to wring a livelihood from the earth. No more will we freely eat what we find; now we will struggle to subdue the earth, to make it feed us, so as to stave off death.

And the earth will fight back. It will turn barren when we overuse it. And the roles that rigidify what it means to be a woman, and what it means to be a man, will come into the world. The very revolution in consciousness that the woman initiated will unfold in such a way as to isolate women into childbearing and into subservience to men. It will isolate men into the production of food and into rulership of the family. The women's work of birthing new human beings will become painful labor; the men's work of shaping a living from the earth will become exhausting toil.

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*Sexuality is vigorous and playful, unforced and unforcing. Indeed, with all their Eros the lovers never quite consummate their love, never quite achieve an orgasm.*

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But does the story insist that this new set of social roles and structures is the right way to live? Or is there any hint that the process of growth and change will continue?

Within the story itself, there is such a hint. For the story itself describes Eden as the Garden of Delight. It is only outside the Garden that male domination takes command of life. The whole tenor of biblical hope is that the Garden can somehow be rediscovered, recreated, reawakened within us and around us. In the new Garden of Delight, exhausting toil will no longer be the human lot—for each will live under his or her own vine and fig tree to eat there unafraid. And in that Garden, to be fully human is to be androgynous; if male and female are to be distinguished, then still it must be possible as it was in Eden for the man to "give birth" and for the woman to "start history." That is, in the world of delight men and women would not be locked into the roles that they have been locked into throughout most of history.

Now of course the ancient Eden of delight was infantile. Once consciousness dawns, we cannot go home again to the garden of infantile unconsciousness. But can we go *forward*—to a conscious Eden?

That is the vision of the Song of Songs. But before we examine this other "garden" of the Bible, let us look at one crucial question: why is it the woman who carries the burden of "growth" or "sin" in the story of Eden?

One way of understanding the story is that it is about the unfolding of a single human life—from infancy to a certain kind of drudging adulthood. In that life story, perhaps the clearest shock of sexual differentiation, emerging from the relative androgyny of childish girls and boys, is the swelling of a girl into a woman. Perhaps in that sense the women are the ones who eat first from

the tree that can teach the knowing of distinctions—and then they feed the knowledge to men. Perhaps the Eden story has it be the snake who teaches women the lesson because the snake molts its skin without dying. So the snake can best teach women how to understand the "molting" of their uterine skins in menstruation, when they bleed without dying, and the "molting" of their old identities in growing up, when they change without dying. (It is the snake that teaches the woman that she will not die, but will grow up, if she eats from the tree.) It is precisely menstruation—the event through which women discover themselves as women—that has been for women the instrument of role differentiation into childbirth, child rearing, and subordination to men.

And then the woman teaches the man as well, how to "molt" his old identity and change—without dying.

Seen this way, the story may be helpful in teaching how each human being grows into consciousness and adulthood. Seen this way, it is about fluidity and change within a single life, but about stasis and inevitability in the long haul—for each individual life will go through the same cycle as the life before it.

But the story may be communicating something else as well—something about the life spiral of the human race as a whole, about the role of consciousness in the emergence of the human race from the humus.

The Eden story is a tale of how the human race as a whole grows up. Beginning as an undifferentiated part of the web of life, human beings—led perhaps by women who began to create culture by educating children, teaching language, worshipping the Goddess—separate themselves from the earth. Women's creation of this special role for themselves enables men to learn to imprison them in the very roles that women had used to liberate themselves. The male step on the spiral perhaps represents what might be called "the biblical revolution"—itself both an advance for some values and a retreat for others, like most revolutions. An advance for economics—that is, the knowledge of how to battle the earth to wring food from it. A retreat for peacefulness. As the Bible describes this moment, it encompasses the emergence of Cain and Abel—farmer and shepherd—and the first murder. An advance for men who were freed to make the future, and a retreat for women whose power became the Sleeping Beauty hidden somewhere in the corridors of the Hebrew Bible and its successors and interpreters—the Talmud, the New Testament, and the Koran.

At the level of overarching mythic symbol, the Hebrew Bible carries some powerful assertions that women and men must walk together in the world. One way to see this doubleness is that it operates at the biological level: to make or at least to continue the human family requires both men and women.


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But another way to see the doubleness is that it operates *within* each human being, psychologically and spiritually. The notion that Adam was originally androgynous—somehow both "male" and "female"—was recognized long ago. Nineteen hundred years ago some of the ancient Jewish commentators said it and thus suggested a second level of perception. For whoever wrote down the words of Genesis and of rabbinic commentary could tell, from looking at the world, that there were *within* men and *within* women both "male" and "female." And once this way of thinking enters the world, it becomes harder to separate men and women into utterly separate roles and spheres of life.

What does it mean to use such metaphors as "male" and "female" to describe behaviors and characteristics that could appear in both sexes? The metaphors, coming partly from biology and partly from our cultural inheritance of how to look at biology—a cultural inheritance deeply influenced by the Bible—have become connected with two other pairs of polarities: mastery and mystery, activism and nurturance. Our traditions have seen activism and mastery as male, nurturance and mystery as female. And while these identifications have tended to push men in the

*(Continued on p. 125)*

# THE TIKKUN CONFERENCE

**A special supplement of papers and talks delivered at the Conference of Liberal/Progressive Jewish Intellectuals held in New York City, Dec. 18–20, 1988.**

## The Meaning of the Conference

*It was overwhelming—a mind- and heart-expanding experience. It unified my political and personal concerns, and it enabled me to feel connected to other Jews in ways that I never experienced before.*

*I loved the way individual sessions were able to blend solid academic discussions with serious and thoughtful presentations of feelings and emotions—a model quite unlike intellectual life in American universities.*

*It inspired me to be open to a synthesis between progressive politics and Judaism, something I had knee-jerkedly rejected in the past as impossible.*

*I was impressed with the tolerance for dissenting opinions. Other forums might have squashed it.*

*I'm normally a skeptic and a cynic. Yet I leave after three days with more hope than I ever believed I could have, optimistic about progressive possibilities. I believe that this conference will be seen as a historic juncture in the progressive movement, and I'm proud and thankful to have been here.*

—Excerpts from Conference Evaluations

The *Tikkun* conference, held in New York City December 18–20, 1988, and attended by over eighteen hundred people, generated an enormous amount of excitement. Dozens of people told us during and after the event that this was an extremely important experience for them, and we continue to receive enthusiastic expressions of appreciation from people who were there.

Before the conference we had little time to prepare ourselves emotionally for what we would experience. Organizing a first-time event from three thousand miles away was extremely taxing and took all the energy of our small staff. We were worried about money (no, we didn't break even) and nervous about possible disasters.

The conference exceeded all our expectations. We were deeply moved by the spirit of the event, and we were invigorated by the intelligent discussion. We would do some things differently at future conferences. For example, we made a big mistake by not providing child care. Also, we scheduled sessions and events too tightly, not taking into account people's need for unstructured time. However, overall we couldn't be more pleased with how it went.

It is, of course, impossible to convey in print the experience of being at the conference. However, because many people who couldn't come are interested in what happened, some of our reflections about the event follow.

To begin with, we have been trying to understand what excited people about the conference. First, there was the moment of discovery of how many of us there were. Although we had expected five hundred people, over eighteen hundred people actually registered. The attendees were at first incredulous, then exhilarated by how many other people there were who, like themselves, had a *Tikkun*-style political sensibility.

For several decades the organized Jewish world has been dominated by its most conservative elements, and the media continue to quote these conservative leaders as though they actually represented all sectors of the Jewish world. Here was a moment in which liberals and progressives could see, firsthand, that they are not alone, that there are large numbers of people who look at the world as they do.

Second, participation in the conference was itself a powerful political act. The overwhelming majority of attendees enthusiastically identified with *Tikkun*'s critique of the Israeli occupation of the West Bank, and with its insistence that the organized Jewish community and its conservative leadership do not speak for the majority of American Jews. In thus "breaking ranks" with the organized Jewish community, participants were in effect launching the next major national struggle within the Jewish world.

Yet, this group could not be dismissed as an anti-Zionist or anti-Israel crowd. In small group discussions about Israel and in questions to speakers from the floor, over and over again people talked about their concern about and love for Israel. Even the approximately 150 observers from establishment Jewish organizations and the press had to admit that this was no gathering of Israel-bashers. That made it harder for them to minimize the significance of the powerful outpouring of indignation at Israel's policies toward the Palestinians.

Third, the incredible diversity of people sharing a similar point of view was exciting for many attendees. One observer described it as "the reconciliation of the generations," since the crowd contained people of all ages, including three hundred college students. Some of the attendees were religiously observant. Many people spoke about their involvement in their communities as rabbis, educators, synagogue social-action-committee members, members of havurot, and activists in gay and lesbian educational projects. However, many attendees had not had any involvement in the Jewish community since their bar or bat mitzvahs. Being at this event was their next step toward Jewish involvement, after having been *Tikkun* readers in the past couple of years. Others were militantly against any religious involvement and were surprised to find themselves among people who shared their criticisms of Israel and their support for liberal/progressive politics while nevertheless being committed to a religious worldview. There was, of course, a wide diversity of political views—from those who talked about how to most effectively get Congress to pass a liberal program, to those who yearned for a revival of the radical politics of the sixties or the thirties.

Fourth, the conference excited many people because it felt safe. In order to successfully build a liberal/progressive movement, people within the movement need to feel that they can be honest about who they are—with all their actual or imagined deficiencies—without fearing that they will be rejected or made to feel terrible about themselves. Because of the meritocratic ideology of the society, most people already feel that they have no one but themselves to blame for their failures. They don't need to become involved in a left movement where they will be made to feel even worse about themselves.

The conference was a model, of sorts, of what such a movement could feel like. To be sure, there were small groups of people present who manifested their "outrage" that this or that wasn't right, but they simply were unable to get the normal lynch-mob mentality going. Eventually they abandoned their stance and started to enjoy being part of an event where, by and large, people acted toward each other as though they were potential comrades and friends. The degree of openness and respectfulness among people created an instant sense of optimism about the possibilities. People likened it to the spirit of the early days of the New Left in the 1960s, before fratricidal struggles caused most people to forget what they had in common. Not surprisingly, in such a context people began to imagine themselves becoming more active in politics. The spirit of optimism, sufficient to make Bush and Shamir seem like obstacles that could be overcome, was a direct product of the way people treated each other.

There was another factor that also helped make people feel safe. At the Palestinian roundtable, the first event, an important message was conveyed: the rhetoric of "the most oppressed person is always right" would not

go unchallenged at the *Tikkun* conference. One way that people often feel stifled in left gatherings is that they are made to believe that their perceptions are illegitimate if they clash with the statements of whoever is identified as the representative of the most oppressed group. The political situation in the Mideast at the time of the conference—the continuing refusal of the Israeli government to negotiate with the PLO, even after Arafat's recognition of Israel and his apparent renunciation of terrorism—created a climate in which roundtable participants Edward Said and Ibrahim Abu Lughod, both members of the Palestine National Council, were understandably welcomed to our conference as representatives of an oppressed people. Yet the Jewish participants in this roundtable resisted Said's portrayal of the Palestinian tragedy as one-sidedly the responsibility of the Jewish people. While excited that the PNC representatives were there, and certain that it was important to give them a respectful hearing, the roundtable participants challenged Said to state publicly that he knew that the majority of the PNC would be willing to accept a Palestinian state on the West Bank and would be willing to renounce all claims to the rest of Palestine (he did not do so), and they challenged Said to join with Jewish scholars to write a two-sided account of the history that would be fair to both sides.

After this session, many conference participants expressed appreciation that a one-sided scapegoating of Israel had been averted. Even many conference attendees who *agreed* with Said about the substance of the issue acknowledged that, in making it safe for people to challenge the opinions of the spokespeople of the most oppressed, we had created a climate in which people would feel comfortable sharing their own thoughts, even if those thoughts were "less radical" or "less politically correct" than those of others at the conference.

Still another reason for the excitement about the conference was the way we reaffirmed that ideas matter. In the past few decades the neoconservatives have managed to revive a moribund conservative movement by developing a network of magazines, think tanks, and researchers who aggressively articulate a new right-wing approach to the world. Yet liberals, defeated in national elections in five out of six of the last presidential campaigns, have focused primarily on tactics and are rarely willing to question fundamentals. A populist climate on the left often puts intellectuals on the defensive.

The conference unabashedly defined itself as being aimed toward intellectuals, and it affirmed unequivocally that intellectual life is important. Sessions addressing issues that have mistakenly been dismissed as "too theoretical" drew large and enthusiastic audiences. And questions from the floor indicated that the interest generated was not just among academics, but among "organic intellectuals"—the wide variety of teachers, journalists, college students, publishers, Congressional aides, political activists, poets, and professionals in Jewish and community organizations for whom ideas play a central part in their daily life. Recognizing the importance of intellectual work was both validating and empowering for many participants.

Finally, people were excited about the conference not only because the intellectual content of the sessions was strong and stimulating, but because there were important sessions in which people shared their feelings and their experiences, as well as their ideas. In the session "Jewish and Progressive Values and their Roles in Cultural Creativity," for example, the participants spoke openly about the experiences that have shaped their creativity. And in the session "Women and Judaism," there was a great deal of discussion about the pain women experience as they try to reconcile their commitment to Judaism with their commitment to feminism.

Likewise, music and poetry were integrated into the conference in a way that many people especially appreciated. In the middle of the opening plenary, after the keynote address, Shlomo Carlebach, a Hassidic rabbi recognized as one of the most inspiring songwriters and performers in the Jewish world, roused the assembled crowd, which began singing and dancing in the aisles. At the start of the Israel plenary, a dozen people performed sections of Liz Swados's "Jerusalem Cantata," which moved many people to tears. David Ignatow, Marge Piercy, Robert Pinsky, Gerald Sterns, Irena Klepfisz, and Ruth Whitman read poetry. Unlike many public Jewish functions whose dinners have little Jewish content, the conference's kosher meal included a time for Torah study and the blessing after the meal. And the music throughout the conference was an expression of the diversity of the people present: along with Hebrew religious and Yiddish secularist music there were labor songs, songs of the movements of the thirties and the sixties, and songs from the women's movement.

We cannot summarize everything that happened at the event, but here are a few of the highlights that are not necessarily reflected in the following papers:

- American Jews sat down with members of the Palestine National Council and began to share perspectives. Ibrahim Abu Lughod reported that previous attempts to invite him to events in the Jewish community had been sharply resisted by conservative Jews and that the sponsors had acceded to the right and cancelled his previous invitations.
- In several of the sessions there was a sharp difference of opinion about how to strengthen the liberal/progressive forces in the U.S. Some people agreed with

the *Tikkun* position that the left must move from a rights-based approach to a meaning-centered politics. Others argued that the left had made significant advances in the 1980s on the local level, despite losses on the national scene, and that the primary focus should be to build on our existing strengths. Still others argued that, despite forty years of left politics, the fundamental distribution of wealth has remained untouched, and that this fact is critical both in assessing the past and in setting an agenda for the future.

• In a session on political strategy, Peter Gabel questioned the validity of what he termed the economistic and technocratic presentations of Frances Fox Piven and Michael Harrington. In opposition to Piven's call for rededicated voter registration efforts and Harrington's focus on developments in the international economy, Gabel argued for focusing on the aesthetic and evocative dimensions of politics and developing an ethically based and psychologically sophisticated vision of what the progressive forces are for.

• Sharp disagreements existed about why some Jews and many Jewish leaders have moved to the right. Some people argued that this was primarily a response to the cold war and an outgrowth of Jewish assimilation into the conservative mainstream. Others argued that this shift was primarily a reaction to the insensitivity of liberals and the left toward legitimate Jewish concerns.

• An intense exchange was precipitated by Jesse Lemisch's spirited attack on *Tikkun*'s position that a liberal program should include the creation of a progressive profamily perspective. Lemisch rejected this stance as a retreat from the radicalism of the 1960s. He also criticized "liberatory Judaism," as it is presented in *Tikkun*.

• The session on lesbian and gay issues explored the ways that these issues are not adequately integrated into the consciousness of progressive movements. Many who attended this session reported that it was the most deeply honest and moving session at the conference.

• The Israel session included several heated exchanges. Henry Siegman, executive director of the American Jewish Congress (AJC), noted that *Tikkun* was getting a lot of press coverage now that its opposition to Israeli policies was being referred to in the newspapers. But perhaps, he suggested, there is no substantive difference between AJC and *Tikkun,* and any conflict could be reduced to *Tikkun*'s desire for self-promotion. *Tikkun*'s Michael Lerner responded by agreeing to stop making any press statements criticizing AJC and to leave the Israel issue to AJC if its local chapters would endorse and aggressively support the following two positions: (1) a demilitarized Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza; and (2) direct negotiations between Israel and the PLO to achieve a demilitarized state. Siegman declined to endorse, or urge AJC to endorse, either of these positions.

In another exchange, David Gordis, former executive director of the American Jewish Committee and a current board member of *Tikkun,* used his speech to warn the crowd to be careful not to speak about Israel in such a way that would turn off those people in the Jewish organizations whom they should be trying to convince. Lerner rejected this orientation. He argued that it was precisely this kind of self-censorship within the organized Jewish community that has always put liberals on the defensive. The primary task of the community of people around *Tikkun* is *not* to influence the conservative leadership of the organized Jewish world, but to help show those many American Jews who have been alienated from the Jewish world as presently constituted that there is another way to be Jewish, a way more consistent with their ethical and moral sensibilities. The more that the *Tikkun* community develops an ethos and style that appeal to the organized Jewish world, the less likely that it will provide an attractive alternative to those who rejected that world, and hence the less likely that it will be effective in showing those people what remains powerful and compelling in Judaism and in the cultural and spiritual heritage of the Jewish people.

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*Here was a moment in which liberals and progressives could see, firsthand, that they are not alone, that there are large numbers of people who look at the world as they do.*

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Abba Eban, invited to speak at this session, arrived late. As he entered the room and was recognized, the entire room rose to give him a spontaneous ovation. An early supporter of and writer for *Tikkun,* Eban eloquently summarized the *Tikkun* position that he helped shape: American Jews must speak out. If the PLO is not serious about peace, Israel should expose the PLO's insincerity by entering into negotiations; if the PLO is serious about peace, Israel would be making a tragic mistake by missing this historic opportunity.

• At the banquet celebration Monday evening *Tikkun* honored Irving Howe, Grace Paley, and Alfred Kazin for their contributions to keeping alive the spirit of opposition in the dark days, when so many Jewish intellectuals either moved to the right or turned toward narrowly academic pursuits. Many people were deeply moved by their speeches (which will be printed in the May/June issue of *Tikkun*).

• The discussion at the session on Black-Jewish relations managed, in many people's opinion, to break through

much of the defensiveness that has characterized recent forums about this issue.

• At the closing plenary, proponents of a petition circulating at the conference—one that called for Israel to negotiate immediately with the PLO—introduced a motion for the petition to be adopted by the people present. The first issue discussed was whether it was appropriate to have a motion introduced and voted on, given that people had not been prepared for such a vote and that many of the participants had already left. On the other hand, there was some concern that the national press might not realize that the overwhelming majority of conference participants supported the call for immediate negotiations unless there were a formal vote. The motion to have such a vote won by a more than two-to-one-margin. Yet the proponents of the motion, realizing that close to one-third of the participants would feel offended by the vote, then successfully moved to table their own motion out of respect for the minority. Although the motion most likely would have passed overwhelmingly, there was a sense of gratitude and even elation at the political maturity that the conference attendants showed by not pressing for making a statement, when doing so might have disrupted the harmony and good feelings that pervaded the entire gathering. The conference ended with songs of unity and peace.

The role of *Tikkun* in stimulating the development of a multifaceted, nonsectarian progressive Jewish renewal movement puts us in a strange situation. We craft a magazine and a conference in which our own editorial stance is a minority position. Although it would certainly be possible to have more intellectual consistency, both within the magazine and within our public events, by inviting only those people whom we know agree with us, we don't want that kind of magazine or that kind of movement.

So, for example, it was no mistake that in picking honorees for the Monday evening banquet celebration we did not choose anyone who is a member of our board or anyone who shares our editorial stance. We, of course, have a great deal of respect for our three honorees, and for all the people we invited to speak at our conference. But respect is different from agreement. One of our most important tasks is to create a magazine and a movement in which disagreements can be vigorously and respectfully pursued. In some parts of the American cultural melting pot, disagreements are a source of tension and anxiety, something to be worriedly buried. But for those of us rooted in the Jewish tradition, disagreements are the lifeblood and energy that stimulate intellectual vitality and depth.

Building a nonsectarian Jewish renewal movement requires that kind of openness—even when we have to pay the price of finding that others attribute editorial views to *Tikkun* that are solely the views of people whose articles we have printed or people whom we have invited to speak at our public events.

It's impossible to summarize *Tikkun*'s editorial views here without making them sound simplistic. But many people who are learning about *Tikkun* for the first time will be surprised to know that while we support the major liberal and progressive causes (such as the struggles against sexism, racism, national chauvinism, poverty, apartheid, nuclear weapons, and intervention in Latin America), we are quite critical of the way many liberals and progressives think about the world. We have found in the liberal camp a willingness to dismiss all those people who are attracted to the right—rather than an interest in discovering what possible legitimate psychological, spiritual, or ethical needs are being addressed more effectively by the right than the left. This criticism leads us to ask how these needs can be addressed by liberals and the left without accepting the reactionary solutions that the right develops to address these same needs.

*Tikkun* has maintained that current societal arrangements weaken our spiritual and ethical sensitivities, provide substitute gratifications for the deeper sense of human connectedness that they simultaneously elicit and frustrate, and encourage the development of a psychology of self-blame that leads many people to ignore the ways in which the larger social context has shaped their options. We have argued that developing compassion—for oneself, one's parents, one's cultural or ethnic community, and for the many people whom we encounter in our lives—is the indispensable ingredient in building a healthier society. Yet we are far from those who encourage a victim mentality or those who believe that salvation lies in the intervention of an all-powerful state that will rectify all wrongs. The "system" is not something external to all of us—but rather it is constantly being recreated by the choices that we each make. The process of empowerment through compassion is aimed at encouraging people to overcome a depressive passivity toward a world that frustrates their fundamental human needs—and to actively engage in a process of self and world transformation. This is hardly a plea for welfare-state passivity, Marxist determinism, or narcissistic absorption in psychological reductionism.

In addition, we understand and validate the anger many American Jews feel toward what they perceive to be a sexist, heterosexist, materialist, conformist, and repressive organized Jewish community. But we believe there are intellectual and spiritual riches in the Jewish tradition that have not been adequately understood or explored—and we encourage our *Tikkun* community

to familiarize itself with these riches. We think it is historical reductionism of the worst sort to reduce the Jewish renewal movement to New Age fundamentalism or to see it as a retreat from progressive politics.

*Tikkun* has been instrumental in giving voice to a silenced Jewish majority that shares our belief that the current Israeli policies toward the Palestinians are immoral, a violation of the best of Jewish tradition, and self-destructive. At the same time we do *not* see Israel as the sole cause of the present mess or the sole obstacle to peace. Moreover, we reject the double standard used by some outsiders and parts of the secular left in judging Israel—and we constantly argue against those Jews who have discovered their Jewishness solely for the purpose of criticizing Israel, but who otherwise wish to have no personal involvement with the Jewish people or its spiritual heritage. So we have an approach to the world that is as far from knee-jerk leftism as it is from the intellectual vacuity of the organized Jewish world or the reactionary politics of the far right.

* * *

What's next?

1. We've formed the Committee for Judaism and Social Justice (CJSJ) to act as the educational outreach arm of *Tikkun*. We hope you will support its attempts to get an alternative voice for the American Jewish world out to the public and to the media.

2. The Alternative Jewish Leadership. That's who our readers and conference attendees are—the alternative leadership of the Jewish world, a leadership based on intellectual seriousness and a moral and political commitment to the best ideals of the Jewish people (*not* on the ability to raise money or to toe the line set by the Jewish bureaucrats). To solidify ourselves, we are asking you to invite a small group of friends or colleagues to meet together once every two weeks or once a month for the purpose of discussing Jewish issues. We hope you will use *Tikkun* articles and editorials as the basis of this discussion, but you might also choose to read books together, discuss the current realities in Israel, plan social action, or study Jewish history and philosophy. A network of such discussion groups, connected through *Tikkun,* will deepen the Jewish foundations of this emerging alternative Jewish leadership. *Tikkun* is available to assist you in this process.

3. We hope to have a one-week encampment in the summer of 1990—an opportunity to delve more deeply into the issues raised at the conference. Living together for a week, studying texts and exploring ideas, we hope to deepen the ties of people in the *Tikkun* community. Any help would be appreciated in finding a facility that would accommodate several hundred people, serve vegetarian food, and not cost too much.

4. We hope to have another conference, although its exact time and focus will be shaped by developments in Israel and America. Don't wait for the next conference to get involved—start a local *Tikkun* discussion group in the meantime.

* * *

In the following pages, and in the May/June issue, we are reprinting some of the papers from the conference. Unfortunately, the amount of material we can include is limited by space constraints. The papers selected for reprint are not necessarily the most significant talks at the event, but they are among those we thought would be of the greatest interest to our readers. In addition, an expanded version of Peter Gabel's speech appears in the main body of this issue. □

## Opening Plenary Address

# Claiming Our Rightful Role

*Nan Fink*

When we started *Tikkun* magazine two and a half years ago, there were two major issues we sought to address. These two issues have been discussed a great deal in the magazine and both of them are major foci for this conference. The first is the question of how to revitalize the liberal and progressive forces in this country. And the second is how to deal with the apparent domination of the Jewish world by conservative voices.

Let's start with the first issue: In 1986 we were concerned about how demoralized and ineffective the liberal and progressive forces had become. Not only was the left a pale representation of what it was in other times, but it seemed to be isolated from many of the people it

*Nan Fink is the publisher of* Tikkun.

should have included within its ranks. I myself saw this in my work with unemployed workers in the Midwest in the first half of the 1980s. I came in contact with many people who were extremely discouraged by what was happening during the Reagan era and whose lives were profoundly affected by the cuts in social services. Yet, dissatisfied as they were, they didn't have a sense that an alternative existed. They wished there were one, but the one that existed seemed far away from them, without life, not welcoming to them.

The second major focus of *Tikkun* was to counter the impression that the Jewish world is simply as it is represented in the media—dominated by conservatives and people who are blindly loyal to the State of Israel. We were concerned about this because we knew that these voices were not representative of much of the Jewish world. We knew that most Jews in America remained committed to the liberal values that had led them to identify with the progressive struggles of the twentieth century. Polls have consistently shown this to be so. And yet the public perception was that American Jews, satiated by the good life, were moving to the right.

Part of the problem was that the media turned to the leaders of the organized Jewish community, and their more conservative voices were the ones that were being heard. And part of the problem was that the rest of us weren't speaking out loudly enough. We knew we needed to develop an alternative voice, one that presented a progressive vision rooted in Judaism.

We were well aware that many Jews who were interested in the first set of issues, about how to build a more effective liberal and left politics in America, would not necessarily be interested in the second set of issues. The idea of mixing the two would possibly turn off some people who had absorbed the left's antireligious attitude. However, we wanted to offer a challenge both to a left that is usually comfortable only with people with whom it agrees and to a Jewish world that has often been stifling in its repression of dissent.

So we created *Tikkun* as "the liberal alternative to *Commentary* magazine and the voices of Jewish conservatism." We picked *Commentary* because, although it was originally reflective of the liberal Jewish intelligentsia, it had become a leading voice of right-wing sentiment. By creating *Tikkun* we wanted to help the larger world see that a liberal and progressive voice was reemerging among American Jews. Part of the task of *Tikkun,* as we saw it, was to help reconstitute the liberal and progressive tradition of American Jewish intellectuals. We've been working on that, with the help of so many of you. This conference aims to highlight and celebrate the degree to which that tradition is in fact being reconstituted, not only through *Tikkun,* but through the work of dozens of Jewish progressive organizations like the Shalom Center, the Jewish Fund for Justice, the New Israel Fund, New Jewish Agenda, American Friends of Peace Now, the P'nai Or Jewish renewal movement, the Havurah movement, the dozens of feminist and lesbian and gay projects around the country, and through magazines like *Agada* and *Lilith* and *Sh'ma.* It is also being done through the work of so many of you who are here today in your universities, your studios, and your offices.

As you probably noticed, we heavily advertised this conference. The point of all of that wasn't to get people to come to the conference (although we certainly wanted it to be well attended). But, rather, it was to say to the world at large: Look, there is this reemerging American Jewish intellectual presence. Take account! And so we advertised the conference with a text explaining that there is a fine and rich heritage of American Jewish progressive intellectuals in this country and that this world is being reconstituted.

This conference is not meant to be a political convention aimed at creating an umbrella organization for all this activity. Rather, it is a chance to explore some of the intellectual issues that have emerged in this work, issues that will not be solved here, but issues which engage many of us. In so doing, we hope to constitute a community of intellectuals whose ongoing thinking, along with that of others, will provide the much-needed leadership for the vitalization of the left in America and the renewal of the progressive/liberal tradition in the Jewish world.

Now this is a complicated task. In the earlier decades of this century, American Jewish intellectual life was shaped largely by liberal and progressive Jewish intellectuals. Drawing on their experience as a minority, they created a rich public discourse, a literature, and approaches to politics that became central to the larger intellectual and cultural life of America. The questions they asked themselves often became the central questions that dominated the intellectual and cultural life of the larger society decades later, as the participants in these earlier discussions became central figures in the universities, the publishing field, media, and literary life.

Looking back thirty, forty, or fifty years, we may tend to exaggerate the degree of unity among the people in the liberal and left Jewish communities. There was little unity. The community of liberal and progressive Jewish intellectuals was extremely contentious. This had (and has) a good side and a bad side. The good side is that such a community of dialogue and debate can be alive in a way that is rarely found in other parts of the society. I personally love the vitality that healthy and respectful debate can produce. But to make that happen, we need to make debate respectful. I was part of the

movement of the sixties, and I was very aware that sometimes intense debate can devolve into personal attacks that make everyone feel unsafe. There will be a great tendency for that to happen here as well—particularly when we are trying to build an arena that is so big that it can include liberal Jews and people with much more traditionally radical perspectives. If this conference is successful, you will meet people here with whom you strongly disagree on many important issues. The only way we can build such a community is if people exercise self-restraint and do not start baiting others for not being enough of something, whatever that something is. We want intense debate of positions, but we want to make it safe for people who hold those different positions to say so and argue them, rather than to feel put down and defensive. A community that drives people away will soon create a stifling inner dynamic that is oppressive even to people who share its official politics or worldview.

To a certain extent this dynamic happened in the earlier part of this century within the American Jewish progressive community. Some of the debate was too intense, too disrespectful, and that caused problems. But that wasn't the main reason why the liberal/progressive tendency of Jewish intellectuals was eventually supplanted by a swing to the right. To understand that development I believe we have to look at two different phenomena.

First, we have to acknowledge that as Jews became more assimilated into the larger American society, the ethos and norms of that society became increasingly powerful even amongst American Jewish intellectuals. In the forties and the fifties the emergence of a strong crusade against anyone connected with liberal and progressive ideas, a crusade parading as anticommunism but in fact embodying an attack on every shade of liberal ideas and ideals, became a dominant force in American society. To some extent this anti-Communist crusade was helped along by the problems of the Communist party—by its members' blind loyalty to Stalin at the point when his gulags and mass destruction of human life quite legitimately alienated anyone who cared about basic human values. But the anti-Communist crusade was much more than that. It was a wild assault on all the forces that sought to restructure American society away from the dominance of corporate profit and toward the goal of serving human needs. It was all the more frantic because this other way of looking at reality had become popular in the 1930s, in part because the liberal and progressive forces had shown people how to have compassion for themselves and their own situation.

Jews, however, were a disproportionate part of the liberal and progressive forces, and so Jews were the particular victims of the anti-Communist crusade. While many resisted, it became increasingly easy for others to



join that crusade, or at least to lie low, get away from liberal or left politics, and make compromises with the established order.

There was another force working for this compromise as well. The great limitation of the left in the thirties was that it focused almost exclusively on the economic crisis facing American society. At points it seemed to be saying that capitalism couldn't fix the economic crisis. So, after World War II, when American imperialism began to function effectively to bring home the wealth of the rest of the world and make the American economy function better, most Americans felt that the left was discredited by the actual material success of American society. Many Jews, feeling great appreciation for the role the U.S. played in fighting fascism, joined the great celebration of America. They were increasingly uncritical—all too forgetful of the disgraceful role America played in shutting its doors to the millions of Jews who could find no place for escape from the Nazis. Of course, there had always been a part of the Jewish community that joined the American celebration and that found the community of liberal and progressive Jewish intellectuals distasteful. But now these people were increasingly being joined by Jewish intellectuals who could appreciate what America had offered the Jews. And let's not minimize that. One fact that we too must acknowledge, with real gratitude, is that America has been a society that has provided

unprecedented freedom and security and tolerance for the Jews.

The problem is, however, that appreciation doesn't mean that we can't also be critical. But many Jewish intellectuals were finding that hard to do, and some were undoubtedly attracted by the possibility of success for themselves that was being offered to those who abandoned the liberal and progressive causes of the past. Norman Podhoretz's vulgar autobiography is appropriately called *Making It*—and "making it" was precisely what many American Jews wanted to do. Ironically, this in part led them to abandon their religious heritage as well, because anything that made them stand out and be different was a potential impediment to "making it" in American society. The most assimilated people fit in best with America's ruling elite.

*The left has forced Jews to choose between their own particular interests and the "correct line" universalist concerns—but it has never forced any other ethnic minority to make that choice.*

I think, however, that it would be a terrible mistake to attribute the decline of the liberal and progressive tradition of American Jewish intellectuals solely to anti-communism or material self-interest. The fact that must also be faced is that the left was itself responsible—because the left was wildly insensitive to Jewish issues and Jewish needs. The left has never fully faced the implications of the Holocaust and the failure of many left parties in Europe to help or protect the Jews. The left has never fully faced the incredible anti-Semitism that existed within the Communist party, often thinly veiled as anti-Trotskyism or anti-Zionism. The left has never faced the degree to which it tolerates anti-Semitism within its own ranks. The left has managed to be "unaware" of Soviet anti-Semitism. The left has tended to use different criteria to judge Jews and non-Jews; it has failed to support the legitimate national liberation struggle of the Jewish people, and it has never understood the specific kind of oppression that Jews face, though it is sensitive to everyone else's oppression. The left has forced Jews to choose between their own particular interests and the "correct line" universalist concerns—but it has never forced any other ethnic minority to make that choice. So it is no wonder that many intellectuals recoiled from that insensitivity and were less attracted to remaining part of the left, particularly given the other reasons described above for moving away from left politics.

But the decline of a Jewish intellectual community that followed has been very destructive. Jewish life, devoid of its left-wing critics and intellectuals, became increasingly one-dimensional. The bureaucrats, the yes-sayers, and the conformists began to dominate Jewish organizations, toeing the line for the big-money givers who sat on the relevant boards of directors. Materialism, anti-intellectualism, and an insensitivity to spiritual life drove many young people away from a Jewish community that was increasingly part of the American mainstream. People left the Jewish world not because it was too different from the rest of America, but because it was too much like it.

It was inevitable that a new generation would find this kind of community stifling and boring. As a result, many younger Jews have not affiliated, and many who do affiliate do so for social reasons. Often these people have little respect for the intellectual or spiritual life of these Jewish communities and do not feel represented by the conservative Jewish leaders whom the media always turn to.

No wonder, then, that there are so many of us here today. We are claiming our rightful role as the inheritors of the American Jewish progressive tradition. We are creating an alternative reality, a reality to which I think many younger Jews will ultimately be more connected than to the official, conservative, "organized Jewish community."

It is this new reality, this new Jewish world that is now emerging, that has come to find expression in *Tikkun* and that is being celebrated here at this conference.

This community is extremely diverse. For example, there are many people here who have no interest in religion whatsoever. But there are also many here who feel moved by the Jewish tradition. In earlier decades, when the liberal world was itself just breaking away from the constraints of ghetto life, people were too angry about religious oppression to be tolerant of those who thought there was much value in religion. Today, the dialogue between these alternative ways of looking at reality can take place within our community. Similarly, there are vast differences here between those who see American society as fundamentally sound but in need of important repair work and those who think that revolutionary change is necessary. We should not paper over differences—but we should understand that we need to create a community that allows for these differences, allows for debate, and does so in a spirit of tolerance.

I am proud to be part of this community. This is a very talented and exciting group of people. We have important questions to face here at this conference, and important work to do in the future. □

OPENING PLENARY KEYNOTE ADDRESS

# A Worldview for Jewish Progressives

*Michael Lerner*

The incredible excitement generated by the *Tikkun* conference, matching the incredible growth of *Tikkun,* which in its two and a half years has become one of the biggest-circulation intellectual magazines in the U.S., is only the tip of the iceberg of a political development of considerable importance: the reemergence of the liberal and progressive voice of American Jewry. Many of us know, of course, that most American Jews never moved as far to the right as the rest of the American population. Although the neoconservatives in the Jewish world used the 38 percent Jewish vote for Reagan in 1980 as an indicator that these newly conservative intellectuals were the vanguard of a conservative trend that would become stronger as the Reagan revolution grew, by 1984 that Jewish vote for Reagan had declined to 34 percent—just the opposite of their predictions. And in 1988, some of the exit polls indicated that the percentage of Jews voting Republican had dropped to 29 percent. While others were moving to the right, the mass of Jews was not following the trend.

If this is true, why do we have the impression that the Jewish world is so conservative? Here we must insist that anyone who makes this kind of a claim sharply distinguish between the organized Jewish world and the mass of American Jews. The organized Jewish world is not run democratically. Its institutions are controlled largely by the people who donate the most money. There is no mechanism for you or for me to select those leaders whom the media regularly quote as speaking for the Jewish world. And these leaders, and the 29 percent of Jews who voted for Bush and who are disproportionately represented in these institutions, have created an organized Jewish community that stifles debate, deadens intellectual and spiritual creativity, and ultimately drives away the vast majority of American Jews—who have nothing to do with these institutions.

So, for example, when Prime Minister Shamir came to the U.S. in March to reject Secretary of State Shultz's proposal for an international conference based on the principle of land for peace, the press both in the U.S. and in Israel reported that "the American Jewish community" gave him the support he was seeking. Those few voices that spoke up against Shamir, and *Tikkun* was one of them, were told that they were "not in the mainstream." Yet only a few weeks later a poll released by the *Los Angeles Times* showed that 60 percent of American Jewry supported the Shultz initiative. So, yes, the organized Jewish world has moved to the right, and this is reflected in the style and internal politics of "the organized Jewish community"; but *no,* the majority of American Jews have not followed them.

We here today are vital proof that a new generation of Jews has come to maturity in America, Jews who are proud to be Jews, unafraid to claim our Jewish identity, yet equally unwilling to allow the conservative Jewish leadership to cow us into submission with policies or attitudes that are destructive. We at *Tikkun* have argued that Israeli policy is destructive to the self-interest of the Jewish people. But we also have said, and say again today, that the occupation of one and a half million Palestinians by the Israeli army is not only irrational and destructive, it is immoral and must be terminated. We support the creation of a Palestinian state because we believe that Palestinians have the same right to national self-determination that the Zionists rightly won for the Jewish people. And we speak here directly from our commitment to the best elements in the Jewish tradition. Many of the commentators in Rabbinic literature make a special point of the fact that God created all human beings from one human being—to show that we are all brothers and sisters, that the breath of God flows through us all, that we are, every one of us, made in God's image. It is precisely this Jewish sensibility that makes us outraged at the anti-Arab stereotypes and racism that have swept this society and Israeli society.

It's no excuse for us that a similar racism dominates many Arab societies—and that there is an unmistakable anti-Semitic content to much of the anti-Israel and anti-Zionist literature and propaganda produced in Arab countries. Of course we deplore that as well—just as we deplore the incredible brutality that Arab states use towards their own minorities, most recently the Iraqi use of poison gas; just as we also deplore the double standards which lead too much of the left to be supermobilized in struggle against Israel's unjustified killing of close to three hundred people during the course of one year of the *intifada,* but

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remarkably uninvolved in critiquing the murders of thousands of Kurds by the Iraqis, remarkably silent at the murder of so many Afghans by the Soviets, remarkably silent at the murder of over 500,000 people in the Iran-Iraq war, remarkably silent at the suppression of Sikhs by the Hindu majority in India, and the list could go on. But we get no comfort from those double standards: the Jewish people must judge itself by its own morality and its own tradition, and by that standard we reject Israel's occupation of one and a half million people, and we say that it is immoral and a disgrace to our tradition. It is a disgrace because the point of Jewish survival is to be a witness to the possibility of another logic in the world besides the logic of force and violence: a witness to the possibility of a world of justice and kindness.

We reject all the various stalling techniques of the Israeli government and of its U.S. backers. This is the time to sit down and negotiate, directly, with the Palestinians. You don't make peace with your friends; you make peace with your enemies. And that means sitting down with the PLO and trying to work out plans for a demilitarized Palestinian state that provides both for Israeli security and for the rights of Palestinians. In light of the unmistakable moves forward by the PLO, dramatized by Arafat's statements to the United Nations last week, it is time for Israel to negotiate directly with the PLO. And it's time for us, American Jews, to give the message clearly to our legislators and to the media: those who speak in our name and claim that we are not ready for this move are not speaking for us—there are many American Jews, not just a few, who are ready to talk to the PLO. We have no illusions about the PLO—but it is time to sit down and negotiate with them and work out a peaceful solution. The attempt to bar them from the United States and to not allow their leaders to speak is pure foolishness. It's time to let them speak and for us to speak back.

Similarly, the liberal and progressive Jews assembled here today are proud to claim our support for the important liberal and progressive struggles—for social justice and an end to economic and political inequality, for the women's movement and the struggle against sexism, for the struggle against apartheid and against oppression of Blacks and other Third World minorities within the United States, for disarmament and an end to the cold war, for the gay and lesbian movements and the struggle against heterosexism, for the transformation of our society from one based on corporate profit to one based on human needs, for an end to world hunger and homelessness, for health care and child care and humane programs of support for the aged, for the struggle to adequately fund AIDS research and to redirect the financial resources of the Western world so that they can be used to rectify the imbalances between our wealth and the poverty that we have helped to cause and that we help to sustain in the Third World.

But all of this could have been said by many of us decades ago. What is different today is that we are speaking today as Jews, rooted in the rich tradition and legacy of the Jewish people, and unwilling to cede that legacy to the conservatives who have appropriated it to their own, often quite nefarious, ends.

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*The greatness of Abraham is his ability to break the repetition compulsion, to say no to the voice of cruelty masking as the voice of God, and to hear a God that does not want the cruelty to be passed on.*

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We cannot, of course, pretend that the Jewish tradition is unambiguously on our side. Just as liberalism has been used to justify Western arrogance and imperialism, just as the socialist tradition has within it a history of sexism and anti-Semitism and Stalinist distortions, so too the Jewish tradition has been a place where some with very opposing values to our own have found a home. In its thirty-five hundred years the Jewish tradition has been a source of inspiration for those who would struggle against oppression—but it has, like every other human endeavor under the face of the sun, also been shaped by limited human beings who exhibited some degree of transcendence and some amount of historically conditioned distortions and pain. Just as Stalinists were able to quote the morally inspired visions of nineteenth-century Marxists and socialists to justify brutal repression, so today we can only be sickened by the sight of so many religious rightists quoting Torah to justify their unethical occupation of the West Bank.

Yet, I believe that if we look deeply at our tradition we will see that it is not just happenstance that Jews remain committed to liberal and progressive causes, but rather that this commitment reflects the major, though not the only, tendency within Judaism. Ours is not just a story of an abstract set of ideas, but of a people, with all our flaws and inadequacies. The greatness of Torah is that it tells the story of a people that is trying to overcome the legacy of cruelty imposed upon it by the external systems of domination. But rather than create mythical heroes, it presents people as being deeply flawed, with moments of transcendence but also moments of weakness and inadequacy.

For example, the biblical Abraham is raised in a society whose oppressive class structure is reflected in

deep cruelty toward children, manifested most directly in the widespread practice of child sacrifice. Abraham hears a voice that tells him to reject this society, to move on to another land, to start over again. He is the prototypical rebel, the man who will not accept his surroundings and who wants to build something new. Yet, though he can leave the land of Babel, Babel doesn't leave him. Over and over again the Torah story disapprovingly exposes how his sexist treatment of Sarah, while it pays off in crass material terms, subjects him to the ridicule and outrage of those around him. This is a man who is capable of genuine transcendence, which allows him to confront God and demand that He be subjected to a universal standard of justice when He contemplates destroying Sodom. But in the end this is also a man who still hears the internalized pain of his childhood speaking as though it were the voice of God, demanding that he take his only son Isaac and sacrifice him, thus passing on to him the cruelty that he himself had experienced.

The greatness of Abraham is his ability, by the end of the story, to break the repetition compulsion, to say "no" to the voice of cruelty masking as the voice of God, and to hear a God that does not want the cruelty to be passed on. This is the central theme of transcendence, the revolutionary message of Judaism: that the world is not the way it needs to be, that things can be different, that the world of oppression is not inevitable, that it can be transcended. Not by angels or perfect creatures—but by flawed human beings who can take giant steps, though they remain flawed and imperfect.

The central event in Jewish history, however, is not that of a lone individual hero struggling with his or her situation, but the revolutionary struggle of an entire people as it breaks out of slavery. Throughout history, ruling classes have done their best to convince those they oppress that the oppression is natural and inevitable. Yet the Exodus story, which became the central story of the Jewish people, one around which most of the Jewish holidays are based, one that is celebrated not just on Passover but every week as the central point of Shabbat (the Sabbath), loudly proclaims to the world that the little people, the slaves, can overthrow the biggest and most sophisticated systems of exploitation and oppression. Is it any wonder that throughout history ruling classes have felt the need to stir up their subjects against the Jews—fearful that the Jewish message, read each week in Torah, would stir the subjugated of the world to rebellion?

There have been many other religious systems that spoke to the fundamental human need to recognize and celebrate the grandeur of the universe. The universal need to recognize in the universe a spiritual power greater than ourselves, and to stand in awe and wonder at the magnificence of the world, has been satisfied in many religious systems. What was unique about Judaism was that it insisted that human beings had a special obligation of *tikkun olam*—to heal, repair, and transform the world—and that that obligation was rooted in a real possibility of achieving that radical end. Unlike all the various systems of necessity and inevitability that have as their covert message the idea that human action is irrelevant or totally shaped by external causes, Judaism proclaims that the fundamental principle of the universe is freedom and choice. When Moses asks God for a name by which God can be known to the Israelite slaves, something concrete that a slave people can grab onto, God's response is this: *Ehyeh Asher Ehyeh,* I shall be who I shall be. That is, my essence is the principle of freedom. The universe has been created and is governed by a force whose primary characteristic is its ability to allow for choice and transformation.

This is the radical message of Judaism, and it is in this tradition that we, the reclaimers of Judaism from the hands of contemporary conservatives and neocons, are the legitimate inheritors and preservers of the essence of Judaism. I have heard some people say, "Some of those liberals who are speaking out today are only interested in their Jewishness in order to criticize Israel. Other than that they have no interest." It's true that there are some opportunists who are still working out childhood rebellion when they speak out. But let me say a word in favor of childhood rebellion—the children are often quite right, and their rebellion, though sometimes not rationally directed, is usually based on a legitimate sense that something really is wrong. I do not support the response that says "dump Judaism," but I do acknowledge the legitimacy of those people's pain, and I say to the Jewish world: if you can't hold your own children within your community, look to yourselves and the inadequacies of the community you have built, rather than looking solely to the alleged pathology of those who have rejected the kind of Judaism you have handed them. Nevertheless, I believe that the rejection of Judaism is unwarranted, because the kind of Judaism that has been handed to us is not the only, or the most legitimate, part of the tradition. In fact, as I have just argued, in its essence Judaism is the metaphysics of revolutionary transformation and healing.

There is no message that is repeated more often in the Torah than variants of this one: "When you come into your land, do not oppress the stranger. Remember that you were strangers in the land of Egypt." Here, again, is the message of hope: we can break the chains of necessity. We who have learned the theories of human psychology know the tremendous power that the past has to shape the future. The normal path is for the pain

of childhood to distort our adult lives so that we unconsciously pass on to the next generation the very pain that was delivered to us. The message of Torah is simply this: for you who break out of slavery, we recognize that there will be this tendency to try to be like everyone else, to simply recreate the oppression of Egypt when you get to the Promised Land. But don't do it! You don't have to do it. The God of the universe is the God of possibility and transcendence and freedom.

This is an incredibly weighty and scary message because it gives human beings, created in the image of this God of freedom, the freedom and responsibility to recreate the world and to end the history of pain and oppression. But the scars from the past are real; they do have weight, and they do keep us from living up to our possibilities. So at the very moment when Moses is up at Sinai, the children of Israel are already recreating Egypt, dancing around the golden calf. And so God is faced with the reality that there cannot be one leap of total transformation, that there will have to be compromise with reality, that people can only go so far in a given generation. With this sense of compassion, a religion evolves that compromises with the actual mentality of the people. So God says to Moses, in preparation for the revelation, "They should prepare themselves for the third day, and stay far from the mountain." But when Moses repeats the message, he says, "Prepare for the third day, go not near a woman, and stay far from the mountain." The sexism of that society is now being heard as part of the divine message.

What we are stuck with, then, is the ambiguity of a reality which contains elements of hopefulness and transcendence, on the one hand, and elements of pain and hurtfulness, on the other. Those who think that all this can be magically escaped, that the history and complex inheritance can be thrown off, will only recreate the same tendencies in their world. I remember that many of us thought we could totally escape the legacy of the past with one searing revolutionary jump in the 1960s. Instead, we created a social movement in which all of the inherited cruelty and pain was now dubbed revolutionary virtue—and we clubbed each other almost into unconsciousness as we discovered in each other that we could not be the embodiments in the present of the society we hoped for in the future. What we needed, instead, was to learn a little *rakhmones*—a bit of compassion for ourselves and our inadequacies. But this compassion is always impossible unless we start with compassion for our parents, our family, our tribe, our people. Yes, they and we are flawed—but yes, also, they have a basis for real transcendence. If we can accept the imperfections (I don't mean accept them by adopting them and passing them on—I don't want to compromise with the sexism and the chauvinism and the other forms of distortions), then we can accept that this tradition is as good a basis as one can have from which to build a history and a community.

Yet, looking back, I can understand why the strengths in our tradition were not sufficient to hold people in, once the Enlightenment and the emancipation from the ghettos opened other options. In part, the spirit of modernism was the spirit of Judaism itself. If the revolutionary aspects of Judaism's hopefulness had been submerged through much of our experience in the Diaspora, it was largely because our relative powerlessness made it seem pointless to insist on our larger picture of world transformation. In fact, to the extent that we held onto that vision, embodied in Shabbat and holidays, we were anathema to the ruling classes of the world. So how far could we really push it? Yet, is it any surprise that Jews should find themselves so simpatico with the spirit of the Enlightenment, with the wave of hopefulness that spread over the world in the past few hundred years, with the view that things could be radically remade, that nothing was sacred, that everything was open to question, debate, and, ultimately, transformation. Modernism was Judaism secularized—no wonder so many Jews felt themselves quite at home.

But there was another reason why Jews would buy so quickly into an Enlightenment that entailed abandoning their unique culture and perspective. Staying Jewish had meant remaining subject to incredible physical persecution. Even before the Holocaust, Jews rushing from the ghettos and into secular identities were rushing from a Judaism that had itself become stunted and frozen, out of fear, as the level of persecution against Jews dramatically rose with the rise of capitalism. Starting with the 1648 massacres in Poland and including the next three hundred years, things had never been worse, never been more precarious. The Judaism that was being rejected was a Judaism that had become a religion closely associated with fear and tears—not because of something intrinsic to the religion, but because of what was being done to us by external oppressors. The joyful elements that the contemporary movements for Jewish renewal are reclaiming were there in Judaism—but it is our relative safety and security that make it possible for us to reclaim this part of the tradition.

The rejection of Judaism and the philosophies of modernism have their limits too, and we are seeing them most clearly in contemporary America. The struggle of the rising bourgeoisie against the feudal aristocracy brought new philosophical systems that would be useful clubs against the old order. Yet this struggle also caused new problems, two in particular. The first was the rejection of the spiritual realm and the introduction of a narrow conception of reality, embodied

in bourgeois science, that sees as real only those aspects of the world that are measurable, quantifiable, publicly observable, repeatable. Ultimately, this led to a conception of human beings as being motivated only by narrow material needs. Although some form of this thinking dominates much of Western thought, it is particularly distorting for us in the liberal and progressive social change movements. Even today we find these movements often insisting that the only thing that can motivate people is a narrow conception of their economic or political interests—where political interests like national self-determination or freedom from sexual or racial oppression are reduced to "equal opportunity" to pursue one's own economic interests. Even when this approach is broadened to include other bodily pleasures, the model of human beings as accumulators of pleasures to fill unmet physical needs seems narrow and ahistorical.

The second distortion was the creation of the isolated individual as the fundamental "given" of reality—and relationships were seen as being established by some imagined contract between these isolated monads. Such a view of reality provided the needed support for the rising bourgeoisie. They could proceed to imagine a neutral arena, the capitalist marketplace, in which people freely entered into various arrangements to meet their needs. If the resulting outcome was that some people ended up with more capital and more power, that was because they had been smarter, more energetic, or had more to contribute. Those who lost out deserved to lose out. This philosophy of meritocracy, the notion that class inequalities were justified by merit, was based on the primacy of the individual and gave the highest value to the rights of individuals to pursue their own goals and needs—the self-evident truth of capitalist society. If there were any problems, and liberal reformers admitted there were, the problems came from inequalities. The real goal of reform was simply to make sure that everybody had equal opportunity to compete fairly in the marketplace. Conversely, if you were not quite fit to compete in the marketplace, you might need special help—perhaps some therapy or other form of rehabilitation. But if you could make yourself into the right kind of human being, the right kind of competitor, you would flourish in this system.

Though liberal and left movements challenged many aspects of contemporary capitalism, they nevertheless brought into focus two fundamental aspects of the capitalist metaphysic that contribute to the psychology of self-blaming: the philosophy of materialism and the primacy of individual rights.

Thinking about the world through the framework of materialism and individual rights limits the effectiveness of liberal and progressive forces. These two foci provide, of course, a very powerful intellectual framework for fighting against the remnants of feudalism and the inequities of capitalism. Please do not misunderstand what I am about to say—because I believe that the struggle for individual rights and the rejection of the kind of spirituality that was part of the medieval feudal order was absolutely necessary, and that in many corners of this society this struggle still must be waged. A Jewish renewal movement must side with the ACLU against the George Bushes of the world, with the movements for women's equality and gay and lesbian equality, with all the struggles for rights that have been denied.

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*If we can have compassion for the inevitable ways that we will fail each other, then we have a chance.*

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And yet, that is not enough of a basis for a politics. The left gained its most important mass foothold in the U.S. in the 1930s when it fought for the material interests of the majority. Yet I believe that what was fundamental to its success was not the economic miracles of the New Deal—these miracles were more a product of World War II and American imperialism after the war—but rather the way that the New Deal undermined self-blaming and generated self-compassion by allowing most people to understand that the problems they were facing were not their own fault. But when people's economic circumstances changed after the war so that fewer were experiencing their pain in primarily economic-deprivation terms, the liberal forces and the left did not move with these people to understand their new forms of oppression. Instead, we focused exclusively on those who remained economically oppressed and disenfranchised.

The time when liberals and the left were most powerful was when they transcended these narrow foci in the sixties. While establishment liberals in the Kennedy and Johnson years focused exclusively on liberal spending programs to soften the worst effects of poverty, a New Left of liberals and progressives emerged with a far deeper critique of the alienation and powerlessness characteristic of advanced industrial societies. The pain in people's lives was seen as, in part, a product of the social order in which they lived. When the women's movement emerged through consciousness-raising groups, its power came from its ability to get a whole new sector of the society to understand how women's personal pain was related to external oppressive social realities. This ability to generate self-acceptance and compassion is the key to the success of any movement.

The majority of Americans have not achieved the good life simply because they are no longer suffering material deprivation. The powerlessness at work, coupled

with self-blaming for having unfulfilling work and unfulfilling personal lives, cripples many Americans. The research with American workers that I have done at the Institute for Labor and Mental Health has convinced me that the pain in this society is very widespread—though covered over with a veneer of hail-fellow-well-met optimism. Many people feel terrible about their lives, and feel that they can't talk about that to anyone because they have no one to blame but themselves. It only makes matters worse when the liberals and the left urged Americans to be more generous and share the wonderful benefits of their lives with others who have been left out—because most Americans are not experiencing their lives as so wonderful and together. The call for "equal opportunity" seemed to convey the message that most Americans already had had *their* chance to make it—now it was time to give that chance to others. But if they already had had their time, and their lives did *not* feel so fulfilled, who could they blame but themselves? The liberal message is often heard as a message of blame: "You should be happy now—if you're not, it's your own fault. Now it's time to give others a chance." No wonder so many Americans feel misunderstood by the liberals and the left, looked down upon, disrespected, sometimes even made to feel guilty that they aren't spending all of their energies and resources on fixing up other people's lives. The most frequent comment I heard from working people explaining why they weren't involved in any kind of liberal or progressive politics was this: "Me, involved in helping others? Are you kidding? My life is such a mess; who am I to be trying to straighten out anything else?"

The right in America has been able to manipulate the pain, to talk about the crisis in families, the breakdown of ethical purpose, the absence of spirituality in our society. Ironically, if liberals and the left would talk this way, we would immediately be able to show many people that the materialism the right decries is rooted in the values of a marketplace that places money above all things. The breakdown of values is similarly connected to a marketplace whose sole aim is to accumulate wealth and power. And the pain that so many people experience in family life is not only a product of stressful work environments that frustrate our ability to actualize our human potentialities, but also a product of the narcissistic personalities that are increasingly called for in order to be successful in the economic marketplace, yet which are so destructive to loving family lives.

I believe that a successful liberal and left force would have to make a dramatic change away from its exclusive focus on individual rights and adopt a new metaphysics that envisions human beings as fundamentally part of communities. It would have to incorporate the idea that the really healthy human being is the one who is in relationship to others, not the one who has learned to stand alone. A successful social change movement must be one which articulates its goals in terms of how to create a society that makes it possible for loving commitments to stay in place—not through coercion, because in no way do I want a return to the destructive dynamics of communities based on power, patriarchy, or invalidation of individual human choice; but, rather, through free choice. I envision a movement that takes the strength of the women's movement and generalizes it to all of society—so that people in every part of the society can participate in consciousness-raising activities that help them develop a sense of compassion for themselves—a way of understanding how the frustrations and pains of their lives are rooted not in their own inadequacies, but in the alienation and mutual estrangement fostered by a competitive market society. A liberal and left movement that can talk about creating a society that promotes love and intimacy, that can talk about the crisis in friendships and the problem of loyalty, will be a movement that can win the power to make the larger changes it seeks. Such a movement, I believe, must embody a different approach to reality, one which sees human beings as fundamentally sacred, to be honored and treasured as uniquely valuable and worthy of respect. Similarly, such a movement should replace its materialist conception of the world with a conception that creates a space for standing in awe and wonder of the universe, and that talks about basic ethical truths as central to its commitments. This is not a movement that will move to the right—in fact, it will be more radical, more committed to fundamental social transformation, precisely because it puts these basic issues at the center of its agenda.

Such a movement must resist the temptation to immediately reduce everything to a new legislative program. For example, when talking about the crisis in families, there is an immediate temptation to talk about the need for child care. Of course, a progressive profamily program *must* include a demand for child care, but the crisis in families is more than a crisis in not having needed services; it is a crisis in the nature of human relationships. The crisis in values is not reducible to getting "teeth" into laws about ethics in government or getting more prosecutions of corporate crimes; it's a question of having a society that does not reward those who are screwing others, but rather rewards those who are best at supporting and cooperating with others and giving loving care and compassion. The point is that there are deeper, more fundamental human needs, and a progressive social change movement must speak in the name of the best interests of all, not just one small sector or an alliance of sectors.

Liberal politics has been dominated by the notion of building coalitions and alliances, by the kind of "quilt"

about which Jesse Jackson spoke at the Democratic National Convention in 1988, a quilt that pulls together a series of particular interests without a common vision or understanding of the world. It was no slip of the tongue when Jackson talked of the quilt he wanted to build as including both hawks and doves—without a shared vision, there is no principled ground on which to exclude either a Sam Nunn or a Louis Farrakhan. In contrast to this kind of politics, a successful progressive movement will articulate a unifying vision that speaks for the general interest and that projects a deep understanding of why we need a real *tikkun,* a fundamental transformation of the world.

There's one other thing to be learned from the Jewish tradition: the need to combat idolatry. Idolatry means taking any partial reality and making it into an absolute.

There are some obvious forms of idolatry: the worship of money or fame or power. Yet idolatry can take political forms as well. The most typical form of idolatry in centrist politics is to assume that "reality" can be defined in terms of what things are like *now*—to reject the possibility of radical transformation. But there's also a left form of idolatry that consists of focusing all attention on the struggle for social justice at the expense of other aspects of reality.

There is more to life than politics. The Jewish idea of Shabbat embodies this notion: on the one hand, the need to celebrate the struggle for social justice, embodied in the victory over the slaveholders of Egypt; on the other hand, the need both to celebrate the grandeur of the physical universe and to enjoy each other. Love, friendships, awe and amazement at the world, sex, food, play, and music—these elements that are central to the ritual of Shabbat are precisely what a progressive movement needs. Judaism has much to teach a progressive movement about how to weave together these joyous and celebratory elements into a movement for social justice. Without them, no movement can stand the test of time. These were considerations that many involved in social change in the sixties didn't think about too carefully: many of us believed that we would see revolutionary changes within our own lifetime. Today, we must realize that the task of *tikkun olam* will not be accomplished by a single generation—and the task of building a movement that can be passed on to future generations must receive high priority.

* * *

The forces that must emerge to transform the world will, of course, be much broader than a Jewish left. And yet, as I have outlined here, there are many elements within Judaism and the experience of the Jewish people from which all people could learn. A Jewish renewal movement, committed to liberal and progressive politics, can be one part of that larger social change movement. It can contribute a great deal, precisely to the extent that it is authentically rooted in its Jewishness. The Jewish people's experience as a self-proclaimed vanguard of the struggle for justice has much to teach a left that similarly must see itself as a vanguard in the struggle for social change. Jews on the left could do a lot for the social change movements if they were to learn more about their own tradition and its insights. I do not want us to hide from ourselves the ways in which the Jewish people and its traditions have been distorted by sexism, chauvinism, and every other form of ugliness that has been prominent in the societies in which the Jewish people have lived. Yet, it is precisely our ability to have compassion for the distortions in our own tradition and history, even as we transcend those distortions, that will make it possible for us to build a new society. The obstacles here, I believe, are primarily psychological: have we been able to forgive our parents, our tribe, our community, our people, for the ways in which they have failed us? If so, then we can start to build a Jewish renewal movement capable of making a substantial contribution to the healing and repairing and transforming of the world.

Let's not have any illusions, either, about what we will experience in such a movement. Count on the fact that we will disappoint each other; that in myriad ways we will be less than we ought to be; that our leaders will have strong ego needs and will not be motivated just by idealism; that our interactions will sometimes be distorted by sexism; that we will not always be gentle and caring enough toward each other; that we will make stupid mistakes and take wrong turns; that some of us will not have the courage to stand up for what we believe when it puts us in conflict with others whom we care about; that we will sometimes take the easy way out; that we will not learn all that we could about our Judaism or all that we should about the problems of the larger society; that we will be inadequate. Count on it. If we can accept all this, if we can have compassion for the inevitable ways that we will fail each other, then we have a chance of building the kind of social change movement that can teach others how to embody a similar compassion in their efforts to change the world.

A group of people who can both affirm the Jewish commitment to social justice and the commitment to compassion is a group of people ready to be the inheritors of the Jewish tradition. That tradition can no longer be ceded to the conservatives and conformists who dominate the organized Jewish community. We

must claim the Jewish tradition as ours. We are its inheritors; we are the link in the chain of the generations; we can pass on what is most positive and powerful in it; we can struggle against the inevitable legacies of cruelty and pain that are within it, even as they are within ourselves. This, I believe, is the promise of a new movement for Jewish liberation, part of the movement of all peoples for the liberation of the planet, to which we at *Tikkun* are committed. I'm proud to be amongst so many of you who share this struggle with me. □

## Opening Plenary Address

# What Rides the Wind

*Marge Piercy*

The sad thing about the left as I have experienced it has always been its penchant for infighting, for recruiting to one's own particular passion within the bounds of those already engaged progressively and lashing out with one's meanest, tightest anger against those who agree on six points out of seven. Ah, but the sin of that seventh point, it drives through the mind like a hot spike. Why?

For one thing, infighting is infinitely easier. How much more comfortable it is to quarrel cozily inside the family than to take on strangers. We are all well versed in family jousting, as opposed to taking on the world outside. It is traditionally more secure for a man to come home from the job and attack his wife or his kid than to take on his boss. We may most keenly resent those who are closest to us, so that we would rather that someone we perceive as a rival be defeated, even though in large measure we may be on the same side. American Jewish literature written by men has often presented the "hero" as a warrior battling his mother, girlfriend, wife: someone generally smaller and in this society poorer, with far fewer options for survival, income, sex partners, and position in society.

For another, it is easier intellectually, emotionally, on every level, to argue with someone who shares at least a number of your basic assumptions and some of your values. Another ongoing tendency on the left is the split into smaller and smaller, purer and purer splinters of absolute agreement. There appears to be endless satisfaction available in repeating one's own group rhetoric in public after sanctifying that rhetoric through group purgation; much more satisfaction than in actually listening to other people's points of view. In politics, as in bad marriages, the time while the other person's mouth moves is usually spent polishing your own stiletto and admiring your face in it. Purity is a requirement that should be reserved for water and air and foodstuffs, but kept out of political process. Politics is an area realistically and rightfully of mixed motives, mixed responses, mixed audiences, very different needs; the province of coalition and compromise; of selfishness, anger, pride, passion, altruism jangling together; and sometimes—sometimes—a sense of community. All the most successful political movements—the best and the worst—whether of the right or of the left, have offered a sense of transcendent motion, of shaping and riding history, of being enlarged by possibilities that people can work toward.

Jewish self-hatred cannot be neglected as a cause of this infighting, for often what we most despise in each other is some subterranean—some repressed, suppressed, or abandoned—aspect of ourselves. Self-hatred is pervasive in our society because the media as a continuous mass for the icons of consumption constantly instruct us of our individual imperfections as we fail to achieve standards of financial success, emotional richness, social acceptance and celebration, sexual gratification, physical beauty and strength, total and permanent plastic health available to just about no one. Almost everybody believes herself or himself to be a failure, and the more you move out of the elite, the more thoroughly this sense of failure characterizes ordinary life. In this society, every woman is a failure simply because she grows older, and women are blamed for aging just as they are blamed for being made of flesh.

This sense of failure, of being stymied, of being stunted or blocked, of not being good enough and not having enough of what you ought to have to show you are good enough, is sufficiently powerful to turn this country around. For the most part, the right harnesses it. Through sports metaphors—the collisions of nation-

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states and economic systems viewed as football games—and through the identification with military or economic forces as if they were individual heroes and villains engaged in a showdown at high noon on Main Street, the right constantly exploits that loose change of emotion. We are trained to identify with our country as if our nation were a macho street kid, where confrontation and honor (construed in the sense of nobody being able to whop you) showdowns, and muscle-flexing are all part of the myths paraded. Since actual war involves the slaughter mostly of civilian populations and the death of a great many children, women, old people, cats, dogs, horses, cattle, birds—the whole attendant ecology of a place—the overlay of imagery drawn from old westerns or gang fighting seems bizarre. This tendency to identify powerfully as a spectator is taught by TV (the great baby-sitter) and is polished through adolescence into adulthood, and often intensifies in old age. Many Americans report their warmest relationships to be with their television set. Many people conceive of the actors, whether they are playing heroes in adventure shows or characters in situation comedies or anchors on the highly structured bits of visual gloss we call the news, as people they know better than their best friends—as their true friends. Therefore the president becomes one more god in the box, one more participant in the TV show of the news. The right has moved the venue of confrontation from the streets to the tube. Until and unless we are able to create a liberal drama that can match and eclipse the drama of the right, with rhetoric to match, we will not win. One of the reasons that the left won hearts and minds during the sixties was because we were livelier, brighter; we had the good songs and the fascinating action. We seemed sexier. We were a brighter toothpaste.

Jews on the left have hardly been immune to the desire to be somebody else, sometimes anybody else. Few of the red-diaper babies I have met were given much of a sense of Jewish culture, and usually they had no knowledge at all of the Jewish religion. Just as the Jewish man typically offers his sexual homage to, and reserves his effervescent lust for, the blonde WASP—the much-salivated-over, much-whacked-off-on, much-vituperated figure of the shiksa—so often have Jews longed to be acceptable and accepted either in the larger society or in a smaller subgroup where the hierarchy of glamor or political correctness or lovability seldom seems to feature the Jew.

For a while the "other" was the Israeli. He—and it was usually a young male that Americans were thinking of—was not the stooped, Yiddish-speaking uncle bent over his machine in the garment trade, not a too-loud cousin running a shoe store in the Bronx, but somebody almost as good as the young John Wayne. He was lean, tanned and mean, able, rooted in the land, armed, taking no shit. He provided vicarious pride, just as sometimes it seemed that the Holocaust had provided vicarious shame.

Often in America the left has been imported along with immigrants and has frequently run a sometimes parallel sometimes tangential sometimes collision course with movements that originated here. Internationalism has always been a comfortable mode for most Diaspora Jews, as well as a fact of life for many families whose individual members survived World War II in whatever country they could manage to wriggle into, legally or illegally.

But in the recent left in the United States, the desire to find simple answers abroad that could be applied here has led to a lot of romanticism, to brutal, simple-minded dogmatism, and sometimes to outright lunacy. You take somebody else's formula, which did or sometimes even did not work in Bolivia or Albania or China, and you set out to make our violently multicolored reality fit into a two-dimensional monochrome grid.

A sense of political reality must not lead either to despair (the corporations are all-powerful Molochs, we cannot oppose what they do, we shall inevitably perish of nuclear war so why bother?) or to infatuation with whatever left regime is currently fashionable, so that all one's efforts are spent extolling Fidel or Mao or whomever. I shall always hold in my soul as an example of the purist wrongheadedness that has often characterized the American left a devout group of comrades handing out pamphlets to workers pouring out of the subway in Central Square in Cambridge a few years ago with the banner headline: FOLLOW CLOSELY THE FOOTSTEPS OF COMRADE ENVER HOXHA. Central Square is a stone working-class racially mixed neighborhood still resisting gentrification. Its residents have fought successful battles against MIT and for rent control. Here is a neighborhood with many problems, many energetic potential activists, and what is offered them? What sounds like a bad translation from the Albanian.

A lot of it is a case of what Indians call Wannabees—whites who want to be what they think Indians, or Blacks, or Nicaraguans, or Cubans, or Chinese are, or anything at all but themselves having to figure out how to conduct a life that is useful and righteous as a live American citizen. Figuring out how to change the United States often feels like such a large task that unconsciously we seek to solve the problem by simplifying reality. But beware any commitment undertaken with less than your full intelligence. Whether you are contemplating entering a relationship, a marriage, a contract, a new career; whether you are making a religious commitment or a financial one; whether you are deciding what agenda to follow

or what platform to endorse; anything that requires you to turn off some of what you know is a mistake.

Often in my life when I have been most passionately involved politically it has sometimes felt to me as if my companions always demanded that I see life simply in terms of whatever we were committed to at the time. I sometimes think of the pre-Socratic philosophers who searched for the underlying reality of matter: all things are really made of fire or water or air or flux. Similarly,

*We have to survive our own bad news in order to leave anything to our grandchildren besides bad genes, bad air, bad water, and a world hip-deep in radioactive aluminum cans and plastic tampon inserters.*

at a given time we are told all things are made of racism or sexism or Marxism according to Zilch. Every perspective, every discipline we master, every new set of ideas provides simply a grid that organizes reality so that some aspects of experience become visible as others drop out of view. When we confine ourselves to one grid, we make ourselves stupider than we can afford to be in a dangerous world that changes faster than we can focus. Trying to apply the politics of the past mechanically—whether that past is 1948, 1958, or 1968—makes us stupid also; but we have thrown away the past too many times with a great whoop of relief to believe it goes away because we ignore it.

Most of us are the grandchildren or children of immigrants who were extremely careful not to teach us Yiddish or Ladino. My family was unusual in that my mother and my grandmother were both storytellers, and thus a certain amount of family history, family and tribal myth and legend, was given to me—along with a hunger for more. But many Jews I know have been allowed to understand as little as possible. They may know only that their mother's or father's family came from Poland, or even more blandly, "from Eastern Europe." In this case, the place where the map gives out and the dragons reign is only a couple of generations back and a couple of thousand miles east of here.

In America, where official history is Disney World, our parents often considered all the received history and wisdom and stories of their families as so much peasant trash to be dumped and forgotten. Often we have lost not only the names of the villages where our ancestors lived but any knowledge of what they did for a living, what they believed, why they left and came here; often we have lost the history of labor and religious struggles they may have bled for. What we do know may seem immeasurably distant to us, quaint troubles to people whose problems may be more along the lines of paying for a private school education for their children than staying alive. But empowerment stretches into the past as well as into an imagined future striven for. We create our own lineage as we decide who we are. If you live in New York City, you may believe Jews are no longer marginal; however, this is a society where the religious right is fighting to make Christianity official.

Similarly, we are always making and unmaking the mythical future. If we cannot imagine alternate futures—new and multitudinously exciting and soothing ways to give birth, care for and socialize our young, educate each other, heal each other, marry, separate, grow old, mourn, die and be buried, communicate with fellow humans and other beings, grow food, eat, dispose of our wastes, deal with disagreements, amuse ourselves—then we shall be stuck in boredom or the types of romanticism disguised as political doctrine I was mocking just now. We shall want only more and more of a share of the same, or wish to be one of those people we imagine as more real than ourselves, whether they are Chinese or in the TV set in "Dynasty."

Imagination is powerful, whether it is working to make us envision our inner strengths and the vast energy and resources locked into ordinary people and capable of shining out in crisis, capable of breaking out into great good or great evil; or whether it is showing us utopias, dystopias, or merely societies in which some variable is changed—such as a society in which certain women act as incubators for the babies of the upper echelons. Then we can better understand ourselves by seeing what we are not, in order to better grasp what we are. It can also help us better understand what we want to move toward and what we want to prevent in the worlds our children must inhabit.

One of the ways in which Jewish self-hatred and the ongoing patrimony of the Haskala, the discovery of secular rationalism by Jews, have impoverished our responses has taken the form of a shudder of disgust at Judaism itself by many American Jewish progressives.

In all the time I have been active in the movements of the last thirty years, most of the Jews I have met were cultural Jews. Usually they were anti-Zionist, which always caused me trouble. I often disagree with particular Israeli policies, but I never, never doubt Israel's right to exist and to be a nation. I do not want to live in a world where Israel does not exist. I believe aside from the economic self-interest of Jews who feel they have made it in the *goldeneh medina* (the golden land), the drift of Jews toward the right has intensified because only the

right has a place for religion and for Israel's right to exist as any other country exists—as a mixed blessing and corrupted by power. But the need to affirm existence is not the same thing as endorsing wrongheaded, wrong-hearted policies that bash the possibility of a peaceful settlement in the Middle East into bloody rubble. The religious right in Israel is no less nutty and no less dangerous than the religious right here, and the military solutions worshiped there can kill us all as surely as our own nuclear arsenal can.

In some ways our relationship to Israel is no more realistic a political agenda than the concern of Italian Americans for what is happening in Sicily or the concern many Greek Americans felt during the years of the junta. Often, because of anti-Semitism, we, as Jews living in Detroit or Seattle, are held responsible for what members of the Israeli army do in Lebanon or on the West Bank. However, because American money is vitally important to Israel, and American politics involves covert and overt support for regimes in the Middle East, we are inevitably required to assume a position. As a Jew in the United States, you may find all or only some of your political energies consumed by Israel, but either way there is always something dangerous and loud going on that can at any moment flare into one or another disaster. Zionism is forbidden on one side of the debate, as the Palestinian homeland is on the other. No ethics or politics can sensibly endorse one and ban the other.

The left has little patience with Judaism. Most politically engaged Jews tend to be far more tolerant of the Christianity of the Catholic left, of the religiosity of the Quakers, of Buddhism, than of Judaism. As a religion, it seems to embarrass many. Many progressive people cannot see a revival of interest in Judaism or an attempt to renew it as anything other than a lapse into mental childishness. The Holocaust usually figures as a basis for comparisons to something any government is doing that is wrong, bloody, genocidal.

I find that I cannot imagine a world that contains both the Holocaust and a personal omnipotent G-d. I cannot, in times of fear of danger, pray to someone powerful to deliver me. I pray in order to align myself in tradition, in history, in my own community, in my own consciousness. I pray to clear my mind of petty greed and distractions and meanness. I pray in an attempt to abrade false consciousness. I pray to feel a unity with all beings. I pray to feel my oneness with the earth. I pray in order to cleanse and correct myself. But I cannot pray for something to happen or not to happen, not even when my life seems to, or does in fact, depend on it.

I simply cannot imagine that any petition of mine rising would have any impact on something that would not be moved by the anguish of several million pious and fervid Jews or by the cries of babies thrown living into the fire. I leave it to those more theologically gifted than myself to craft explanations, or to those athletes of faith who can believe because it is impossible. I can't.

I am nervous about people using the Holocaust freely as a basis for comparison or as a metaphor. It seems to me to go with a desire to deny the extent of the horror and the loss. But genocide is an old habit of our species, and the Holocaust is an extreme of something many societies, including our own, resort to when dealing with minorities experienced as in the way, unassimilable, dangerous in some real or invented manner, turned into devil people.

When I read accounts of the massacre of Indian tribes, like the Sand Creek Massacre where even the babies were bayonetted, I recognized the scene on a small scale that Hitler had his willing bureaucracy carry out in the millions with assembly-line efficiency. We as a species are capable of such Us/Them dichotomizing, such civilized savagery, such organized sadism. But I also believe in people's enormous ability to open up, to give, to grow, to shine and stretch and make incredible beauty in the world we inherit and often abuse. The moral and ultimate issues are pressing in on us as we write, as we think, as we act.

But we have to survive our own bad news in order to leave anything to our grandchildren besides bad genes, bad air, bad water, and a world hip-deep in radioactive aluminum cans and plastic tampon inserters. Our casual and profound sexism debilitates us culturally. We are forever thinking in dichotomies that exclude most possibilities—dangerous Us/Them constructions of a reality that is a continuum.

I recommend a vision of the good life that is based on autonomy, not on domination. Ecofeminism places the speaker and other humans roundly inside nature rather than squarely on top or outside of nature to be mastered or manipulated. It assumes that the intelligence functions, but that the other powers of the brain are also operating; and it does not assume everything is entirely knowable.

What I call feminism involves, in its essence, replacing a habitual and permeating way of dividing the world into dualities with a different way of looking at things, which is unity underlying diversity. Instead of a series of patriarchal divisions into Men and Others, Whites and Others, Humans and Others, Man and Nature, Mind (Me) and Body (It), Us (People Like Me) and Them (People Who Are Not Like Me), you look at yourself as part of a whole, as people, as nature. You find the underlying ground, intuitively in part. Unity is a nonrational experience in many of its strongest aspects, experienced rather than analyzed into being. But in

recognizing the unity of the ground of being, the sense of being part, you also recognize how diverse and varied and peculiar and particular are the flowers upon that ground. You don't expect all divisions to fall neatly into two. Many colors blend into one another, many ways of making a living on this planet, many ecological niches, many ways of making love, many kinds of love to be made, many choices of emphasis. Praise the dung beetle as well as the honeybee.

Dividing the society into those socialized to do and those socialized to feel has just about finished us as a species. You can't go mountain climbing with a grand piano on your back; and we may not be able to survive our own technology of killing until every person is responsible for nurturing the young, until each of us is socialized to care and feel every public choice and to ask of every decision, in the words of an Iroquois activist, what does this mean to the seventh generation?

If we do not identify with each other, it will be *sauve qui peut,* and since we are all on this blue-green egg together, saving oneself alone means polluting the nest. We must be taught, we must teach each other, to see and feel the connections. Without that sense of being part of a web—a social network of labor and society, a total community of rock and lizard and bird and coyote and person, a maze of past from which we issue and the future which issues from us—we necessarily do more injury than good to ourselves and to others. Selfishness is finally fatal to all of us, if only because there is no away in throwing away and no away in running away, anymore if ever there was.

If the progressive forces in this country cannot offer a compelling and imaginative vision that moves people, we will not move people. And we will probably not survive. It is that simple and that imperative. □

## Israel Plenary Address

# Negotiations Now

*Abba Eban*

I am happy to see so many people at the *Tikkun* conference. After so many years in Knesset it's unusual to be in a setting where people say nice things about each other.

Let's start with the good and bad news.

The good news is the vitality shown by *Tikkun* magazine. Not only has it survived—but it has flourished, as evidenced by this exciting conference.

The bad news is that my party, Labor, has decided to join Mr. Shamir's cabinet. This was not my advice. But my experience in recent years has been that it is quite sufficient for me to support a cause to ensure that that cause will suffer immediate and crushing defeat.

It was a wrong decision. The main thing Israel needs today is a party that can present an alternative—not just a restraining force on Shamir, but an alternative vision that can return Israel to its roots in prophetic Judaism and classical Zionism.

It is a mistake for the Labor party to try today to build a consensus with Likud. I like the definition of consensus put forward by the *Oxford Book of Aphorisms*: "consensus is achieved when everyone says collectively what no one believes individually." It can only be achieved by a kind of homogenizing semantic in which real differences are concealed.

After several years of identification with Likud policies it is going to be hard for the Labor party to reemerge as the standard-bearer of an alternative—after so many years in which it has been willing to bear collective responsibility for Likud's decisions.

One of the consequences of this close relationship between Labor and Likud is that the tradition of criticism that had normally been a function of the parliamentary system has now been replaced by a kind of docility in which criticism itself becomes suspect. Those who criticize are sometimes termed disloyal. There is, of course, a view of patriotism which requires that one must always defend one's country's interests. But the highest patriotism is one that also defends one's country's values.

But for the dramatic events since December of 1987, we in Israel would have spent this past year immersed in considering the significance of our fortieth anniversary. Those of you who have been to Israel this past year would surely have noted a somber note which arose

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from the inevitable comparison between the unlimited hopes of our early days and the harsh realities of the present. Forty years ago we were almost unrestrained in the promises and predictions of what Israel could do for itself, and by its example for others.

I confess that in order to seize the ears of the world it was necessary to adopt a somewhat utopian rhetoric. Before coming here I reread the speech with which I successfully pleaded for Israel's membership in the United Nations and I blush at the audacity of our promises. Americans looking at their own literature will find a similar rhetoric. The only fault with utopia is that it doesn't exist. And you'll notice that everyone who tries to represent utopia in literature has taken the prudent step of putting their utopia either on a desert island or at the top of an inaccessible mountain in order to immunize utopia from the two conditions which make utopia impossible: utopia has no boundaries and utopia has no neighbors. When you have no boundaries and no neighbors you have unlimited possibilities. Israel has boundaries and it has neighbors, and therefore the need to modify its utopian expectations with a pragmatic realism must not be underestimated. We have never been the masters of our fate and have never been able, and are unable today, to translate our higher values into the realistic language of politics.

*Israelis should prepare themselves for negotiations with the Palestinians. We can appoint the Israeli delegation, but we might not be able to appoint the Palestinian delegation.*

Nevertheless, we are entitled to celebrate. When everything has been said, Israel is a great and noble adventure. It is almost a unique celebration of resilience and vitality and growth—the growth of an economy and a society protected from the dangers of anarchy that so many people predicted as a result of the bewildering variety of tongues and origins and experiences out of which our immigration was born. Well, sometimes we do present the spectacle of anarchy, particularly around our elections, but underneath those outward pictures of disorder there is also an underlying coherence. We in Israel live our lives on two levels. There is a level of solidarity, especially when our physical security is in danger, but there is a level of sincere and passionate contention. Diversity and dissent are not burdens that are to be grudgingly borne; they are the saving grace and crowning glory of a free and open society.

My friends in the organized Jewish community are sometimes impossible people. They say to me two things: First, isn't it wonderful that Israel is a democracy. And second, isn't it terrible that Israelis are not unanimous on all the intricate problems that they face. Well, we are not unanimous because we are a democracy. We make our decisions not through the blind acceptance of governmental authority but through the interaction of alternative and contradictory choices.

Whenever you feel discouraged about some of the right-wing rhetoric you hear emerging from Israel, remember that on November 1, 1988, 1,024,000 Israelis voted for platforms which specifically called for the termination of Israeli rule over the 1.5 million Palestine Arabs in the West Bank and Gaza. A smaller number, 950,000, voted for platforms that urged the indivisibility of Eretz Yisrael. The balance was, of course, distorted by the massive vote for religious parties, including parties that do not care whether Israel is divided or not, provided that they can have as many *yeshivot* as possible and as long as the budgets of their organizations are overflowing with plenty. But if you were to make an ideological analysis of their beliefs you would find that a majority of them, on valid traditional Jewish grounds, value peace. "Do not provoke the gentiles" was one of the great phrases during the Exile. The concept of survival and preservation of life (*pikuakh nefesh*), of not embarking on heroic but suicidal courses, is just as integral a part of traditional Judaism as the illusions of blood and land and territorial expansion.

Therefore Israel faces its fifth decade with unanticipated material strength, demographic and economic and scientific and technological and military strength, but in deep confusion about our structure and our values.

The year 1989 will be extremely important. The United States has suddenly erupted into a great spasm of lucidity which I believe and hope will be durable.

Israel is an immaculate democracy, with courts which are very suspicious of the pretentions of authority and very vigilant in the defense of individual rights—and yet tied to it is this capsule of the West Bank and Gaza in which there is no democracy and in which there is no respect for individual rights. Normally one has to travel for thousands of miles to find side by side two entities that are so different. Not for one single minute do the Palestinian Arabs in Nablus, in Jenin, in Ramallah have a common memory, a common affection, a common thought, a common sentiment with the Jews in the area under Israeli law. Neither of these two realities seeks harmony with the other through any renunciation of its own particularity. The idea that these populations can live with 100 percent power and authority in the hands of one and zero percent power, authority, and freedom in the possession of the other—this is the most eccentric

idea to which any large group of Jews has assented since some of them believed in the seventeenth century that Shabtai Tzvi was the messiah.

On every level the occupation is a failure. Two percent of the Jewish population of Israel has settled in the West Bank and Gaza where Jews constitute 4 percent of the population. There is no prospect of changing the Arab character of that area. There is not one government on earth that supports the idea of Israel's permanent rule over the West Bank and Gaza—I believe that this is the only unanimity in modern political life. Nor has the settlement there promoted coexistence; never has there been greater alienation. It is a Jewish failure: it has sharply divided Israel and the Jewish people. It is a regional failure because it weakens our Egyptian treaty. An international failure because it corrupts our international relations. A security failure because it weakens us, diverts our forces from strategic vigilance to the task of chasing the youngsters in the streets. It totally neutralizes the sophisticated weapons, the F16s and the tanks and the missiles and the wondrous electronics while our well-trained soldiery, themselves embittered by their task, chase the *intifada* in the streets. In short, this is a policy which is totally a failure in terms of self-interest.

Of course I understand the skepticism, and we must acknowledge that the PLO has contributed greatly to their own lack of credibility. It wouldn't do them any harm if they were to reflect on the fact that that which they now hope to achieve is something that they could have achieved more than forty years ago. But that skepticism must be surmounted. Israel is sure that all those who have greeted Arafat's declarations in Geneva have been duped, that they know less about the PLO than do we Israelis; but how can we know more when we have taken every possible precaution to guarantee that we would know less? We have enacted idiotic legislation, sponsored not by the Likud alone, which surrounds any contact between any Israeli and any Palestinian with an air of criminality.

The psychological basis of all this was the great military salvation of the Six Day War. It *was* a great salvation! Does anyone here think that Sadat would have given us peace if we didn't have Sinai to offer or withhold? That's why even today I, who advocate renunciation of our rule of the West Bank and Gaza, am reluctant to give them up without some firm agreement—though there are many in our country today who are beginning to urge a unilateral withdrawal. But we seemed to think that because we had imposed our security we could impose our peace. For security we didn't need the consent of the people over whom we ruled, but for peace we need and have always needed their consent. We got intoxicated by what Winston Churchill called "the fierce but fading glare of military success." I have never had trouble with the Christian phrase that the meek shall inherit the earth, but I've always wondered whether, after having inherited it, they will continue to be meek.

What should Israel do now? Well, first, it should welcome a free expression of Jewish opinion. I do not think American Jews should become the "Jews of silence." I do not believe Israel should say, "We want your financial support, we want your lobbying support, but we don't want your intellectual contribution; keep your pockets open but your mouths shut." And why should American Jews be united? Are Israelis united? Are Americans united about Nicaragua? Of course, when we have to deal with security, we will make the final decisions. But to be alone in decisions is not to be alone in good counsel, or to believe that our own wisdom is always sufficient. Do not be intimidated by stories about the destruction of Israel! I read a report in which Mr. Shamir used the words "destruction of Israel" seven times. He came to Washington and talked about the throwing of stones by youngsters in the street and said that this was not a security problem—it was the problem of Israeli survival.

Israeli survival? If Israel is capable of being extinguished by a group of youngsters throwing stones in the streets, then the promise of Zionism's creating safety for Jews has failed, because no other community of Jews is in similar danger of destruction. But this is nonsense. Israel is not in danger of being destroyed—especially not by the PLO.

I picked up a book recently on the military balance in the Middle East, and I would tell you if what it said were not true because I have to know what the facts are in this regard. And here is what it said: Israel: 500,000 mobilizable manpower; 4,200 tanks (which is more than the Russians had at Stalingrad); 500–600 missile-bearing aircraft, a greater striking force than that which laid waste to Dresden and Hamburg; and all sorts of electronic wonders and vague insinuations about ultimate deterrents. PLO: 17,250 armed men in five countries with zero tanks and zero aircraft. They are going to destory Israel? As likely as Luxembourg's destroying the Soviet Union. You could get all the PLO people into the Detroit conference center and still have three other conferences there without any of them having any contact with each other. The apocalyptic rhetoric is based on a vast overestimate of the PLO's power and a vast underestimate of Israeli power. When I see the new generation of Likud leadership and witness its leading spokesman, Binyamin Netanyahu, in such an ecstasy of alarm I imagine that the Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar was at the gates of Jerusalem.

# Tikkun Passover Haggadah Supplement

*Have you ever been to a boring Passover seder where people mechanically read through the text? This happens only because many of us have abandoned the tradition of heated argument and discussion about the meaning of the stories connected with Passover. In fact, from the time that Rabbi Akiba used the seder to plan a revolutionary struggle against the Romans to the moment that inhabitants of the Warsaw ghetto celebrated the seder before beginning their historic revolt, Jews have used the seder as a time to apply the message of the historical struggle against the Pharoah to their current reality. It is in this spirit that we encourage you to make any seder you attend a lively and spirited occasion to address the problems of the present moment in light of the lessons of our past. This year it is particularly urgent that we, the Jewish people, address our relationship with the Palestinian people.*

*Detach these additions to the haggadah along the perforated lines and bring them with you to your seder. They are meant to be read as additions to the normal text at the places indicated. But, of course, you can add them elsewhere if you wish.*

## Kiddush

*Before the Kiddush (the first blessing over the wine)*

We are gathered here tonight to affirm our continuity with the generations of Jews who have kept alive the vision of freedom inherent in the Passover story. We proudly affirm that we are the descendants of slaves—the first group of slaves in recorded history ever to wage a successful rebellion against their slaveholders. Ours was the first historical national liberation struggle, and the prototype of many struggles that other nations have waged against those who oppressed them.

There are others who would have done their best to forget their humble past. Some people saw themselves as descendants of gods or of superhuman heroes. We are proud that our people has clung to its vision of itself as a slave people and has insisted on telling its story of liberation as the central founding event around which its culture was built.

Ruling classes have traditionally tried to convince their subjects that domination is inevitable—built into the very structure of the universe. The Jewish people's Torah, telling the story of our liberation struggle, has been a perpetual thorn in the side of these ruling classes. Not only was our very existence a proof that the world could be

headlong rush into assimilation, once that was legally possible. The Judaism that was abandoned, full of tears and suffering, was a Judaism whose sense of joy and inner confidence had been replaced by a narrow defensiveness—itself a response to external oppression. Even Hassidism, born as a protest against the joylessness of a rigidifying Eastern European Judaism, eventually lost much of its spontaneity and its earlier creativity, increasingly reproducing the dogmatic spirit it sought to replace. It is only now, decades after one-third of our people was wiped out, that we can begin to imagine reclaiming the more joyous and life-affirming aspects of our Jewish heritage.

Yet, even here, we are not free of the dynamics of a world of oppression. In class societies, the only escape from being oppressed is to be oppressors, or part of an oppressive system. Whether it be as tax collectors and small tavern owners in Eastern Europe, or as small shopkeepers, government bureaucrats, social workers, or teachers interacting with people living in American ghettoes, Jews—as recent escapees from oppression—act as public representatives of the established order in their dealings with other oppressed groups. In the process, anti-Semitism is regenerated. It's natural for us to become angry at the groups who participate in these dynamics—the peasants in Eastern Europe, or some Blacks in the U.S. They should, after all, understand that we too are victims. Yet it's understandable why they may see us otherwise.

There is no easy way out, no way for our people to make a separate peace with a world of oppression. Our own liberation requires the liberation of all, and the end of all oppression.

# Pour Out Thy Wrath

*After the meal, before opening the door for Elijah and before saying "Shefoch Chamatcha"*

Tonight we remember our six million sisters and brothers who perished at the hands of the Nazis and at the hands of hundreds of thousands of anti-Semites who assisted those Nazis throughout Europe. We remember also the Jewish martyrs throughout the generations—oppressed, beaten, raped, and murdered by European Christians.

It's not fashionable to speak about these atrocities—particularly since some reactionary Jews use these memories to legitimate the current oppressive tactics of the Israeli government. But tonight we recall in pain and in anger what was done to our people. We do not think it appropriate to use this past as a blank check to justify what right-wing Jews wish to do to others. Yet we understand the pain that has led many of our fellow Jews to be deeply suspicious of a non-Jewish world that turned its back on us at the moment we were being systematically annihilated.

To get beyond the pain, we must first be allowed to express our anger. So, tonight it is appropriate to speak about our history, about the Holocaust, and about the ways that the American government and peoples around the world failed to respond to our cries and our suffering. What was done to us was wrong, disgusting, an assault on the sanctity of human life and on God. It is with righteous indignation that Jews have traditionally called out "Shefoch Chamatcha al ha'goyim asher lo yeda'ucha,"—pour out your wrath, God, on those people who have acted toward us in a way that fails to recognize Your holy spirit within us, as it is within all human beings. [Stop here and let seder participants speak about their righteous indignation.]

Yet, even as we speak our anger, we reaffirm our commitment to the messianic vision of a world of peace and justice, a world in which inequalities have been abolished and our human capacities for love and solidarity and creativity and freedom are allowed to flourish, a world in which all people will recognize and affirm in each other the spirit of God. In that day, living in harmony with nature and with each other, all peoples will participate in acknowledging God's presence on earth. We remain committed to the struggles in our own time that will contribute to making that messianic vision someday possible.

The American move to start talks with the PLO is based on what President Reagan described as "the evolution of Palestinian thought towards pragmatic and realistic positions on all the central issues." Either there is such an evolution or there is not; either it's a reality or a fraud and a hoax. If it's a reality, it would be criminally irresponsible not to explore it; and if it's a hoax, it would be irresponsible not to expose it. In each contingency, Israelis should prepare themselves for negotiations with the Palestinians. And we must prepare ourselves for the following thought: we can appoint the Israeli delegation, but we might not be able to appoint the Palestinian delegation.

There must be Arab rule in the West Bank and Gaza. Demilitarization is feasible—it shouldn't be laughed at. We have successful demilitarization, in our agreement with Egypt, of an area five times as large as the West Bank and Gaza. If you ask who is going to enforce demilitarization—well, imagine, there they will be with two suspicious and relatively powerful neighbors on each side, Jordan (which would be rather more ruthless than Israel in ensuring the demilitarization) and Israel. How are the Palestinians going to become a threat?

Therefore I agree with the atmosphere of this meeting and its hopes that 1989 will be the year of the broken ice and the year in which these two peoples begin to understand the compulsions of a future to be shared in peace. □

ISRAEL PLENARY ADDRESS

# A Call to Action: American Jews and the Search for Middle East Peace

*Letty Cottin Pogrebin*

I am going to tell you two jokes. Not because I consider Israel a laughing matter, but because jokes, especially among Jews, tend to function as distillations of cultural ideologies and metaphors of shared consciousness; and because options for peace in the Middle East and the role that American Jews can play in the peace process are such painful subjects that we need to leaven them with a little humor.

The first joke is about Moses. When Moses came down from Mount Sinai with the Holy Tablets, he told the children of Israel, "I have good news ... and bad news: The good news is, I got him down to ten. The bad news is, Thou Shalt Not Covet is still *in*."

The point is that Jews have a long history of accommodation to the imperfect. We don't get everything we want, and nothing's been easy for us.

After all the bloody bad news, wouldn't you think Israel would welcome some good news for a change?

Relatively speaking, the Palestinian peace initiative is good news. Following hijackings, bombs, murders, five wars, Black September, years of hostile rejectionism, and calls for the destruction of "the Zionist entity," the Palestine National Council now calls Israel by its rightful name, endorses 242 and 338, and renounces terrorism. Yasir Arafat says he accepts two states and concludes, "Come let us make peace."

*Something* is happening. The U.S. has called that something good news, good enough to signal a policy turnaround. Yet Yitzhak Shamir calls it no news at all but only "a campaign of deceit." Shimon Peres, sounding like Tweedledum to Shamir's Tweedledee, dismisses it as "a cunning exercise in public relations." Israeli Ambassador Binyamin Netanyahu calls it "just words."

Nevertheless, it has taken the PLO thirteen years to utter these words—which suggests that its members may well take them seriously. If not, the PLO could have spoken these words cynically long ago, using them as tickets to U.S. affection or as barter for world respect. Furthermore, if PLO words mean nothing, why put so much stock in the words of the PLO charter. It's selective perception to claim that words written in 1964 have the power to hurt but words written in 1988 have no power to heal.

Whatever can be criticized in all the recent Palestinian statements, anyone following the PLO in recent years knows that making and clarifying these statements three times in world forums are major steps *for them*. If the

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Israeli government were truly committed to making progress toward peace, it could have evaluated the Palestinian initiative within its historical context, welcomed the U.S. as an active intermediary, and used this window of opportunity to clarify its own conditions for coming to the negotiating table.

That, after all, is the goal. Not refining nuances in the newspapers, but getting Palestinian kids off the streets, keeping Israeli soldiers off the battlefield, and moving the key players into a room where they can wrestle with the complexities of word and deed—as eventually they must.

But this time, it's the Jews who are refusing to talk. As Abba Eban puts it: "They won't take yes for an answer." Israel's intransigence threatens to become as destructive to its international image as is its excessive repression of the *intifada*. This intransigence has transformed the Palestinians into the new refuseniks and has isolated Israelis more effectively than a year's worth of UN sanctions.

In addition, Israel's criticism of the U.S. move toward dialogue breaks our Siamese twinship and creates the sort of dual-loyalty test American Jews have always feared. It asks us to choose between our country's policy and Israel's.

As one who agrees that nations must make peace with their enemies not their friends, I have no problem supporting talks with the PLO. With all the recent attention to what Arafat *hasn't* said, many people have failed to focus on what Shamir *has* said to close all the options. Last spring, he rejected out of hand the Shultz plan, saying the only line in it that was true was the signature. Over and over again, he has said—read his lips—"We will *never* talk to the PLO." And countless times, he has stated that Israel will *never* give up the occupied territories and *never* tolerate a Palestinian state.

Given this dead end, it was left to the U.S. to break the logjam and usher in a new phase of dialogue. But things can be stalled for years at this new phase unless international pressure and Israeli public opinion persuade the Israeli government to agree to direct negotiations. Liberal, progressive, and radical American Jews must play a central role in this effort. *We have to give Israeli obstinacy the same attention we gave to PLO obstinacy. We have to distinguish between Israel's best interests and the Likud party line. And we have to demand that Labor give us a choice, not an echo.*

If the PLO is acceptable under *no* circumstances, then why make it spin its wheels trying to prove it has changed? Peres warned that one Molotov cocktail thrown in the territories will nullify the Palestinian commitment, while at the same time Saleh Khalef, Arafat's deputy, said that, along with diplomacy, the PLO would encourage continued street rebellion and attacks on Israeli military targets. Why *should* they stop the *intifada?* The twenty years of quiet that preceded it produced no Israeli offers.

I'd love to see the Palestinians clean up their act and remove all of Israel's excuses, but this is a false issue. If the Jewish state could have relations with Germany after the Nazi terror and make peace with the Egyptians who killed far more Jews than the PLO, why is it any more unthinkable to negotiate with Arafat?

To conclude Moses' good news/bad news paradigm—the good news is: a twenty-year impasse has been broken. The bad news is: the next move is Israel's. At this watershed moment, I'm uncomfortable leaving the collective Jewish destiny in Shamir's hands. So let's put it this way: the next move is Israel's to make, but it is ours to care about with the same fervor that we brought to bear during the Who-is-a-Jew crisis—because the Palestinian crisis is proving just as divisive to the Jewish community and just as destructive to the Jewish people.

Which leads me to my second joke. It's about a little girl who never spoke. From early infancy, her parents tried everything to elicit a word from her: toys, games, clowns. Nothing worked. They took her to doctors and psychiatrists. Everyone said there was no reason why this child couldn't talk—but still, silence.

Then, one night at the dinner table, when she was six years old, the little girl spit out her milk, put down her glass, and said clearly, "This milk is sour."

"You can talk!" her parents exclaimed. "But why haven't you said anything all these years?"

"Until now," said the little girl, "everything's been OK."

This joke helps explain why during the past year so many American Jews have started speaking out about Israel. Previously, despite twenty years of occupation, the majority view had been that, *basically,* everything was OK. Some of us had no problem protesting various indiscretions—such as the Lebanon incursion, the Pollard spy case, or increased Israeli settlements on the West Bank. But most of organized American Jewry had been quiescent, if not supportive, of "Israel right or wrong."

I can't say whether they were quiet because they didn't want to complain in front of the *goyim* (non-Jews), or thought their criticism would stimulate anti-Semitism, or were scared of the PLO, or believed there was nothing to complain about. But I do know that silence is never an act of neutrality. It leaves the distinct impression that "everything is OK."

This year, in the land of milk and honey, the milk turned sour for all of us. It had to be protested, first at the family dinner table; but when that got no results, outside the house. Some spoke out early, at first sight of Israeli soldiers breaking bones, bloodying heads, and burying Palestinians alive. Some protested the gradual erosion of Israel's democratic principles—represented

by over three hundred Palestinian deaths, the double standard for human rights and civil liberties, state censorship, administrative detentions, the demolition of Palestinian homes, and expulsion—otherwise known as deportation.

Still, many American Jews did nothing, claiming that Israel's security interests were paramount. We need a united front, they insisted. If you don't live there, you have no right to criticize (though that doesn't stop Jews in America from criticizing Nicaragua or South Africa; or Jews in Chicago from criticizing nuclear power plants in New Hampshire). Only with our own Jewish state were we expected to censor our conscience and relinquish our freedom of speech.

That is, until the Who-is-a-Jew issue turned American Jewry into a radical protest movement. This was the Jewish Diaspora's *intifada*. Until then, many people dedicated to Israel's survival had chosen largely to ignore what *kind* of an Israel this survivor would be. To survive as a society that is repressive, violent, nondemocratic, racist, classist, sexist, and militaristic was OK. But *not* to keep *us* out. Not to invalidate *our* Jewishness.

Despite former injunctions against interfering in Israeli politics, telegrams and fax letters were launched like stones. News conferences exploded in the press. Planes crisscrossed the ocean carrying delegations of every description. Hawkish intellectuals such as Norman Podhoretz and Cynthia Ozick called Who-is-a-Jew a transcendent moral issue in which Diaspora Jews must be involved. And federation leaders started forming a lobby in Israel to represent American Jewish interests.

Israel could amend its character, heart, and soul, but not *our* Law of Return.

And it is seen as *ours*. When I was in Israel recently, many people couldn't understand why a law that affects about twelve *olim* (immigrants) a year is such a big deal. Inside Israel, twelve *olim* are not a big deal; a big deal is 1.6 million Palestinians under Israeli rule, twice as many reservists spending twice as much time in the army, military costs that are crippling the economy, the corruption of IDF morale, the hatred calcifying on both sides, plus the rising tide of fundamentalism.

I deplore the proposed amendment as much as anyone, but I see it as just another measure of the rabbinical power that, unchallenged, has long been oppressing Israeli women. I wish American Jews would be as exercised about Israel's divorce laws and the plight of the *aguna* (abandoned wife). And I wish our passion over *who* is a Jew were matched by a similar reaction to the brutality of the occupation, and the more telling question of *what* is a Jew or *what* is an Israeli state.

For the most part, mainstream Jewish organizations were not the place to turn to for such a reaction. Half the Israeli population disagrees with its rulers—even the religious party Degel Hatorah said that for real peace, for *pikuakh nefesh* (saving of a life), it is willing to give up the territories. Yet *our* leaders often behave as if Israelis speak in one voice and therefore so must we.

Yet, as surveys have shown and *Tikkun* has reflected, most American Jews are far more dovish than the organized American Jewish leadership; 60 to 70 percent of us are unaffiliated with establishment Jewish organizations. This means we have to turn elsewhere to make our feelings known.

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*Most American Jews are far more dovish than the organized American Jewish leadership.*

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Abba Eban says we need a Conference of Presidents of *Minor* Jewish Organizations as an authoritative counterforce to the pronouncements of the Presidents of *Major* Jewish Organizations. Well, such plans and more are in the making as dozens of alternative Jewish organizations work to expand what it means to be a friend of Israel.

Being a friend of Israel means more than supporting blind loyalty and military preparedness. It means demanding that the U.S. play a meaningful peacemaking role, not a passive, politically safe, wait-and-see position. It means keeping policymakers, the media, and the public informed of both the facts at the grass roots and of alternative Jewish opinion here and in Israel. It means writing more and speaking more and taking to the streets, not with three or four thousand, as we did in New York in April 1988, but with three hundred thousand, as the movement for Soviet Jewry did in Washington in December 1987. It means promoting Israeli-Palestinian dialogue and calling for nullification of the law that prohibits it. It means supporting self-help projects in Israel, especially in poor Jewish and Arab communities; and creating cultural exchanges, peace curricula for school children, and other programs advancing democratic ideals, nonviolent solutions, and Jewish-Arab coexistence. *And* it means supporting these efforts with our time and money so that our politics can have the same clout as the establishment's.

This is a great moment for Jewish activism. The milk is sour, but the silenced majority has found its voice. And now, as never before, Shamir and Peres and Bush and Baker and all Israelis and Americans must hear it. The pro-Israel peace movement is alive and growing, and all of us are part of it. It makes only one demand on us. We have to join up. To be a movement we have to *move*. No one is going to come and get us. □

PAPER: MODERNISM SESSION

# Phony Gardens With Real Toads in Them

*Todd Gitlin*

*Don't ask me any questions. I've seen how things*
*that seek their way find their void instead.*
*There are spaces that ache in the uninhabited air*
*and in my eyes, completely dressed creatures—no one*
*naked there!*

—Federico García Lorca,
"1910 (Intermezzo),"
in *Poet in New York*
(translated by Greg Simon
and Steven F. White)

Modernism is, or was, a passion—a wake at the death of God, a plunging into and past the heart of darkness. The route was ex nihilo: out of nothing, something, even everything. Marshall Berman has written an inspired book about the modernist passion for creative destruction: modernism as the music of modernity, the sum of the self-creating acts in which human beings smash up the old world and hurl themselves into—something else. John Berger writes about cubism as the inspired discovery, or invention, of the unity and continuity of the world—the aesthetic equivalent of the Second International. The one thing modernism cannot be accused of is smugness: it took the damage seriously whether or not it set out for a promised land.

By contrast, most of what has come to be called postmodernism makes its dislocated home in a compromised land. Possibly, if the spirit of modernism is Jewish (passionate, messianic, redemptive, universalist), then postmodernism is goyish. Promises, it thinks, are mirages. "Everybody knows," as Leonard Cohen says it on his brilliant recent album—everybody is *knowing*—but nobody *knows* anything. Around the prevailing postmodernism—cool postmodernism—is the vast labored weariness and concocted eeriness of déjà vu. The cool postmodernism is a spirit of aftermath and accommodation—demonstrating that originality is fraudulent by ripping it off; despising human intention by making a name for yourself. Every belief comes prewrapped in quotation marks. Surface city, here we come. Spin the kaleidoscope; round up the usual suspects; sit down at the language game, shuffle the cards; don't bother me about human worlds or freedoms or experience or heart; reality is another word for nothing left to lose. The offstage sound is either an extended yawn or a sitcom laugh track. Irony, which Czeslaw Milosz has called "the glory of slaves," is the universal solvent. (There are postmodernists who think they invented irony.) The world divides between insiders who get the joke and suckers who are gotten by it.

I've had my say recently (*New York Times Book Review,* Nov. 6, 1988, and *Dissent,* Winter 1989) about where this cool postmodernist mood might have come from—and I recommend what Susan Sontag ("One Culture and the New Sensibility," in *Against Interpretation*), Fredric Jameson ("Postmodernism, or The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism," *New Left Review* #146), Andreas Huyssen (*After the Great Divide: Modernism, Mass Culture, Postmodernism*), and Sven Birkerts (*An Artificial Wilderness*) have written on the subject. I see the phenomenon as largely generational—post-Vietnam, postsixties, post-New Left—and situational: suburban, TV-hip, placeless, spaceless, surface-bound, frightened of what we might feel if we took seriously that we live among fellow beings. Cool postmodernism in this light is bomb damage—shell shock from bombs that have not yet gone off and images that have already exploded. It's the Muzak of the mall, Arnold Schwarzenegger or Mr. T grunting a thick-necked critique of himself. But I also want to say that alongside the blank look and the glitter of surfaces—cool postmodernism—there is, or might be, vital postmodernism—a hot postmodernism of the heart, which is not a slick capitulation but the unending commitment and attempt to recover the self from its fragments, and history from amnesia, and reason from technique; there is a resistance that is not self-indulgent, a joyous revulsion, a will "to undo the folded lie," as Auden wrote fifty years ago on the eve of the Second World War—and my heart is with that postmodernism; I'll come back to it later.

For now I want to speak about the cool postmodernism, let's say in the icy version of Andy Warhol, who has now long since outlived his fifteen minutes and ought to be retired, have his silk-screened shirt hung up in the Hall of—what else—Fame. Suppose

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that this cool postmodernist mood is an imaginary garden with real (to use a prepostmodernist expression) toads in it. Or better, that it is a phony solution to the realest of problems. Please pardon the abstraction. It's the music of our situation that I want to convey.

Here are some intersecting real circumstances in which art and thought find themselves today.

*Alongside the blank look and the glitter of surfaces—cool postmodernism—there is, or might be, a vital postmodernism—a hot postmodernism of the heart.*

The first real, burning problem: the impulse to control the world in the name of order has, to say the least, failed to forestall carnage. Arguably it has produced the carnage. Marry the universalist aspirations of the Enlightenment and the rationalism of science, and the fruit is apparently the atomic bomb. Rousseau fathers the censor. Extend the dream of humanity mastering nature, and the next thing you know you are bulldozing rain forests. The road of belief leads to death camps. In the name of the universal spirit of humanity, so-called superpowers incinerate peasant villages. In the name of freedom of speech, the company interrupts this story to flood you with images and fill you with emptiness. Progress paves over ancestral graveyards. Heroes are killers. Censors are authors. Authors are tyrants. Marxism, by enshrining labor, and Leninism, by enshrining the party, erected pyramids of sacrifice. There are oversimplifications in this—but who cannot live in the closing decades of this millennium and fail to tremble at the possibility that these nightmares are ours?

Well, hey, no problem. Cool out with postmod. Smug it out or punk it out—in either case, fuck it. Disenchant the world once and for all; change the channel, couch potato; put on your Chippendale pillbox hat; buy our thing; there is no here here. Postmodernism masquerades as revolt the way anorexia masquerades as diet. Thinking flat, it says, is the best revenge.

A second problem: how on earth to live in a world of difference? One of the decisive questions is whether we can live in a world of difference that is not a world of deference. For me it is particularly a challenge because, as Horace Kallen said, America is a nation of nationalities. Interdependence is so obvious it has become this year's cliché. How to honor diversity and live with it?—that is the social question for New York, San Francisco, Los Angeles, Jerusalem, Yugoslavia.... Look around the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics and work out what Russians, Armenians, Azerbaijanis, Estonians, Jews have to say to each other. Look at Guatemala or Brazil or Rumania or South Africa or Israel/Palestine, or ... or ... or ... to see what nation does unto nation, tribe unto tribe. The nineteenth century threw up two answers to tribalism—science; and the International—the unity of the working men and women of all nations. The back of both was cracked in 1914: science enlisted, and the working men went off to the slaughter. After that catastrophe, what faith could there be in a transcendence of nations? Meanwhile, the reactionary proposal is to wrap yourself in the flag and trash bilingualism as the Antichrist.

Cool postmodernism propounds the cool pseudosolution: magisterial indifference. Pastiche, mindless eclecticism, is phony coexistence along the meridian of the least common denominator. Instead of holy war, bland peace. Instead of respect, packaged tourism. Instead of a sense of history—histories—let everyone be equally ignorant of the past.

The third problem is the glut and the central control and circulation of images. Marx observed that when everything is for sale, nothing is sacred; capital, which is congealed labor, makes miracles. The late-twentieth-century addendum is: if it moves, someone will shoot it—that is, tape it, wrap it in plastic and package it, and tell you what it means. We are seen, as William Gass once put it, as the crosshatch where the media intersect. The machinery of surfaces tears text away from context until context is drowned by a snowfall of surfaces.

Cool postmodernism's pseudosolution is to submit to the maelstrom by discovering untold pluralities of opinion beneath the uniformities of mass culture. Talk shows as democracy. Discern unfathomable depths in "The Donna Reed Show." Divine a common culture in "Leave It to Beaver" or a culture of resistance in "Beverly Hillbillies."

Finally, perhaps, these three problems become more or less the same philosophical problem to which the cool postmodernism is a spurious solution—or a space holder: the question of the basis for judgment. Russell proposed logic. Wittgenstein's idea was to clean up language. Foucault's idea was to slide away from a universal humanism in the name of local values and a sadomasochistic agon. The Western liberal ideal combines reason with pluralism but gnaws away its own foundation. In a polyglot world of multiple culture, where on earth or in heaven is value to be found?

In art and philosophy, the cool postmodernist answer is a rejection of the absolutes of reasoned universalism in the name of an equally absolute and dogmatic localism. In the arbitrary equation of all treasures. At worst, in sentimentality on top of baby talk and nihilism—an

amazing combination. In the name of savvy rebellion, we hear the arbitrary rejection of all the achievements of civilization as junk. Ironic leveling and indiscriminate trashing come together on the premise that autonomous judgment has to surrender before the market.

The best thing to be said about cool postmodernism is that it is a holding action—because belief is hokey, the giants of modernism have been subdued, all the texts have been endlessly reread and ransacked, and there are apparently no more giants in the earth. Well, it does make sense to tolerate the anxiety of our modern abandonment. And in this abandonment the deeply unsettling and inspiring project, the unrealized project, is, more or less, the promise of something else—call it a hot postmodernism or a seriously global culture that would not be brought to us courtesy of McDonald's. Not by the imposition of the master culture over the minor, the elite culture over the popular. Rather, the rock-bottom value, the overriding principle, in a global culture has to be the preservation of the other. The revaluation of all value, which Nietzsche proposed, has to rest on the premise that the conversation and contact among the values is itself a value. That is why the politics that follows from the poststructuralist critique of the Enlightenment is a politics of preservation. The hallmark is coexistence: that in the preservation of the other is a condition for the preservation of the self; we are not *we* until they are *they*; for to whom else shall we speak, with whom else shall we think, if not those who are different from ourselves? First, preservation of the living planet from the bomb and the poisons and all the varieties of reckless endangerment. Second, preservation of the human group from the recklessness and vanity of other human groups. You do not invade, you do not occupy, you do not dismantle the history of nations; you do not rape, you do not destroy the villages of the others or knock down their houses. Third, preservation of the self from the group itself.

The ideal toward which politics strives is conversation—and conversation requires respect for the other. *The fundamental value is that the conversation continue toward the global culture.*

That is our political project in the fin de millennium, and it is also an aesthetic project: the hot and healthy culture is never smug about living in weightlessness. It hears, with Beckett, plain human speech in the garbage. It knows, with Dennis Potter in *The Singing Detective,* that in the swirl of multiple narratives it is worth digging for bedrock. It knows, with Don DeLillo, that the manufacture of lies can be judged in the face of more truth—not absolute truth, that straw injunction, but a more comprehensive truth. The human voice beneath the rubble calls out with Blake that energy is eternal life, life above and over against death. □

PAPER: JEWS AND NEOCONS SESSION

# The Anti-Communist Past of the Neoconservative Present

*Ilene Philipson*

It is often assumed that neoconservatism arose as a response to the excesses of the New Left during the sixties. Incipient neoconservative periodicals such as *Commentary, Public Interest,* and *Partisan Review,* and even the democratic socialist *Dissent,* often railed against the New Left's confrontational style, its romantic infatuation with violence, its denigration of modernism and high culture, and its seemingly blind faith in Third World movements. Intellectuals who were to become the infamous and influential "neocons" of the seventies and eighties found the social movements of the sixties real threats to those liberal institutions of American society that had allowed them to assimilate, prosper, and gain a modicum of influence and respect.

While this thesis is manifestly true, it does not explain why it was primarily Jews, and New York Jews at that, who were the force behind the neoconservative movement and who, to this day, remain among its leading exponents.

It seems to me that it is necessary to look much further back in history in order to understand the origins of neoconservatism. For it is in the unique experience of

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New York City Jewish intellectuals and particularly their conflictual, emotionally scarring relationship to communism that neoconservatism finds its fundamental roots.

In the sixties, when middle-aged Jewish intellectuals peered out the windows of their faculty offices, read their morning papers, or watched the evening news, they saw what they believed to be the current incarnation of Stalinism and, not infrequently, a culture bearing increasing resemblance to the German Weimar Republic. Since 1939, when Stalin and Hitler formed their brief but catastrophic pact against the Western democracies, the link between communism and fascism had been solidified in many people's minds. The American Communist party, which had been one of the strongest and most active voices against Hitler throughout the thirties, suddenly reversed its position in the summer of 1939, supporting the Soviets' claim that now nazism was simply a "matter of taste" which one "may respect or hate ... just as any other system of political views." In response, thousands of people, particularly Jews and intellectuals, deserted the Communist party; dozens of liberal organizations and unions adopted "Communazi" resolutions that banned both Fascists and Communists, and communism was viewed by increasing numbers of people as being more closely allied with fascism than with democracy.

To many Jewish intellectuals, the Nazi-Soviet pact was not so much a surprise as a confirmation. Many of them had flirted with the Communist party—as members, as participants in CP-sponsored events and organizations, as inactive sympathizers. But throughout the thirties most of them had become critics of an increasingly rigid Stalinism that, by definition, forbade criticism, encouraged slavish adherence, suppressed creativity, and substituted dogma for intellectual inquiry. The Moscow trials of 1936 to 1938 turned increasing numbers of Jewish intellectuals away from communism as news of Stalin's show trials against his detractors spread throughout the U.S. According to Philip Rahv, writing in April 1938 in the journal he cofounded, *Partisan Review,* "It is not only the old Bolsheviks who are on trial—we too, all of us, are in the prisoners' dock. These are trials of the mind and of the human spirit. Their meanings encompass the age."

Arguing against the Moscow trials, defending Trotsky, and exposing and critiquing Stalinism became the moral, political, intellectual, and personal passions of many Jewish intellectuals. They saw themselves as defenders of the "human spirit," not simply as critics of the American Communist party. Perhaps because of their previous association with communism, the New York intellectuals' crusade against communism took on an emotional fervor typically found only among intimate associates, among members of the same family.

The "Communazi" worldview, which saw greater similarity than difference between communism and fascism, was crystallized and elaborated in Hannah Arendt's 1951 book, *The Origins of Totalitarianism.* Arendt argued that communism and nazism were not merely similar but identical, two distinct examples of a single social system—totalitarianism. Arendt believed that in both Soviet Russia and Nazi Germany the most dangerous totalitarian and anti-Semitic forces had been and were "the people" or "masses" who, without a conservative elite to restrain them, manifested "radical evil," which had particularly devastating consequences for Jews.

Arendt's work helped solidify the anti-Communist sentiments and the Jewish identities of many Jewish intellectuals. The horrors of the Nazi Holocaust were seen by these Jewish intellectuals not as historical aberrations as much as the embodiment of radical evil as it was allowed to thrive under a totalitarian regime. Although the Nazis had been defeated, the totalitarian threat lived on within the Soviet Union and Eastern bloc, and increasingly in insurgent movements of "the people" throughout the Third World. From this viewpoint, Jewish intellectuals had much to fear: totalitarian masses by definition sought to destroy both intellectuals and Jews.

Many Jewish intellectuals viewed the social movements of the sixties though the prism of this totalitarian equation. The idealization of the Vietcong, the acceptance—even veneration—of violence, the thorough condemnation of liberal culture, and the emblematic cry "Power to the People" seemed to many Jewish intellectuals to be incipient manifestations of totalitarianism. The revolutionary fervor and confrontational politics of the student movement, the emergence of an adversary culture, and the anticipated effects of rapid inflation during the Vietnam War years vividly resembled the political and cultural situation of the Weimar Republic poised on the brink of the Third Reich.

The Weimar analogy—while misperceiving the New Left's influence and intent as well as the U.S. government's susceptibility to totalitarianism—was real enough to many first-generation American Jews who had witnessed Stalin's crimes and the Holocaust. Hearing students, often *their* students, joyously chanting, "Ho, Ho, Ho Chi Minh, NLF is gonna win!" rekindled memories of Communist students at places like City College of New York in the thirties mindlessly defending Joseph Stalin against even the mildest criticism. Seeing the Black Panther newspaper run an article entitled "Palestine Guerrillas versus Israeli Pigs" undoubtedly evoked even grimmer thoughts.

As Irving Howe, who ultimately resisted the path of

neoconservatism, has remarked, the political battles of the thirties and fifties proved to be the "formative passions of our lives." And as Irving Kristol, one of the leaders of the neoconservative movement, has reflected on his own leftist past in the thirties, "joining a radical movement when one is young is very much like falling in love when one is young. The girl may turn out to be rotten, but the experience of love is so valuable it can never be entirely undone by the ultimate disenchantment." The fears that so many Jewish intellectuals developed in response to Stalinist and Nazi atrocities—increasingly linked in their minds as a uniform "Communazi" or totalitarian threat—underlay much of their contempt for the New Left and their move toward the right wing of the political spectrum.

*An obsession with anticommunism seems to miss the point, as North-South global conflict replaces East-West, and as religious fundamentalism, domestic and foreign, seems potentially far more destructive.*

*In These Times* editor Jimmy Weinstein has argued that leftists in the U.S. should abandon their traditional preoccupation with the significance and legacy of the Russian Revolution. The same sort of injunction could be applied to neoconservatives as well. The masses show little sympathy for the totalitarian beliefs of a Stalin or Hitler. The United States, even under Reagan and Bush, bears little resemblance to Weimar. And the left in this country—small, disorganized, equivocal—for the most part has disavowed violence, has become disenchanted with Third World revolutions, and has embraced most of the liberal institutions it denounced in the sixties.

While we can hope that the majority of Jewish intellectuals will continue to identify with the progressive tradition in this country and that the neoconservative movement will remain a striking anomaly, there is evidence that a new generation of Jewish intellectuals is moving to the right for reasons similar to those I have outlined. If men like Ronald Radosh and David Horowitz represent more than idiosyncratic responses, we can assume that the preoccupation with the legacy of the Russian Revolution and with the totalitarian equation is being played out, once again, in the eighties. It seems as though these Jewish intellectuals would like an individual's stance on communism—in the Spanish Civil War, in Cambodia, in Afghanistan, in Nicaragua—to be the pivot around which political debate revolves. Since communism is no longer a relevant domestic issue, these Jewish intellectuals look to history and to developing nations to raise the old war-horse that served the earlier neoconservatives so well. But as we approach the last decade of the twentieth century, an obsession with anticommunism seems to miss the point, as North-South global conflict replaces East-West, and as religious fundamentalism, domestic and foreign, seems potentially far more destructive—to Jews, to intellectuals, to the very "masses" whom the neocons demean—than does the communism fought over so passionately in the past. □

PAPER: LIBERALISM AND ITS CRITICS SESSION

# Theses on Liberalism

*Eli Zaretsky*

When we speak of liberalism today, we generally mean the idea of the positive or interventionist state—an idea that was first formulated in early-twentieth-century America, greatly advanced during the New Deal, and reformulated again in the 1960s. But the concept of liberalism has a much longer and, I think, still relevant history—one that helps us address the question of how contemporary liberalism lost its enormous twentieth-century mandate and how the best in the liberal tradition might be revived. In tracing that history I will try to distinguish the part of liberalism that is permanent—the idea of individual needs, rights, and choices different from and prior to the ones that belong to groups—from the historically specific con-

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nection of liberalism to property.

The word "liberal" does not appear in English until the fourteenth century, but the liberal idea of freedom depends on older currents: Greek philosophy, Roman law, and a religious tradition that affirms the close relation between individuals and God. When the word first appeared, it referred to a social distinction—the class of free men, as opposed to those who were not free. Freedom for the few was the original meaning. The "liberal arts," for example, were those pursued by men of independent means, as opposed to the "mechanical arts," pursued by those who had to work for a living. As the word evolved it developed diverse meanings but always retained the connotation of freedom—for example, it meant generous, open-minded, unorthodox, and even unrestrained, as in Shakespeare's "Who hath indeed most like a liberall villaine / Confest the vile encounters they have had."

By contrast, the modern idea of liberty arose with the modern state and refers to universal rights held by mere individuals against those in authority. By mere individuals I mean individuals regardless of social role; in other words, rights apply equally to everyone and are not held by a particular rank or class.

The earliest and most important of these rights was religious freedom. Protestants pioneered the idea that, in Luther's words, "God desires to be alone in our consciences"; but it is obvious how important this liberal principle is to modern Jewish history as well. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, liberalism took on additional meanings, such as natural rights and government by consent, without losing the aspect of universality. Contrary to the later Marxist critique, liberal thinkers of this period, such as Spinoza, Hume, and Rousseau, maintained that human beings are *essentially* social—indeed, it was on that basis that they argued that the individual could reason for him- or herself. This point is important because my argument rests on the view that liberalism has always had a social dimension.

If we return to medieval England, we see that what defined a person as "free" or "liberal" as opposed to unfree was, especially, the ownership of alienable property. The serf was no slave but was tied to the land. What brought about the transition from liberty or freedom as an attribute of a specific social class to the idea of universal freedom was the rise of capitalism or, at least, bourgeois society, with its promise that everyone could own property and, in that sense, be free. The dispersal of property was linked to the rise of liberty; the ancient idea of a republic, originally based on an aristocracy, was thereby universalized. Property protected the individual against those in authority.

The tie between property and freedom was especially prominent in the United States, which, in the nineteenth century, linked basic political freedoms to what was called "free labor," meaning, as a newspaper of the 1850s put it, that "every man holds his fortune in his own right arm." Liberalism, in other words, more or less came to coincide with abolitionism and, as historian Eric Foner has written, provided "the moral consensus which allowed the North, for the first time in history, to mobilize an entire society in modern warfare."

Even as the Civil War was being fought, the idea that property guaranteed rights was already obsolete. Whatever benefits property may bestow—and, of course, they are great—it does not protect rights. I own a house in the Midwest. Does the fact that I own this house guarantee my freedom of speech? Of course not. What protects my freedom, insofar as anything does, and in spite of everything we have heard in recent years—and not only from the Reagan right—is the state.

So it was in the period following the Civil War. Slavery had been abolished, and it was unclear what would take its place. Insofar as the freedmen gained any rights at that time, it was because they were able to bring the state—especially the national government—into play. The same situation prevailed during the civil rights movement of the 1960s. Of course, the capacity of Blacks to force the state to protect their rights depended upon political organization—that is, on the balance of forces in the society. When that balance changed, the state retreated to a minimal position—paying lip service to individual rights and denying that rights can pertain to groups. In either case the ownership of property was irrelevant to the question of rights. I do not mean to suggest that the connection between rights and property was accidental, but neither was it inevitable; what it was, was historical.

The increasing importance of the state and the decreasing importance of small private property reflected the fact that as a consequence of industrialization the individual was becoming, in Marx's term, increasingly "socialized" or interdependent. Many early-nineteenth-century liberals advanced the idea that the liberal project—individual freedom—could not be contained within a private-property integument. John Stuart Mill, for example, argued for the significance of emotions and attachments against his father's generation's emphasis on rationality and self-interest. Romantic literature and the discipline of sociology were born from the younger Mill's perception.

During late-nineteenth-century American industrialization, the meaning of property itself was redefined by the state. Corporations were granted rights until then restricted to individuals, and the whole conception of a commons—from which property in early liberal thought had been borrowed—was destroyed. In that context, those who called themselves liberals found

themselves defending an obsolete conception of individualism based on property, education, and breeding against the great socializing institutions of the epoch—mass political parties, unrestricted immigration, the cities, large-scale industry. The liberals, in fact, became conservatives or reactionaries at the same time as a socialist alternative developed based upon a commitment to the increasing collectivization of society.

The liberal tradition that took shape in the early twentieth century—"L-word" liberalism—developed in opposition to both these alternatives. A generation of reformers, such as Jane Addams, Thorstein Veblen, and John Dewey, sought to develop a theory and practice of rights and freedoms (the liberal heritage) appropriate to an industrial society. They called their outlook "progressivism." Just as Marxism and liberalism rested on philosophical and scientific traditions—idealism and empiricism respectively—progressivism involved a philosophical and intellectual upheaval: phenomenology, systems thinking, the social sciences. Progressives sought to shift the focus of classical liberalism from political to social and economic rights, and from adult males to women and children. Progressives argued that the great danger to individual freedom was the large corporation, and that the individual needed the state to counteract that influence. They rewrote the Constitution so that it applied to an industrial society.

Why, then, did their initiative leave us so vulnerable to Ronald Reagan and George Bush? Why, in other words, has twentieth-century liberalism been unsuccessful in establishing a third path between classical liberalism and orthodox Marxism? I believe contemporary liberalism was hampered and compromised from the first *because* it continued to identify private property with freedom. I will not speculate here on the nature of this identification, but I think it is deeply rooted in human character and history. Property—in the sense of possessions—is linked to freedom, but property—in the sense of capital—is not. Twentieth-century liberals neither transcended the limitations of earlier liberalism nor comprehended the depth and scope of the Marxist challenge.

The compromised character of twentieth-century liberalism can be seen both domestically and internationally. Domestically, the twentieth-century American state has been "corporate liberal," meaning that market forces were preserved *within* large-scale bureaucratic organizations. Our fear of statism—to which the attachment to property spoke—meant that we never developed institutions that embodied or articulated collective needs. The individual, not the social group, is the cell or unit of the modern liberal welfare state. The form of the state is public, but the content is private. The balance between public and private does shift, but the basic point is that the public presupposes or includes the private so that the expansion of the public realm is premised on, and thereby expands, the market. Hence, when the welfare state came under attack in the 1970s and 1980s there were interest groups that protested, but the collective ties and obligations, rooted at a deep level and on which any meaningful state program depends, were missing.

*Radicals who came of age in the 1960s defined themselves against the liberal past. These radicals lacked the idea that liberal freedoms were complementary to collective or socialist goals.*

Internationally, the United States sought during World War I to expand liberal principles worldwide. Woodrow Wilson's opponent was autocracy—that is, the Kaiser; Wilson wanted to make the world safe for democracy. What compromised that project was the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917. Ever since, American liberalism has fought on two fronts—against right-wing autocracy and against communism. While the liberal critique of Communist autocracy was valid and important, it also strengthened the identification of private property—now in its corporate form—with freedom. With that identification, twentieth-century liberalism tended to become a conservative and defensive doctrine like its late-nineteenth-century predecessor. The high point of twentieth-century liberalism—the New Deal and World War II period—was a time in which anti-Communist tensions relaxed and the main enemy was on the right. The intensification of the cold war in the late 1940s and early 1950s divided the New Deal coalition long before the desertion of the white South to the Republicans in the 1960s and 1970s. Unions split; reaction dominated the universities, religious institutions, and the media; public debate nearly disappeared. The formation of Americans for Democratic Action (ADA) in 1948 was an effort to equate liberalism with anti-communism. The conservative domination of American Jewish life also dates to this period.

As a result, the radicals who came of age in the 1960s defined themselves *against* the liberal past. This effort crippled them. With very few exceptions the radicals of this generation lacked the idea that liberal freedoms were complementary to collective or socialist goals. The liberalism that survived the 1960s does offer some support to feminist, gay liberation, and antiracist

movements—for example, Dukakis's defense of abortion was based on the liberal principle of freedom of choice. However, Dukakis's liberalism was so defensive and internally divided that it could offer little support to those who feared being "tainted" by what they perceived to be unpopular positions.

In this context, intellectuals in Eastern Europe and in the Soviet Union under Gorbachev have surprisingly emerged as the leading voices in the world advocating the inseparability of individual liberties, communal traditions, and collective needs. In both the Soviet Union and China, market forces have returned along with a new emphasis on democracy and liberal freedoms. But the reason for this change is not that private property protects freedom in the classical sense. The reasons for the market are economic (it may be more practical and efficient) and psychological (human beings need the competitiveness, creativity, and diversity that the market sometimes fosters). That is why Fourier and other utopians envisioned a socialist future that included the market, and why Freud, a classical liberal, thought the Bolsheviks out of touch with human nature. There is a difference, however, between a polity that respects and fosters the market and a polity that is based upon it.

Political theorist John Plamenatz has written: "Liberal ideas of freedom are far more widespread than the readiness to admit that one's ideas of freedom are liberal." Personally, I admit that my ideas of freedom are liberal. More important, I believe that the liberal project—the effort to insure that the content of an individual's freedom is defined only by him or her and not by any collective entity—can never be exhausted. That project is now several centuries old and has been reformulated many times. What has not been achieved, however, is a reformulation of that project appropriate to the intensely socialized world of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Indeed, the abstract separation of individual rights and collective needs may have defined the era we are now apparently, hopefully, leaving. □

PAPER: FEMINIST PERSPECTIVES SESSION

# Victimology

*Jessica Benjamin*

Michael Lerner criticizes the way that the New Left and the women's liberation movement attacked the family, on the grounds that such attacks alienated many people who would otherwise have been interested in our cause. And he notes that many of us who were once the attackers later felt terrorized by our own censure. One could, in fact, censure others for things that one (perhaps unconsciously) suspected as weaknesses in oneself. For many years now, as I have reflected on the history of the left and the women's movement, I have been concerned with understanding this species of attack—the problem of the kind of absolutist, totalizing, and moralizing critique that has been generated by every radical movement since Jacobinism. Some of those movements even ended up murdering large numbers of people. In the United States radical movements, while just as dogmatic and authoritarian, have been relatively nonlethal, owing to their lack of success: a mixed blessing. This historical fact has at times obfuscated, or made Americans indifferent to, the consequences of radical righteousness, as if our powerlessness exonerates us from thinking about the problem.

This problem is intertwined with an issue often alluded to at this conference: the split between the values of liberalism, rationalism, and enlightenment and those of communitarianism, idealism, and the particularism of a specific group. Typically, the liberal stress on individual rights and liberties has been the standpoint from which to critique radical zealotry, while radicals' commitment to transcending the existing order has formed the basis for charges that the liberal side is halfhearted. This conflict between enlightenment and messianism is central to radical political experience, and I think to Jewish politics in particular. At different times I've found myself on different sides of this issue—but ultimately I've come to realize that one needs to be on both sides, to be critical of both sides, and to hold up a kind of tension between them. I suppose the reason I had not realized this sooner is because I had previously misconstrued that position as liberalism; and, in a Marxist way, I thought that contradictions had to be resolved rather than sustained.

What most affected me in formulating my critique of

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radicalism was a set of little stories, of which I'll mention two. I have a cousin who, growing up in the twenties with anarchist parents, made speeches in the park about Sacco and Vanzetti. She used to correspond with our Uncle Aaron, a prominent anarchist who was exiled to Siberia by the Bolsheviks. She once asked him, "What do you do for fun out there?" and he responded, "Dear Sophele, I have no time for fun; there are too many important things to be done." She probably would have gotten the same response thirty years earlier from Aaron's father, a very pious and scholarly Jew, and a Zionist. Although torn by differences in ideology—communism, anarchism, and Zionism—the members of our family had much in common when it came to righteousness, fervor, and asceticism.

*There is a tremendous moral capital in suffering, even if you aren't suffering any more.*

The second story is that some years ago there was an autobiographical account by Peggy Dennis in *Socialist Review* of her years in the Communist party (she was married to Eugene Dennis, who was chair of the party for some time). She related how she had left her small son in the Soviet Union, where they had spent some time being prepared for their work here, and she didn't see him again until he grew up. This story horrified me. It was frightening that people would be willing to sacrifice their children in this way. It was even more horrifying to think that behind the ostensible reason for leaving him—to prevent the American authorities from discovering that they had illegally visited the Soviet Union, as the child now spoke only Russian—probably lay the policy of keeping the children of prominent Comintern officials in the Soviet Union in order to control them politicaliy. Such testimony recurs in the memoirs written by European ex-Communists who, unlike American Communists, had their eyes opened by the fate of those comrades who had fled fascism only to wind up in Stalin's camps.

These stories and others like them led me to a personal revulsion against a certain kind of left-wing idealism and asceticism, a style of righteousness and personal self-sacrifice which, it seemed, led directly into submission to the most ominous authority. It was sad to see that this kind of righteousness—radical guilt, as it were—could be found in a less virulent form right here in our very own women's movement, which had been dedicated to personal as well as public liberation.

Of course, the danger of founding politics on the personal derives, at least in part, from the replication of that old trick: universalizing the particular—as in the socialist movement's universalization of the working class. In the name of the revolutionary subject, the movement makes world-historical claims: when the working class comes to power all human history will change; prehistory will come to an end. In the feminist movement there was a similar construction of a universal out of a particular group at its inception. We thought that as fifty-one percent we were a good candidate for being the universal liberator, the group that embodies the solution to the most universal contradiction, and thus the group with the maximum righteousness.

A certain transition in politics, which occurred in the sixties, was required to pave the way for such thinking: the construction of the idea of the oppressed group as liberator. The notion of a class uniquely situated to oppose the ruling class because its exploitation is the hidden source of power gave way to a more simple proposition that the oppressed would rise up politically. In the sixties we evolved a new kind of "scientific" radicalism, the pursuit of what we might call "victimology," the highest stage of what Lenin never called "left-wing moralism—a gerontological disorder." Victimology is the search in your group's present and past for sufficient amounts of suffering in order to absolutely legitimate and sanctify its righteous aspirations and demands. There has been a considerable contest during the past twenty years among groups engaged in this pursuit.

What we have learned is that there is a tremendous moral capital in suffering, even if you aren't suffering any more. It is like the old Jewish story of the man who was sleeping in a berth on a Russian train when he began to hear sounds from the man in the berth above him: "Oy, oy, oy." When this persisted so long that he despaired of ever getting any sleep, he asked the man what was wrong. The man responded, "Oy, oy, am I thirsty." Convinced that he would get no sleep until the man's thirst was quenched, he procured for him a glass of water. He had almost returned to sleep when he was again disturbed by the man moaning "Oy, oy, oy." "What's wrong now?" he demanded. "Oy," said the sufferer, "oy, was I thirsty!"

Philip Roth, commenting on the misuse of the past, wrote a section in *The Counterlife* in which he ironically proposed that we "remember to forget" the suffering of the Holocaust. The point, of course, is not that we should really forget it, but rather that we need to remember that remembering can be abused—that it is possible to lose all sense of other groups and to create a universal claim for your own particular group.

Women have a good case for focusing on their own suffering, for much abuse has been and continues to be

inflicted on women directly by men. The question is: how to have a politics that recognizes injustice and recognizes abuse and suffering without degenerating into the victimological stance, without engendering the righteousness and sacrifice that has so long accompanied this position. For example, the more righteous a position feminists take about heterosexuality, the more self-scrutinizing they have to be about their own sexuality, regardless of what kind it is. In sexuality there is only a short step from censorship to proscription and inhibition. For most people it's not possible to continually mobilize resentment against women's sexual objectification and violation in pornography and then feel free to have a good time with their own sexuality. Of course, we might suspect that those who are inspired by this righteous position have taken the stance they do because they have suffered under the current organization of sexuality, not because they have enjoyed it. But, whatever the case, the liberation of sexuality in the interest of pleasure has lately been replaced as the goal of the movement; the goal now is to expose heterosexuality as fundamentally organized by the principle of domination.

Of course, this exposure of heterosexual dominance and submission is filled with its own passion. You can mobilize human passion in reaction formation just as much as you can mobilize it directly. The fantasy of transgressing norms and boundaries that is the turn-on in pornography is also mobilized in the campaign against pornography. In this sense, the antipornography movement inherits the side of zealous radicalism that is idealist and absolutist. The problem with the liberal, rational, Enlightenment position of universal liberties is that it tends not to mobilize any sort of passion. When people listen to the argument that censorship of pornography in any form will erode civil liberties, although many of them are persuaded, they often go to sleep listening. Most people are highly charged only by the evocation of an enemy (the Other), or by the possibility of transgression, or by the idea of putting an end to all transgression. So people are turned on by the issue of pornography, with its revulsion against transgression and violence and its offer of a position of righteousness, more than they are turned on by practical struggles for concrete things of direct interest to many women.

There is no easy solution to this dilemma. Everything that we can mobilize in the way of human passion has a dangerous or a repressive side. But without some form



of vision and passion, we can go nowhere. We therefore recognize that there needs to be a constant tension between passion and self-awareness, between being "into" things and standing critically outside them. My personal solution to this dilemma is to add to these opposites a combination of irony, humor, and self-criticism. The kind of self-criticism I mean is not that which says, "Comrades, let us list all our errors and correct them immediately." It is based on life without historical teleology, in which we do not imagine that being right now can absolve us of responsibility for the past, or that right and wrong will be lifted above ambiguity by an objective historical process. It is my hope that the next phase of our movement may embody a very different kind of spirit, one which allows us to be committed while seeing the drawbacks of that commitment, to respect the reality of suffering without making it a brand of righteousness, to articulate a vision that does not demand human sacrifice, to play even with what is serious, and above all to accept—not resign ourselves to—living with contradiction. □

# Hospice

*L. S. Asekoff*

In this clement season with its surprising roses
The lady of the house is at home to strangers.
Under eaves of the mourning dove
Windchimes tinkle icily. Solemn whispers describe
The journey soon to be taken.
Close your eyes, breathe deeply, you will see
Black dots on a map, points of light in a firmament.
Now repeat after me: We take a train ... We take a train ...
To go to ... to go to ... Tarascon ... Tarascon ... or Rouen ...
or Rouen ...
& we take ... & we take ... death ... death ... to go to ... to
go to ...
A star ... a star ... Yet after they leave
She is alone with the pain again, & the pearly glow—
Grains of hope on a night tray.

Between sleeping, waking, between one pill & another,
Her daughters appear—the dark one bearing a rainbow of wishes,
The pale one her shy downcast smile.
How long, my darlings? How long is a piece of string?
The good weaver teaches her art to others, so
She tells them about the rabbi's red daughters,
The woman who lost her babies to the sea,
The angel of Ravensbrueck & the three brothers:
Mystic graphologist, Blau Weiss pioneer, & he
Who gave her the gold ring she still wears.
Where are they now? On this planet of ashes
God winks—whole worlds disappear. Children, she says,
Life never tires asking its question,
& this also is part of it, an experience
Not to be missed. Still, after so many farewells,
she is surprised
How the sweet sadness sweeps over her
Wave after wave. Perhaps there is no end
To what we can learn &, yes, time for tears, too.
Staring at a blue-veined arm, she confesses,
I feel like a spy in my own country.

Home, for a time, now & healing,
Amid flowering lemon, feathery eucalyptus,
The improbable richness of California winter,
In this house of women without men
She practices the patient arts,
Reading the memoirs of Mandelstam's widow,
Talking on the telephone to concerned distant voices,
Sewing a pearl button on her favorite nightgown.
Just yesterday, propped at the window, she wrote:
I feel slowly my being drift out my fingertips,
The miracle of my transplanted life,
Yellow roses in the blue venetian vase
D. brought me from Murano
& hanging over it, quite by chance,
The black madonna of Czenstochow ...

Early this morning she wakes to cowbells in Switzerland.
Out the white world, the fog world,
A shape drifts toward her—Anna, the beekeeper's daughter,
In her pale veil, long white gloves.
How slowly she moves down the winding path
Gathering in her arms one by one
The honeyed light from darkening hives.
Beyond her, winter stars glimmer—ports of call.

## The Wrestler

*Richard S. Chess*

When that stinking angel Ed, the smartest boy
    in violet shorts, lifted and dropped
me to the mat, when that slob landed
    on me, I went deaf to the skinny birds
who ringed the mat with jeers,
    heard only my breath escaping.
For a dizzy moment I confused him
    with one of the dumbbell-tough thugs
who flicks his ashes at girlish boys,
    but then I flipped onto my safe belly
and rose, ass first, to shake this nuisance
    from my back.
He dropped me by the thighs this time
    and worked my shoulder blades
toward the floor. No prayer could save me.
    On the count of three Ed rose
like vapor and vanished down a dark corridor
    toward some book, no doubt,
leaving me, the blessed son of Isaac,
    crushed on the matted earth
from which my children have risen
    to take revenge.

## Anger

*Caroline Finkelstein*

Selma, a child not a child not a child but a Jew,
goes to the store for milk. This is Lodz
where rumor has the chickens plotting ...

    In their necklaces of lice the chickens sway
and gabble at their prayers as if ...
as if the holy Sabbath were a barnyard!

Soon. Soon. This is Lodz the dogs will eat.

FICTION

# Edict

*Edith Pearlman*

The three daughters were convinced of it: their widowed mother could no longer manage. Arthritis and angina would fuddle anybody; and the West Side was full of menace. Mrs. Levine in the apartment downstairs had just died. Cecilia simply had to accept her sister Irma's invitation to move South. She had to listen to her children.

She listened to them. When had she not listened to them? From the moment that each opened her baby mouth Cecilia Furst had been alert to various messages: infant cries, tales from kindergarten, adolescent furies, anecdotes of love. How many early mornings had she lain awake attending to the traffic on West End Avenue as if Toscanini were conducting, with her ear cocked for a particular solo instrument: a key in the latch. She had heard their names called at commencements and awards ceremonies. She had thrilled to their confident "I do"s.

"Listen to me, Mom." It was the oldest, fresh from the Boston shuttle, recklessly abandoning her law office to spend the day talking at her mother. "Of course Manhattan is more interesting than Sarasota. But what use are you making of New York these days? When we were little you trundled us to museums and shows. You were a terrific guide. We're schlepping culture with our own kids now. Enrichment, it's called. But you—when was the last time you went to a concert? You've withdrawn from New York—really you have."

Much *she* knew, this handsome harridan. Ah, the oldest was Ernst all over again, Ernst in woman's garb, seeking to overpower her with argument as Ernst always had sought, and succeeding—again like Ernst—only in making her silent. "The counterman called you 'Mrs. Levine,' Mom. Doesn't he know which ... person is which? Don't you like your salad?"

She liked her salad just fine. She preferred to take time with meals. And the counterman knew exactly which old lady was which, whatever names he called them by. He knew that she was the one who on a rainy afternoon loved to sit in the booth near the register with a cup of tea and a book, and make an occasional comment to him, and receive a civil reply. "Would you like to go to the Frick?" her daughter said. *One last time* (but she didn't say that).

The middle daughter drove up from Washington and spent the night on the living room couch. "Oh, how I miss the big old apartment," she gabbled the next morning. "Listen, Mom, New York's a jungle. I fear for you alone on the streets, honestly I do. As if two teenagers weren't enough aggravation, now I have to worry about my little mummy. Aunt Irma's a doll. And she's got a balcony!"

*Look who's talking....* "Bacon?" Cecilia asked from the stove.

"Listen, *I* came to wait on *you*," yawned the bosomy, scatterbrained, sexy, twice-divorced woman, the spitting image of Ernst's mother. "Shall we go over to Lexington after breakfast? I want to get some buttons."

*When I was a girl, my New York was Jerome Avenue and Hunter College and the Palace. Now my city has shrunk to these few blocks near Columbus. Home. The butcher ...*

Amy came. The baby. Amy came in from the college in New Jersey where she and her husband taught. The trip took an hour by train. She made it frequently. This visit seemed like any other, but both parent and child knew it was different. Amy had been primed by her sisters. Sitting beside her mother on a bench in the tiny park, she presented all the arguments: Irma's sweetness; Florida's climate; the amenities and facilities of Sarasota; the indifferent and even threatening face that New York turned towards a person who was alone and not altogether well.

When she finished speaking Amy breathed deeply, inhaling the fragrance of the linden trees.

"When I was a girl," Cecilia began, and then stopped.

"Go on," said Amy's soft voice.

"When I was a girl my New York was Jerome Avenue and Hunter College and the Palace. After that, when I

*Edith Pearlman's short stories have been published in national magazines and literary quarterlies. She is the recipient of a PEN award and two O. Henry prizes.*

was married, and moneyed, and blessed with you and the others, I found Bergdorf's and Schrafft's and Carnegie Hall. Now my city has shrunk to these few blocks near Columbus. Home. The butcher ... you met him...."

"What a pink face he has," Amy marveled.

"The dry cleaner still alters. Olga the electrolysist. Señora Perez of the bodega."

"The card shop, with its books for rent," Amy continued for her. "What's the name of that interesting proprietress: Miss ... ? "

"Flannery. If you think *you've* got troubles ... "

"The movie house."

"Though it no longer does revivals."

"Aunt Irma is a bore, I suppose," said Amy.

Cecilia nodded. "Though there are worse things than boredom."

"There's terror."

"I'm not terrified."

"Then stay," said the child of her heart.

That night, washing her plate and glass in the cramped kitchen (she too missed the big old apartment), Cecilia envisioned herself during the years to come. Only slightly bent, only occasionally using the cane, she would maintain these three rooms, manage her little income, pity the poor, ignore the rich. She would continue to patronize the lending library, the little park, the little Señora. A Lifetime New Yorker, the obituary would say.

... growing feeble. Growing ill. Growing stubborn and demanding. Confined by pain to the apartment and then to the bed. Waiting for the visits of the Home Health Aide. Descended upon once a month by an emphatic lady lawyer and every so often by a blowsy divorcée. Attended to frequently by Amy. Amy lived practically around the corner, Amy's sisters would be quick to point out. Cecilia would become Amy's responsibility. She would become Amy's burden. She would surrender to her own needs, and turn into a despot. She would become Amy's oppressor.

So she abandoned this home of a lifetime. She departed in the same dignified manner adopted a century earlier by her grandmother, who left her own village by order of the Tsar. □

FICTION

# The Confession

*Robert Cohen*

Malovich, gruff of voice, called one evening to talk about loneliness. "Not my own, you understand. This isn't a confession. I can't stand confessions."

"Fine," I said. "I believe you."

"There's this friend of mine," said Malovich. "Call him thirty years old, thereabouts. He doesn't go out, my friend. Not with women, men, nothing. Even a movie is inconceivable. Parties aren't worth mentioning. Occasionally he'll attend a political demonstration in front of the United Nations. He has values, this guy. He's informed. He reads magazines. Do you follow me so far?"

"Which magazines?"

"Don't be a wise guy."

Malovich is a lawyer, a busy man, given to accusing silences and snappish admonitions. He drinks twelve, thirteen cups of coffee a day. Everything about him, even his shoulders, gives the impression of a tight coil. At that moment I felt picky and trivial, asking such questions. "Forget it," I said. "Go on with your story."

"It's not a story. A case study. A biographical sketch. Everything people say isn't necessarily a story." He threw me one of his silences for a moment, then collected himself and went on. "Understand, he wasn't always like this. In college he roomed with people, made friends with Blacks, homosexuals, teaching assistants. A popular, witty guy. Plenty of women. Okay, it was easy then, the point is he's not by nature a depressive person. Pensive, possibly. Occasionally a brooding fit. But no gloom-bird. Anyway, now it's different. No particular reason—I'm told it's like that sometimes with people. Wake up one morning and you're not who

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you were. Very confusing."

"Wait a minute," I said. "Are you talking about Rosenman, by any chance?"

Malovich snorted. "Rosenman? Who talks about Rosenman? His own wife has nothing to say about him. I'm talking about someone a little more complex. Subtle. Enigmatic, if you will. The thing that's interesting about this person is how everybody likes him so much. 'What a terrific guy,' people say when they've just met him, 'let's make him a friend for life.' They honestly say these things. Also, he gets stopped on the street all the time, because people think he's someone they already know: Joe Blow, Herman Dreck, whoever. He's always very nice about it, too. I mean, it's an ambiguous situation, somebody comes up to you and thinks you're their old friend Herman Dreck. 'It's the face,' they say. 'I coulda swore,' they say. Meanwhile, he goes home and sits in the dark with the radio on. It makes you want to cry, I swear to God."

"Oh, of course," I say. "You must mean Kronick. The poor bastard."

"What are you talking about, Kronick? Last I heard, he was back in the Peace Corps. Third time, I believe. Can't take the States, that guy. No, this person I mean has more, I don't know—"

"Fortitude? Courage? Spirit?"

"Don't get excited. Call it arrogance. Call it whatever you like. One last thing about this guy I know. He's been out of it for so long he actually writes down what he's going to say to people in advance. On his lap there's a little notepad with cryptic expressions he uses in conversation. A while ago it was a little ditty about the Middle East, after that a clever remark on the nuclear threat. I'll tell you this: they aren't bad, his little remarks. Someday he should publish them, maybe. Most people won't ever find out they're canned, unless they connect with each other behind his back. But they rarely do, do they?"

There was a sharp whistle from his end of the line.

"That's the tea," said Malovich. "I put the damn pot on low, but there you are: things build up, need release, make noises. You follow?"

"Sure," I said. "Sure I follow."

"And I suppose it's obvious, who I'm talking about. That this isn't really hypothetical."

"Of course. I understand, I tell you. Loneliness, it's hard to stomach. It was smart of you to call, let it out. I'm sympathetic. I'm your friend."

"No you're not. Haven't you been listening? I'm talking about *you*, idiot."

"Me?"

"Of course you. That's how far gone you are, you can't even tell the difference, real and hypothetical. So here's what I want to know. Now that you've stepped outside of it all, what is there?"

"I don't know what you mean."

"Don't play simple, you're an intelligent person. What I mean is, you look around and what do you see?"

"I'll call you back," I said, and hung up. Ten minutes later I called Malovich, breathing hard. I still heard the whistle on his end of the line. "I see everything," I said. "Everything."

Malovich thought about this for a moment. "No kidding, everything?"

"Everything," I said.

"Be specific," he said, "Me. Do you see me?"

"No," I admitted. "I don't see you."

Malovich grunted in approval. "Well, I don't see you either, pal. That's what I wanted to tell you. That's the whole story."

I said I knew that. There was a short silence. The two of us hung up at approximately the same time, then turned to face the things we saw around us. □

FILM REVIEW

# Framing Vietnam

*Jenefer P. Shute*

The recent boom in popular movies about the Vietnam War has inspired a miniboom of articles about why there are so many movies about the Vietnam War. What's interesting about these articles is how little attention they've paid, on the whole, to the Robin Williams vehicle *Good Morning, Vietnam* (1987). Most critics have treated it, if at all, as a peripheral phenomenon, a movie set in Vietnam during the war but not really "about" the war. On the contrary, it seems to me that this particular film is highly significant as a symptom: a symptom of the devolution of public discourse about the war, from deep shame to near shamelessness.

Somewhere around 1985, after a decade of resolutely avoiding this political hot potato, Hollywood decided it was safe—and profitable—to address Vietnam. Historical amnesia and Rambo-style revisionism had apparently done their work, and the "national trauma" was now fit to be recycled as action-adventure for a generation too young to remember or too Yup to care. Even before the current wave of exploitation quickies, the four "big," ambitious Vietnam films to date—Michael Cimino's *The Deer Hunter* (1978), Francis Ford Coppola's *Apocalypse Now* (1979), Oliver Stone's *Platoon* (1986), and Stanley Kubrick's *Full Metal Jacket* (1987)—had foundered in their quest for a cinematic vocabulary adequate to the task. The war movie as a genre, predicated as it was on unambiguous heroism, had, almost overnight, become quaintly obsolete.

Though there are profound differences among these four films—most obviously, those from the seventies seek an American myth grandiose enough for the subject, while those from the eighties share the ostensible project of demystification—what they have in common is a profound avoidance of political inquiry. Instead, the war is cast as a moral and psychological crisis, a rite of passage for the individual and a deep wound to America's self-image—which it was, but not that only, and not that first.

Granted, all films about Vietnam face a representational problem hitherto unique: that of portraying a war whose repertoire of images is already numbingly familiar from the nightly news. This problem may partly explain the swerve toward mythic inflation, especially in those films made shortly after the war (*Apocalypse Now* and *The Deer Hunter*). But even *Platoon,* hailed for its you-are-here, war-is-hell realism, resolves itself into the tidy dichotomies of the morality play. And, though *Full Metal Jacket* directs its cool, corrosive irony at precisely those myths that make war and war movies possible, Kubrick remains too removed to commit himself to political questions. His film vanishes finally into its own distance, leaving, like a cinematic Cheshire cat, only a smirk behind.

Cimino's much-hailed and much-derided *Deer Hunter* is, in about equal measures, a paean to the holy rites of male bonding (which, despite death and mutilation, seem to make war almost worthwhile) and a self-important deployment of genre conventions. Like the western, Cimino's epic establishes the dual poles of "nature" (the realm of male comradeship and the noble "one-shot" ethos of the hunt) and "civilization" (the female domain of domestic entrapment). Like the western hero, Cimino's protagonist, Michael (Robert De Niro), lives by a stoic code that sets him apart and helps him survive. But *The Deer Hunter* fails, ultimately, to make a political connection between its western iconography and the Vietnam War. Its imagery gestures vaguely toward history, announcing portentous intentions but producing, finally, mere bombast.

Though Cimino effectively shows the dark satanic mills of his characters' working lives and these characters' ritual affirmations of community, he establishes no continuity between the society they inhabit and the society that sends them to Vietnam. Vietnam is something that simply happens to them, somewhere they just have to go—

*Historical amnesia and Rambo-style revisionism had apparently done their work, and the "national trauma" was now fit to be recycled as action-adventure for a generation too young to remember or too Yup to care.*

and this powerlessness is not rendered problematic, as it could have been. The characters' propulsion into the war is as arbitrary as the sudden, audacious cut Cimino uses to jolt the viewer from cozy Clairton, Pennsylvania, to the hell of Vietnam. For Michael and his buddies, the war is simply a given—to be seized, certainly, as a test of manhood, but as uncontrollable as a roll of the dice or a spin of the chambers in Russian roulette.

Russian roulette is Cimino's governing metaphor for the war, and it's a perverse one at that. Not only does the fantasy of sadistic Vietcong forcing American prisoners to play Russian roulette have no historical basis whatsoever, but, as an image of the individual's relation to the war, it suggests only chance, accident, fate. Wars have about as little causal logic as Russian roulette, *The Deer Hunter* implies, and they can

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only be out-toughed, not understood, prevented, or resisted.

Coppola's vision in *Apocalypse Now* is more historical—if anything, its historical reach exceeds its grasp—but the film incorporates so many mythic strains that it collapses into incoherence, a triumph of spectacle over sense. Over the murky, something-evil-at-the-heart-of-man moral vision of Conrad's *Heart of Darkness,* Coppola has imposed at least two incompatible narrative modes: a jaded voice-over, derived from the hard-boiled tradition, that turns Willard's (the protagonist's) mission into a culpable quest through the jungle's mean streams; and a hyperbolic, hallucinatory visual style that presents war as a bad acid trip (or as a nightmare Disneyland, or, simply, as spectacle).

Through this imagery, heightened by an acid-rock sound track, Coppola explores the continuity between Vietnam and sixties culture back home. Coppola's preferred transition here is the dissolve, with its psychedelic associations, and his imagery aspires toward hallucinatory absurdity (the soldiers surf during a firefight—a firefight engaged to secure precisely that wave) and apocalyptic beauty (sunsets and infernos). The grunts, described as "rock and rollers with one foot in the grave," read about Manson en route to mass murders of their own. Wagner blasts out during a helicopter attack, suggesting an entire cultural heritage gone berserk. But what, exactly, is the diagnosis?

The diagnosis, it seems, is offered by the briefing officer at the beginning of the film. By way of explaining Kurtz, he tells Willard: "There's a conflict in every human heart between the rational and irrational, between good and evil, and good does *not* always triumph. Sometimes the dark side overcomes. . . ." That's it? All the ponderous cultural references, all the evocations of Disneyland and Manson and Playboy Bunnies, all the images of a society swung crazily out of control, in order to blame, finally, Essential Evil? (Kurtz, someone tells Willard, is "worse than crazy; he's evil.") Coppola, following Conrad (but why Conrad, for *this* war?), presents the issue as ultimately a psychological one, something to do with the "human heart" and its wiring. This may conceivably be a way to explain wars of imperialist aggression, but somewhere along the way, despite a few references to "their" lies, a whole category of analysis has been sidestepped—the political.

*Platoon,* the only one of these movies made by an ex-grunt, has an even more schematic moral vision than *Apocalypse Now,* though its mythic trappings are humbler, tending more toward genre film and morality play than *Götterdämmerung.* Unlike Coppola, Stone does not present war as spectacle: his skillfully staged firefight scenes work on the nerves and suggest that war is not pretty, perhaps not even fun. But the movie's much-touted "realism"—belied in any case by improbable jungle lighting—turns out to be a thin stylistic veneer covering a conventional, not to mention melodramatic, coming-of-age story. From the opening shots of a plane's metallic maw disgorging raw recruits into Vietnam, to the final image of their return trip "bagged and tagged," *Platoon* focuses on the spiritual development of its blank-slate grunt.

Unlike other Vietnam protagonists, Chris (Charlie Sheen) knows why he's there: he volunteered. He doesn't see why only poor kids should go to war, and, besides, he wants to do what his dad did in World War II and his granddad did in World War I. This qualifies him, in the film's terms, as a "crusader." Fighting for the soul of this bemused crusader, and presiding over his initiation into the twin mysteries of killing and comradeship, are the platoon's two sergeants: Barnes, who embodies the massacring spirit of My Lai, and Elias, a tortured Christ figure. Between them they create what Chris calls "a civil war in the platoon—fighting each other when we should be fighting them."

What's interesting about this civil war, however, is that it never mirrors the "civil war" that rent the U.S. during Vietnam. What divides Barnes from Elias is not the political question of their presence or purpose in Vietnam, but the ethical one of how to conduct their killing once they're there. Elias wants to play by the rules, Barnes doesn't; but the rules themselves remain fundamentally unchallenged. In the film's moral universe, Barnes and Elias become Good and Evil personified, fighting for Chris's soul, turning him into "the child born of these two fathers." Once again, the conflict is internalized, translated into a personal moral crisis. Though the voice-over preaches that "in Vietnam we fought ourselves and the enemy is in us," this enemy is conceived apolitically, as Pure Evil rearing its ugly head when Barnes turns to strike Chris down, meat-cleaver-style, his eyes demonically aglow.

Kubrick's *Full Metal Jacket,* the most complex and analytic of these Vietnam films, is much too cerebral to entertain any image of pure evil: Kubrick is concerned with dismantling myths rather than with rehabilitating them. Instead of placing the viewer in a voyeuristic position relative to war-as-spectacle, Kubrick subjects him (and, more problematically, her) to a prolonged brutalization analogous to basic training. Just as the grunts are violated, dehumanized, and infantilized by their drill sergeant, so the viewer is assaulted by a relentlessly distasteful experience. In the second half of the film, the messy, nerve-jangling confusion of urban warfare takes over, leaving the viewer, like the grunts, rudderless amidst random carnage.

If Cimino's governing metaphor for the Vietnam War is Russian roulette, Coppola's a bad acid trip, and Stone's is morality play, then Kubrick's is a garbage dump or refuse heap. His green and gray urban dreamscapes under a pale, drained sky suggest the detritus of a civilization rather than (as in Coppola and Stone) the rank undergrowth of the unconscious. Stylistically, too, Kubrick's cool irony picks over the fragments, turning up what's left of once-functional myths and fables. In the film's most self-reflexive moment, the grunts, interviewed for what they call "Vietnam—The Movie," produce a series of live-TV clichés and glib, Godardesque allusions to Custer and John Wayne. But such knowing evocations, like all the film's potentially political moments, dissolve in Kubrick's all-pervasive irony, which affords the viewer no reference point or point of emotional purchase. As if to ensure this effect, Kubrick has sealed off his protagonist, Private Joker, behind a smirking, smart-alecky mask so that the only emotion one can impute to the character is cynicism.

As Adrian Cronauer, professional smart aleck, Robin Williams offers the final and most unnerving vision of

the war in *Good Morning, Vietnam:* the war as a big joke. Cronauer, we are to believe, is heroic because, as a DJ on the military radio station, he resists his immediate superiors in order to tell the grunts the "truth" about the war. Having established these minimal political credentials for its protagonist, the film feels free to turn everything else into fodder for its peculiarly juvenile, scatological humor (presented here as somehow "liberating," like rock and roll). In this context, harassing Vietnamese women on the street is boyish high spirits; teaching uncomprehending Vietnamese adults in an English class to parrot obscenities is "relating" to them; and showering dollar bills on the members of a Vietnamese woman's family, who chaperone her on a date, is merely endearing. The smug condescension implicit throughout is epitomized in Cronauer's tone when he discovers that a Vietnamese friend is a "terrorist," implicated in blowing up a bar frequented by Americans: "I fought to let you into that bar and now you blow the place up," he reproaches him, a picture of paternalism betrayed.

If it had used the Vietnam War merely as a setting for tasteless, if xenophobic, jokes, the effect of *Good Morning, Vietnam* might be negligible—yet another exploitation movie (albeit one based loosely on "fact," the life of the real Adrian Cronauer). But through its comic structure, *Good Morning, Vietnam* does implicitly offer an interpretation, which is finally an exculpation, of the American role in Vietnam. Cronauer's conflict is always with his immediate superior, the humorless, venal, chronically uptight Sergeant Major Dickerson. Above Dickerson, however, is the benevolent and basically fair General Taylor, who thinks Cronauer is one hell of a guy and ensures that justice prevails by transferring Dickerson to Guam. The power structure, in other words, is fundamentally benign: a just, generous Big Daddy presides over the military, keeping a twinkling eye on things and guaranteeing that decency reigns. Sure, Cronauer ultimately gets shipped out—hobnobbing with "terrorists" is not part of Taylor's benevolent scheme—but not before he teaches the happy, smiling Vietnamese to play baseball (with melons, *faute de mieux*) in an orgy of goodwill that cancels all conflict.

Even with this rosy resolution, it's hard to make a movie set in Saigon in 1965 without showing a little violence. So director Barry Levinson does provide a few hints that, in addition to a constant comedy act over Armed Forces Radio, there's a war going on. A bar is blown up—but we see only American casualties. Cronauer gets a nasty surprise when his jeep drives over a land mine—but this encounter derives directly from the personal animosity of his superior officer, who has knowingly sent him into danger. And then there is an ironic montage sequence, to Louis Armstrong's "What a Wonderful World," that shows a series of war images, some brutal, emphasizing the victimization of the Vietnamese. But this brief string of decontextualized images, sealed off from the rest of the film and proffered with the cheap irony of the Armstrong accompaniment, serves merely as a siphon, so the narrative can return, unaffected, to its anodyne task. Never mind, *Good Morning, Vietnam* tells its audience: the war was a big joke, and, anyway, decent people were running it.

It's hard to imagine a more cynical take on the war, but it suggests that, in mass culture at least, any serious attempt to grapple with Vietnam—with the war in the past and the war in the present—has tacitly been abandoned. Shame and stylistic tact have yielded to shamelessness; the once raw and painful wound has been grafted over by celluloid surgery; having assimilated what used to seem indigestible, Hollywood now moves implacably in on its new fodder: the civil rights movement. □

ART REVIEW

# Picasso in Vallauris

*Marx W. Wartofsky*

Vallauris is an unprepossessing Provençal town in the hills behind Cannes. It is pleasant but not charming, full of pottery workshops that turn out everything from mustard jars, wine jugs, and monogrammed ashtrays to well-made crockery, ambitious and kitschy fruit bowls and lamp bases, and accurate and expensive reproductions of Picasso's ceramic masterpieces, made in the very same workshops in which he created them and had them fired. At the top of the main shopping street, rue Clemenceau, which climbs up from a busy maze-like intersection, is a church, fronting on a large open square shaded by trees. In the middle of the square a tall bronze male figure carries a sheep in its arms, seeming to present it to the town. The statue—over seven feet high—is ruggedly sculpted, with a vigorous texture that at once suggests the strength and peasant rudeness of the figure and the toughness of the metal in which it is cast. Yet there is an air of ease and calm to the figure itself—a goodwill and simplicity, suggested by the bearded face and the patient posture. It is a cast of Picasso's *Man with a Sheep,* presented by the artist as a gift to the town where he lived and worked from 1946 to 1954.

Mornings in Vallauris, the square

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Man with a Sheep *by Picasso, Town Square, Vallauris, France. Photo by Carol Gould.*

turns into an open fruit and vegetable market, the wooden stalls covered by bright orange and blue awnings against the burning sun of the south. The man with the sheep stands in the middle of it all, his pedestal a convenient place for storing the empty fruit crates and overripe melons—the detritus of the marketplace. Rags and newspapers fill the space between the man's ankles. The townspeople, the truck farmers, and the shoppers are comfortable with the presence of the man with the sheep, and he appears to be equally at home among them. Picasso, in persuading the town fathers to accept his gift, gave them some pause when he told them he wanted the statue to be erected in a public place where children could climb all over it and dogs could piss on it peacefully.

Philadelphia is an unprepossessing city, spread out enormously on a flat coastal plain, shading into affluent suburbs to the west. It has a booming downtown business district with skyscrapers and hotels, and the narrow eighteenth-century streets and colonial brick row houses in the middle of the city have a preserved charm. Recognizing its dual nature early on—situated as it then was between the materialism of the Bourbon and planter South of the Carolinas and Virginia, and the spiritualism of the puritan and intellectual North of Boston—Samuel Adams called Philadelphia "the pineal gland of the United States" (a sobriquet beyond the philosophical sophistication of most of our later politicians). In the Philadelphia Museum of Art there is another cast of Picasso's *Man with a Sheep,* this one a gift from R. Sturgis and Marion B. F. Ingersoll. In 1980 it was shown at the great Picasso retrospective in the Museum of Modern Art in New York, together with a small number of the countless India ink wash drawings that Picasso had made as preliminary sketches in preparation for the sculpture. The cool and elegant settings of the two museums are far from the market square in Vallauris, and the man with the sheep seems different there as well.

Here's a third scene: Paris under the Nazi occupation. Summer of 1942. Picasso lives and works in his large two-story-high studio in the rue des Grands-Augustins. He starts making preliminary sketches for the *Man with a Sheep.* These sketches proliferate through 1943, as the idea of a large statue emerges. He has a seven-foot armature made. A Spanish friend manages to obtain a huge amount of modeling clay, hard to get in those conditions. Sometime during the next year, working at "incredible speed" in a single session from early morning until night (as Picasso's biographer Roland Penrose tells it), Picasso finishes the statue. His friend, the poet Paul Eluard, is present in the studio throughout this time, sitting at a table and writing. The weight of the clay is too much for the armature, and the work begins to wobble. Picasso rigs some ropes to hold it in place and has to support the sheep with metal wire to keep it from falling out of the man's arms. Given the weakness of the armature, Picasso quickly arranges to have a plaster cast made of the work.

There it remains standing, in white plaster, in the middle of his studio, until the end of the war, when it is finally cast in bronze. There is a photograph by Robert Capa, taken in September 1944, after the liberation, showing Picasso sitting with his dog in the studio, with the plaster cast of the *Man with a Sheep.* The figure in white plaster catches the light in the studio very differently from the later bronze, and in its birthplace, so to speak, and in the presence of the hand and eye of the artist who made it, it presents a different aspect than does the man in the museum or the one in the marketplace. Are they all the same artwork?

Obviously yes. Obviously no.

Obviously yes: They are all the same since they are all (literally) cast in the same mold. That is, all three casts are made from the negative or inverse impression of the original clay figure on the armature in Picasso's studio (or perhaps from a secondary mold made from the first plaster cast of the statue). In any case, the casts of the *Man with a Sheep* are physical reproductions of the same original work, and, in this sense, our access to any of these casts puts us in the presence of the same artwork in terms of its spatial configuration, size, and surface texture (disregarding, for the moment, variations in the casting material, the finish or patina, the accuracy or quality of the cast, and the color).

Obviously no: Each of the casts—the first plaster cast, the Vallauris cast, and the Philadelphia cast—is different, if one takes into account differences in the way in which the works are presented, differences in their ambience or context, differences in modes of access to the work. This is a pretty simple point. Plainly, an artwork is more than its physical embodiment (though without it the artwork would be a shadowy thing indeed). In great part, how something is seen or understood, or the ways in which it *could* be seen or understood, makes it the artwork that it is; and these ways include how it *has been* seen and understood in the history of its reception—what we might call the work's own cultural biography, or "personal" history (to anthropomorphize wildly).

In a way somewhat analogous to human individuals (who are more than their physical embodiment in flesh, bone, and tissue by virtue of what we might loosely call social, cultural, or personal properties), the work of art, as a cultural artifact, is more than its physical embodiment, by virtue of what we may call its aesthetic properties: for example, the play of colors or shapes; the character of line or configuration; the texture and movement of surface; the economical or congenial or illuminating or apt expression of ideas or feelings; the proportion or rightness or fit of parts, passages, and sequences; and the complex properties of mood or intimation, of grace or

beauty or strength or delicacy. That's a relatively uncontroversial point: artworks are not simply material entities of pigment, stone, linen canvas, and paper, even if minimalist artists want to focus our attention on such elements. The more controversial question is whether artworks are constituted as the artworks they are by their contexts, their settings, by the modes of access we have to them, by what we know about them or about the artist.

Now, if the three casts of rue des Grands-Augustins, Vallauris, and Philadelphia are casts of the "same" work, all three must surely present the same aesthetic properties, just as three different printings of a play by Shakespeare (reproducing the same words in the same sequence) obviously present the same aesthetic properties. But what of three different performances of a play? Here, differing interpretations may produce *very* different versions of the same play. *Richard III,* for example, has had widely variant presentations. But the *Man with a Sheep* (at least in bronze, in two of the three versions or copies) isn't "interpreted" in its various casts; what we have is more like two copies of the same text. Presumably, interpretation comes later.

There must be, it would seem, something identical, which gets interpreted; otherwise, the phrase "interpretation of" has no reference. Is there, in the artwork, an *uninterpreted given* prior to all interpretations—the artwork *an sich* (in itself), to borrow a Hegelian locution? The problem with this notion is that such a self-subsisting work would lie outside any possible experience of it, or any alternative understanding of it. It would, in effect, be inaccessible to us, unless we were graced with an innocent eye—that is, some pristine and primitive vision of the work as it "really is," in itself, *pre*-interpretively, or, as one might say, "objectively." Short of this, access ambiguates. Differences in modes of access yield different works—or different interpretations, different readings of the "same" work. But then, what makes it the same work? Problems....

Does difference in access make a difference in the work, or in the different presentations or "copies" of the "same" work? Certainly it makes a difference in the aspect or appearance of the artwork to us, and in that sense it makes a difference in what the artwork reveals to us, or what we apprehend. Here's where "copies," or reproductions of the "same" work, diverge. But divergences are no small matter. They leave open the question of what the "real" work is, or whether there is some canonical version of it, or whether there is some convergence among the different versions that approximates its "true nature." Suppose that for the sake of argument we want to hang on completely to objectivity or to platonic realism. The aesthetic properties that make the artwork what it is, that constitute its identity, that individuate it as that artwork and no other, all exist *in* the (ideal, essential, real, original) artwork—as its form, or "in" its physical embodiment.

Still, answering which of these objective properties can come to be apprehended by me or by you, or can become part of our experience of the work, or can reveal or show themselves, depends on aspect and access. According to this criterion of realism, two different modes of access may reveal different properties of the "same" artwork. Or, colloquially, they may reveal two "different" artworks residing in the "same" form. (As we might say of an acquaintance, "He's an entirely different person at home from the one he is at work"; or about oneself, "I'm not myself today." We're not talking about schizophrenia. Just about context and variation.)

But just what is "access" in the case of artworks? In other words, how does one get at a work of art, what does one have to go through to approach it, and how close can one get to it? Closeness is a crucial notion here, since by closeness I mean not simply physical proximity to the work so that one can look at it freely, at distance and angles of one's own choosing and at one's leisure; but aesthetic closeness, or familiarity with the personality or character of the work, with its local dialect, so to speak. Such closeness requires knowing the native language or learning it—that is, understanding the formal and expressive qualities of the work and what Ernst Gombrich calls the "vocabulary of forms" of the artist, or of the school or style.

Now, back to the *Man with a Sheep.* The cast in the marketplace in Vallauris has a distinctive ambience, no doubt. It is public, accessible as public art is, part of the scene in ways that museum



*Detail of* Man with a Sheep, *Picasso, Philadelphia Museum of Art. Given by R. Sturgis and Marion B. F. Ingersoll.*

art is not. In his glory, on market mornings, the man with a sheep becomes a part of the crowd, a nearly organic feature of a complex play of human actions and interactions. The rest of the time, he observes silently through staring eyes—almost blind-looking circles in a stolid bearded face—and is unnoticed for the most part, except by the tourists who identify themselves by looking at the statue and by taking pictures of it. But, despite not being noticed by the locals, the statue is part of the town's public face, the feature of its tourist brochures, entwined in its recent history and economy.

After he left Paris in the autumn of 1945, Picasso lived in the hills above the town for nine years (after living in Golfe Juan, the town's neighboring seaside community, for a year or so). What is significant for this account is the fact that living and working in Vallauris, Picasso became familiar to the town, to its craftsmen, to the butcher, the baker, the local cafés. (The café in the town's busiest intersection is presently called "Café Pablo" to cash in on the association.) Picasso was made an honorary citizen of the town, and, on his seventieth birthday, at a dinner held in his honor by the town craftsmen and his friends, he committed himself to produce a large mural for the town.

Thus, Vallauris became the site of another major work by Picasso, permanently located there in the ruins of

a twelfth-century chapel that, as it turns out, is just off the market-square and therefore adjacent to the statue. The mural is the huge two-part *War and Peace,* which completely covers the facing walls of the long chapel. (A third section, covering the semicircular end of the vaulted gallery, was added later.) In addition to the sculpture and the mural, Vallauris also has an extraordinary collection of Picasso's ceramics, exhibited in a big gallery in the Municipal Museum, which occupies the large château abutting the chapel where the *War and Peace* mural is.

In short, Vallauris presents three major aspects of Picasso's work, as civic projects—that is, as public or municipal displays—all three in close proximity to one another in the middle of town. Moreover, the works are practically in each other's presence. They bear on each other. They are part of the town's scene. Even the Municipal Museum, where the ceramic works are displayed, is not something one has to "go to." It's just there, like the town hall and the church and the cluster of shops and cafés where the town does its business and hangs out. Physical access is easy (if one happens to live in Vallauris or can get there easily). Aesthetic access, or what one may call cultural access, is another matter: the mere presence of the work does not make it accessible; but its presence in a certain manner does.

Let's take this analysis in stages: first, the *Man with a Sheep* is a classically representational work, in a canon of representation that is the most familiar of all canons in the Western tradition. Moreover, inconographically, the figure of a shepherd with a sheep has deep resonances in both Greek and Christian art and, one might say, in Jewish tradition—though not pictorially—in the concept of the sacrificial lamb. (Picasso's lamb, held by the legs, with its head straining in fright, may be seen as sacrificial, but that's only one reading.) Accessibility as recognizability, familiarity, symbolic or metaphoric resonance, is certainly there. But that is true of *any* figure of a man with a sheep, and Picasso's choice of a canonical subject executed in a canonical representational way makes the work "accessible" in only a superficial way.

Aesthetic access to Picasso's work comes through Picasso's other work, through the history of his protean creation, through the languages, dialects, and accents in which his artworks express his ideas and his craftsmanship. Picasso's hand is in the work—recognizably so. He says to Penrose: "After all, a work of art isn't achieved by ideas, but with the hands." And, of course, with the eyes. Studying the preliminary sketches for the *Man with a Sheep,* we see the imprint of hand and eye, the slow evolution of a gestural understanding (or a self-understanding), which at its moment of truth crystallizes in the rapid creation of the statue in a single working session. Access to the physical statue is access also to this activity by which it comes into being. But it is this hand and eye that paint the *War and Peace* mural and that shape the clay of the ceramic works and paint them in the fantastic semblances of owls, women, doves.

Second, therefore: the proximity of these works to each other, their interanimation, opens them to us, gives us access to each of them through the others. We begin to learn the visual dialects in which Picasso speaks, and also his particular idiolect, his individual and distinctive manner of expression. True, Picasso speaks in a language that we have come to understand from the whole history of our visual education, from the whole history of art. The richer our knowledge of that language, the more fully we understand the allusions, connotations, puns, proverbs, idioms, folktales, and metaphors that surface in his works. But our particular understanding of Picasso's idiom, our access in this sense to his work, is enhanced by the presence of his various other works. And in Vallauris, the works bear on each other.

But so do the works in the much richer Picasso collections, such as the collection in the Picasso Museum in the neighboring town of Antibes (on the site of Picasso's former studio in the huge Palais Grimaldi) and the even larger collection in the new Picasso Museum in Paris. And so too did the grand collection of Picasso's works at the 1980 retrospective in New York. One of the great advantages of such collections or retrospectives of an artist's work is that they allow people to confront a large variety of the artist's works, to see one work in the presence of the others. Yet the viewer's dialogue with Picasso, the familiarization with the visual dialect, is still more direct, more accessible in Vallauris. It is daily, easy, in the middle of everything else. Even the chapel and the Château Museum are not places to visit as one visits a museum in the city. One drops by, stops in, if not today, then tomorrow.

Wait a minute! There are some serious objections that a dry-eyed critic may raise to this quaint, local view of Picasso as a down-home boy (like, say, Norman Rockwell in Stockbridge, Massachusetts, if you can imagine the comparison). For example: (1) Ceramics is not what is central to Picasso's art. His work in ceramics is peripheral, deriving its style and motifs from the two main streams of his work, paintings and sculpture. Its presence in Vallauris is not especially enlightening, though it adds to the local color. (2) The *War and Peace* mural has some nice, or at least serious, work in it, especially in the figures of war, but it is largely a kitschy piece of poster art, repeating standard Picasso drawings in the service of a banal conception, with none of the force of *Guernica,* or of *The Charnel House,* or even of that arch agitprop poster, *Massacre in Korea.* So the mural is in Vallauris. No great loss to Paris, Antibes, or New York. (3) The *Man with a Sheep* is a great work, no doubt; but it is hardly a representative piece of Picasso's work in sculpture. It is atypical, almost classically representational, and it doesn't introduce us to Picasso's sculptural vocabulary of forms in the way, say, that the series of cubist-inspired women's heads do, or his goat sculptures, or even his visual puns, his transformations of *objets trouvés*—the *Head of a Bull,* made from a bicycle seat and handlebars, and the *Baboon with Young,* made from a toy car, among others.

Whatever force such objections may have, they miss the point. Let me make the point another way (by way of New York), and then return to Vallauris. If any two works may be said to be canonical Picassos, then *Guernica* and *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon* are. In one sense, they have become canonical because so much has been written about them, and because they have been assiduously studied from their genesis in Picasso's prolific preliminary sketches and early versions to their sources or derivations in Picasso's earlier work, or in his discovery of



*Picasso in his studio in Paris with* Man with a Sheep *(plaster cast), 1944. Photo by Robert Capa.*

African and Oceanic art, or in Spanish art and literature. In another sense, we may say that so much has been written about them *because* they are canonical. In any case, everybody knows these two paintings; in fact, they are so familiar that we can no longer see them. (Try to listen, with real musical attention, to Beethoven's *Fifth Symphony* or Mozart's *Ein Kleine Nachtmusik*. It takes a strong effort to wrench free from the unhearing acceptance of the overly familiar and to actually *listen* to this music.) Not all familiarity is closeness, then. Some familiarity, if it doesn't breed contempt, does breed indifference, the enemy of closeness.

Despite this fact, let's talk about closeness to these two canonical works. It was still possible to achieve that closeness in the forties and fifties in New York. Both works were in the Museum of Modern Art—as yet uncanonized, though recognized. *Guernica* had its own room, with some of the preliminary sketches on display. The *Demoiselles*, if memory serves, was on a wall, toward a right-hand corner of a gallery in the old Museum of Modern Art (when no one would have thought or dared to refer to it as MOMA). Since admission was free for art students, one could live in the museum three or four afternoons a week as well as on weekends, see lots of free movies, and get close to the artworks. "Close to" meant leaning up to, peering at the brushwork, the drawing, the way colors mixed on the canvas, the pencil lines of the undersketch. "Close to" also meant learning Picasso's language, slowly. There is no royal road to visual languages either. Of course, the Museum of Modern Art was ideal: it also had Picasso's *Night Fishing in Antibes* and the *Girl Before a Mirror* with its lush, decorative color, as well as a range of his other paintings, etchings, and drawings, and a few sculptures.

Picasso can be read in all of these works, as different as they are in style, genre, medium, date, mood, intention. There is something as distinctive as voice quality, physiognomy, carriage, all the subtle and inexplicit cues by which we recognize a person we know—something like native dialect or accent—that identifies an artist's work. The signature is in the gesture of creation, the particular mode of making, and I believe it can be seen and recognized whether in the painting, the graphics, the sculpture, or the ceramics.

One aspect of such recognition is very easy, and ultimately superficial. Picasso has standard themes and icons, and these themes are his signature or autograph: first, the doves, which are extraordinary—the distillation of decades upon decades of observing, drawing, painting these birds—and which directly link Picasso to his painter father, Don José Ruiz Blasco; then, the bulls and horses, and the *corrida*, which Picasso can suggest accurately with a few swirls of a wet brush laden with India ink; the Minotaur; the harlequins and acrobats; the goats, the owls, the satyrs; and, always, the women—from the sentimental to the misogynic to the monumental to the wildly erotic and the adoring—and the satyric drawings and painting and sculptures by the hundreds. Just calling these themes and motifs to mind brings forth the myriad images that identify not only the (representational) content, but also the forms, the line, the stylistically distinct and recognizable idiomatic gestures of Picasso's hand-eye. I think this is true also of the cubist paintings, some of which are so similar to Georges Braque's as to appear indistinguishable from them at first look. Therefore, there is something, not simply in the *what* but in the *how*, that marks off Picasso's creation across genres and media.

This something is what comes through, I believe, in the closeness and accessibility of the Vallauris *Man with a Sheep* in conjunction with the *War and Peace* mural and the ceramics. Sometimes, but less and less often, one can get that close in a museum too. But it has to be a habitable museum, with indulgent guards and no huge crowds shuffling through the exhibition halls. Sometimes a museum affords the closeness necessary to see a work of art. Apparently *Guernica* can never be seen that way again. Returned now to Spain, it is fortified against bombing, the way the town of Guernica never was, by a series of bulletproof convex plastic shields, so that one can no longer approach the painting or even see it clearly. Perhaps that is what it takes to preserve *Guernica* in today's museum world. I would prefer to take my chances with the fruit and vegetable dealers in the marketplace in Vallauris—though, to tell the truth, the *Man with a Sheep* stands on a pedestal that does put it out of reach of the town's dogs. □

BOOK REVIEW

# The Pitfalls of "Scientific" Feminism

*Joan Wallach Scott*

*Deceptive Distinctions: Sex, Gender, and the Social Order* by Cynthia Fuchs Epstein. Yale University Press, 1988, 300 pp.

Late last year, the *New York Times* ran an article that heralded two psychologists' scientific findings on sex differences. The placement of the article—in the upper left-hand column of the front page—and its headline—"Female Sex Hormone Is Tied to Ability to Perform Tasks"—suggested the editors' glee at having new evidence to support their views about the natural, if only periodic, incapacity of women for decision making. Not only did the research indicate that biology is destiny (as far as females are concerned), but the fact that the scientists conducting it were women added to its importance. What interest other than objectivity, after all, could two women have in producing these kinds of results?

The *Times* report and the study it recounted are depressing reminders of the power both of culture to shape science and of scientific appeals to the "natural" to legitimize inequality. They are also indicators of an ongoing contest about gender in our society. This contest has high stakes, for it is about whose conceptions of the relations between the sexes will organize "reality." Yet the very terms of debate most often obscure the purpose of the contest. For instead of focusing on what the desirable forms of social organization might be and how they can be obtained, the contesting sides first argue about the nature of the preexisting reality to which societies must correspond. In the case of gender, this means deciding whether men and women are equal (that is, the same) or different.

In the discourse of the sciences (natural or social), access to "reality" is said to result from objective investigation and neutral methodology. The problem, of course, as most philosophical writing over the last thirty years on these questions has pointed out, is that reality exists only through its signification, only through processes of conceptualization that confer meaning on things, make sense of them. There can be, then, no perfect method of inquiry conducted outside or apart from language, hence no guarantee of the ultimate truth of any investigation. In this situation, the best reply to research such as that reported in the *Times* is not a condemnation of its inaccuracy but a critique of any notion that objectivity is possible. The discussion needs to be directed away from what is "natural" toward what is socially desirable.

Although, in recent years, feminist scholars have developed important critiques of scientific discourses of objectivity, much of the work on gender in the social sciences has not taken those critiques into account. Instead, research has been designed to prove either that sexual difference is fundamental to personality and social behavior or that it is irrelevant, that women are different from or equal to men. Cynthia Fuchs Epstein's book, a general review of the social scientific literature on the equality side of the gender debate, provides an example of the difficulties—and, I think, the ultimate futility—of resting arguments for social change on claims to objectivity.

Epstein surveyed work not only in her own field of sociology, but also in the allied fields of psychology and anthropology. Her goal was to detach factual truths from ideological debates: "I have aimed for objectivity in assessing the research, but I acknowledge a bias for equality. I believe my bias fits the evidence."

Epstein's argument is that men and women are fundamentally similar; research that has shown otherwise is biased, blinded by prejudice, wrong-minded, confused, flawed, "grounded in ideology or culture [rather than] in systematic observation." In contrast, her own research and that which supports her position is described as "objective, gender-free analysis." It is "correct knowledge" that can confidently displace "old and inaccurate conceptions." Epstein offers little detailed analysis of the differences in research methodologies that lead either to biased or correct conclusions. In fact, her reasoning is tautological: we can tell that research is biased if it confirms gender differences; we know it is objective if it disputes them. Further, Epstein does not understand that scientific claims for "objectivity" are themselves ideological, that they can work to legitimize the authority of certain systems of knowledge by grounding them in "nature" or "fact" when they are but social constructions. Her main point is that assumptions about "dichotomous distinctions" between the sexes cannot produce objective results. (Apparently the prohibition of dichotomy applies only to discussions of gender, because Epstein's book is built on a series of other dichotomies: research that is true or false, that is biased or objective, that proves equality or difference, that is old and inaccurate or new and untrue.)

According to Epstein, "dichotomous distinctions" make it difficult to see variety within gender categories and thus similarities across gender lines. I agree with that point, but I don't think denying the "reality" of gender distinctions is an effective way to advance discussion. Those distinctions are part of the reality we confront, not only in social science research, but in institutions and organizations as disparate as schools, churches, families,

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and the *New York Times*. If we deny the reality of these distinctions, we cannot account for them or explain their operations; we can understand neither the gendered organization of society nor the gender identification of individuals, except as the result of oppression or bad faith. The way to deal with these distinctions is not to disprove them but to figure out how they work.

Here are some of the questions Epstein's approach does not let her ask: Why, if research on sex differences is so flawed, does it have such a powerful appeal? What about Epstein's methodology guarantees her *own* objectivity when so many researchers for so long have been so unaware of their own biases? How has she managed to stand outside the cultural and ideological constraints of her own time? Or has she? What is it about the current era and current social scientific thinking that has made possible the transcendence of historical context and conceptual frameworks, thus permitting the discovery of natural or objective "truth" when doing so has not been possible in earlier periods?

If dichotomous distinctions between the sexes are wrong, why haven't people realized this before? How do the powerful mechanisms of social control—which Epstein says allocate and implement social roles—secure the cooperation of women and men? Solely by force? If notions of socialization and psychoanalytic theories are too universal to account for gender identities of women and men (as Epstein suggests), how then can we explain people's gendered self-identification? Where does insisting that equality is natural and difference "ideological" get us when we want to understand the effects of ideas? Where does social control (a concept Epstein prefers to socialization) come from? By what processes does it operate? What is the nature of the power it exercises?

Epstein's notion of social control is something imposed from above in the forms of law, public policy, and government edicts. She doesn't make clear exactly what is at stake for those with power to enforce rules about gender, except to say that these people have "investments in the social order." Sometimes Epstein suggests that men have an interest in subordinating women, denying them equal access to lucrative jobs and the like. At other times she insists that we shouldn't posit differences of interest by sex; after all, she says, male social scientists have produced unbiased work on equality, while feminists often argue wrongly for difference.

Epstein's analytic confusion about social control comes, I think, from an approach that undertheorizes all the important issues: how societies construct gender difference, how contradictions within even seemingly rigid prescriptions about sexual difference permit variety and change to occur, how individuals establish gender identities. Epstein points out that individuals don't consistently live out the rules of gender, but, instead of asking how and why this discrepancy is possible, she uses it to prove that "ideology" is superimposed on "reality," that women are not really different from men.

I am not arguing here that difference is the key to gender, but rather that we cannot dismiss difference as "wrong" or "false" and thereby dispel its cultural influence. Instead of disproving the claims of those who argue for sexual difference, we need to relativize and contextualize their arguments. What have been the historical changes in discussions of sexual difference? What have been the debates at any point in history and who has taken what side? What have been the effects of the organization of societies according to strict sexual divisions of labor? What is the relationship among normative rules about gender, social institutions such as families, and individual gender identity?

These questions demand answers more complex than those presented in *Deceptive Distinctions*. For the most part, the research summarized by Epstein and her own approach to the subject oversimplify the issues and perpetuate the dichotomous terms of debate. Dichotomies depend on both sides of a contrast for their meaning; to refute them, more is required than a simple endorsement of one side or the other. By setting up the discussion as an argument for either equality or difference, and by setting it up in terms of either objectivity or prejudice, Epstein leaves open the possibility that her critics will simply reverse the pairings, accusing her of subjectively (and blindly) endorsing equality while their objective research proves that men and women are different. The *New York Times* article about the effects of estrogen on women's performance is an example of such a reversal.

The only way out of this dilemma is to refuse the dichotomous trap entirely, pointing out that nature and objectivity are not the grounds on which to make political claims. Instead, if we want to argue for "equality"—for the equal access of women to jobs, social resources, and political rights—we must make the case for equality as a relative matter of justice and politics, not as an absolute question either of science, social science, or nature. Using that case for equality, furthermore, we need not establish that all groups are identical. Rather, equality, in the liberal traditions of political theory within which we operate, means deliberate indifference to specified differences among individuals and groups. Equality is a right women can claim whether or not they are perceived as or perceive themselves as different.

At several points in her book, Epstein suggests that the progress of social science has led to greater equality: "Social science research has been used as the basis for briefs written to reinterpret and change laws that set different standards of justice, education, and employment for men and women. And it has resulted on balance in a greater commitment to equality." She continues: "A revolution in thinking, created by the development of the social sciences and a worldwide shift toward an ideology of equality, has made it possible for the first time in history to seriously question categorical thinking about women and men."

Leaving aside the historical claim, which I think is wrong (categorical thinking about gender has been challenged by feminists in other centuries, such as Mary Wollstonecraft or John Stuart Mill), I believe that her characterization of social science is naive. Only by ruling out as biased or flawed all research that doesn't agree with her point of view (and there continues to be plenty of research that promotes racial as well as sexual difference) can Epstein substantiate her optimism, and this is indeed what she does.

But such an approach precludes a more interesting and important kind of analysis of the politics of research in the human sciences. In these fields,

as in society as a whole, contests about knowledge are contests for power; labels of good and bad, objective and prejudiced, are but weapons in the contests. Social science is not then about "truth," but about knowledge and its relationship—critical or subservient—to power.

I do not mean to deny that things happen, that people act, and that these events can be studied systematically. Nor do I want to suggest that, because there is no absolute "truth," anything goes. Instead, I want to insist that any critical practice—and I take feminism to be such a practice—must turn its attention to the terms of its own argument and address the disciplinary conventions within which it operates. For feminists in the field of social science, a critique of "objectivity" would be a good place to start. □

BOOK REVIEW

# Happiness and the Single Woman

*Elizabeth Lunbeck*

*Women Adrift: Independent Wage Earners in Chicago, 1880–1930* by Joanne Meyerowitz. University of Chicago Press, 1988, 224 pp.

The figure—one might even say the specter—of the single woman has haunted the Anglo-American collective imagination from the height of the Victorian era to our own times. This woman, depending on the observer's point of view, either aggressively spurns male companionship, or is pitifully bereft of that companionship, or, in the ultimate male fantasy and most-dreaded of respectable womanhood's nightmares, promiscuously revels in her singleness. The genealogy of these forms is capricious and somewhat arbitrary, running from the so-called "redundant"—that is, unmarried—woman of Victorian England; through the pleasingly available flapper of the twenties and her latter-day sister, the sexy career gal of the fifties; to, finally, our culture's own redundant woman, the hard-bitten, successful careerist who humiliates men of insufficient accomplishment by day and weeps alone for want of these same men by night. This succession of images speaks not only to the enduring mix of antagonism and fascination to which single women have been subject, but also to two significant commonalities. First, each of these representations is not a simple reflection of the status of "women"—whoever they are—but, rather, the product of a real struggle over the very nature of "womanhood"—single or married. Second, each is, in its many referents, almost exclusively middle-class and white; the flapper is the exception, encompassing a broader spectrum of women and in the right setting—a Harlem jazz club, for example—taking on a darker hue. In the progression from one image to the next, we can trace the concurrent sexualization and trivialization of womanhood—and women—that has been such a salient feature of our recent history.

Until feminist historians set out to right the historical record, single Victorian women appeared as caricatures—crabbed spinsters and frigid old maids or, when accorded a guarded measure of respect, overeducated bluestockings. But feminist scholars have labored valiantly to rescue these women from the meager fates contemporaries thought their due. Such historians as Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, Nancy Cott, and Martha Vicinus have successfully recast wretched privation and loneliness into blessed autonomy and sisterhood. At their most daring, they have seen in singlehood a rejection of men and an embrace of women—a women's culture of loving solidarities that shaded over into what twentieth-century observers, alerted by Freud and a new psychology, condemned as lesbianism.

This feminist recasting of Victorianism was heady stuff. The pinched, narrow, and sexless woman—who embodied all the nasty repressiveness that later generations would castigate with the epithet "Victorian"—was dead, her place taken by a purposeful and expansively sensual paragon of rehabilitated womanhood. No longer a woman sadly bereft of a man, she was instead one fortunate enough to have escaped the confines of the servile—or, at its best, ornamental—domesticity that was the prescribed fate of the nineteenth-century middle-class girl.

Locate this new Victorian woman in the urban landscape of the early twentieth century, however, and it quickly becomes clear just how limited, how class-bound, a construct she really is. For then, a new, more amorphous group of women—working women, largely, drawn to the city to fill the ranks of the new, pink-collar office and sales occupations—became visible in the public sphere. The focus of the debate about woman's nature shifted from the middle-class to the working-class woman. Historians have largely missed this shift and have written as if both the "New Woman" and the flapper—those icons, circa 1920, of modern womanhood—were but Victorians without the repression: middle-class, college-educated, defiantly independent of men.

The Victorian paradigm of independent womanhood could neither comprehend nor accommodate the desires and practices of these new working women. Middle-class and working women often found themselves at odds, the for-

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mer seeking to protect the latter, who chose instead to follow—sometimes defiantly, sometimes tentatively—riskier paths: working for meager wages; living alone, unsupervised by male or female guardians; and, most disturbing to middle-class opinion, engaging in sexual bargaining with men. By the mid-twenties, a new, self-consciously modern model of womanhood had emerged from the give-and-take between these women's experiences and the many interpretations anxious contemporaries made of them.

Joanne Meyerowitz's fine book, *Women Adrift,* skillfully weaves together the many strands in the complex story that takes us from the Victorian to the modern era. Her subject is the tens of thousands of young, single women—"women adrift," as observers of the urban scene characterized them—who flocked to the nation's cities around the turn of the century. There, like Dreiser's Sister Carrie, they sought the autonomy and adventure that small-town and rural life had denied them. In the city, although confined to a narrow sector of low-paying occupations and bullied by men who regarded lone women as fair game, they were able to achieve a small measure of the freedom to shape their own lives that their middle-class Victorian predecessors had so passionately desired.

This freedom could appear a paltry thing. Working hours were long and wages often below subsistence; decent housing was scarce, adequate food expensive, and carfare beyond reach. A woman might earn a weekly seven to ten dollars at a "respectable" clerical or sales job. Then again, she could earn handsome wages working as a masseuse, cabaret dancer, cocktail waitress, or prostitute in the new sexual service sector. Meyerowitz points out that the only women paid as independent wage earners, not as dependent daughters, were sex workers—grim commentary indeed on the working woman's lot.

Yet, given the alternatives, this lot might not have been so dreadful. Single women rejected both the attempts to cast them as virtuous victims in need of maternal protection, as well as the efforts of the mostly female reformers who, as stewards of YWCAs and other homes for working girls, organized to provide that protection. YWCA homes offered women a species of surrogate family life, but women found the rules, the lack of privacy, the attempts to safeguard sexual purity, and the condescension of the good ladies whose gifts sustained the homes difficult to reconcile with their sense of themselves as self-supporting and independent. So, singly and with others, women set up housekeeping in rented rooms. There, Meyerowitz argues, they created something of a working-class women's world, in some cases even forming long-term partnerships akin to those that middle-class Victorian women quietly celebrated. They also nurtured other forms of sisterly cooperation, including self-supervised cooperative boarding houses, and the Lonesome Club, an organization for singles.

Where reformers saw danger, these single women saw opportunity and pursued it with a quiet but determined conviction that their would-be guardians could barely comprehend. To middle-class eyes, men might appear scheming reprobates, but, to a penniless woman in search of a good time, they were worth tangling with. Gentleman friends could provide for an evening's entertainment. Casual acquaintances could be hit up for special treats—a pretty dress, say—in exchange for sexual favors. And unsuspecting strangers could be hustled, their pockets emptied by self-styled golddiggers who fully intended to renege on their part of the bargain. Women sometimes lost badly at what contemporaries called the "sex game." But their participation in this commercialized sexual economy, with its tolerance of brief liaisons and a range of formerly taboo (including homosexual) practices, resulted in a wholesale remapping of women's sexual territory, an acknowledgment of female desire and capacity for pleasure that marked a decisive break with Victorianism.

As working women sketched the contours of a self-supporting and sexually expressive womanhood, the image of single women as pitiable victims faded. By the 1920s, female guardians had grudgingly acknowledged that working women had their own wills and legitimate sexual desires, and sociologists and reformers had recognized that women were no worse for having lived by themselves. But no one was willing to allow women the authority to script their own lives. Meyerowitz's evidence suggests that the women who rejected Victorian passivity and passionlessness in their day-to-day lives were no more able to shape their self-understandings into potent cultural images than their nineteenth-century forebears had been. Instead, a range of intrigued but fundamentally hostile observers claimed to speak for women, and together they constituted post-Victorian womanhood.

Chief among these observers were the entrepreneurs of new mass-culture industries, who purveyed an eroticized image of single women to stimulate and satisfy the prurient curiosities of their burgeoning audience. Movies and pulp fiction chronicled the exploits of nude models and exuberantly sexual chorus girls, evading community censure by redeeming their heroines through marriage. Sociologists also eroticized the single woman, replacing the outmoded woman as victim of circumstance with a self-seeking, opportunistic, and sexually aggressive avatar of rootless modernity. This recasting of womanhood was expressed in several striking reversals. Whereas in the nineteenth century, the city threatened women, now it was women who threatened the city; and, while formerly men had led women astray, now crafty, duplicitous, and oversexed women were ruining innocent men. Women as sexual actors were voracious and predatory, scary creatures indeed.

By the midtwenties, the flapper had emerged as a plausible representation of modern womanhood, putting a temporary end to heated discussions of woman's nature. The flapper was game, enticing, and sexy, but not voraciously so; she didn't ruin men, she complemented them, and she played the sex game by their rules. Moreover, she was single, but only temporarily. Set against the spinster, the perverse woman who wouldn't marry, the flapper was clearly a man's woman. In this atmosphere of heady heterosexuality, "Victorian spinster prototypes" came under renewed attack as useless, parasitical, and damnably frigid.

All this suggests that the new single woman the media are dishing up is less a well-founded representation of women's lives than the outcome, once again, of a struggle to comprehend and define modern womanhood. As women have charted new sorts of life courses, forgoing (in the most com-

monly invoked scenario) the pleasures of domesticity for the dubious rewards of the fast track, once again womanhood is denigrated. The new single woman of popular imagination is a white, college-educated professional in her thirties who squandered her prime mating years in chimerical pursuit of a fulfilling career. Her arrogant spurning of woman's biological destiny does not go unpunished. Shocked by her loneliness into recognizing that careers are best left to men, she repents and desperately begins her search for a husband, a child, and a family, only to be defeated by the hard reality of the "man shortage." For her it is clearly, as *Newsweek* recently put it, "too late for Prince Charming."

But this cautionary tale, a warning against the excesses of feminism, captures the experiences of only a small segment of a large and heterogeneous population of single women. Taken together, nonprofessional, working-class, Black, and other minority single women outnumber their white professional counterparts. Further, the media-driven scenario draws an invidious distinction between "real" economic needs (it's fine for a woman to work if she has to) and "soft" needs for self-fulfillment. It trivializes many women's legitimate desires for both career and family—what, after all, men have by birthright—by castigating them as a manifestation of self-seeking, yuppie greediness.

*Women Adrift* suggests how much rests on public representations of womanhood and how ambiguous these representations can be. Consider the enormous fascination exerted by the character Alex, a vengeful, clearly disturbed borderline personality, played by Glenn Close in *Fatal Attraction*—the single woman as mad destroyer of family life. But was Diane Keaton's character in *Baby Boom*, the high-powered executive chastened by the demands and delights of domesticity, any better? The fates of both unfold against the backdrop of the family idylls. Alex rejects it; Keaton's character can't resist its allure. Yet both films underline the normality of family life and the bizarreness of the woman outside it. Both characters are thus pieces of the same puzzle—the single woman as a species of exotica. □

BOOK REVIEW

# Speaking Nice to Power

*Jefferson Morley*

*On Bended Knee: The Press and the Reagan Presidency* by Mark Hertsgaard. Farrar Straus & Giroux, New York, 1988, 349 pp.

As I write, journalists all over America are plotting to launch new political magazines. A go-getter in New York is said to be circulating a prospectus. A Washington cabal is searching for a financial backer. A certain Texas politico has contemplated founding a journal. A California contingent is gathering furtively.

Some such conspiracies have come to fruition. *Zeta*, based in Boston, is a monthly of the Chomsky-Cockburn school of Anglo-American leftism. (That's the "new old New Left," for those of you with scorecards). *Tikkun*, for its part, obviously marks a revival of the progressive Jewish community. Free-lance writers everywhere, myself included, hope there will be more.

The journalists responsible for these schemes all share a dissatisfaction with the existing organs of political ideas. They often lament the ideological distance between the *New Republic* and the *Nation*. Some say it is too large; *Zeta* is dedicated to the proposition that it is too small. In any case, all sense the general ideological confusion of our times. A new journal of ideas, it is believed, would clarify the end of Reaganism and the advent of *perestroika* and contribute to the improvement of the political culture.

But a journal seldom creates a political community; more often the community creates the journal. The longhairs, hippies, and antiwar activists of the 1960s made up the counterculture, and the counterculture launched a thousand mastheads. The plotters of the next liberal weekly constantly ask themselves: isn't there a political community big enough to support one more magazine?

The prospects of the liberal weekly are one small illustration of the problem of liberal political culture in the United States. Among many other Americans, we secular, semiscientific, white, middle-class, and usually Jewish journalists are wondering when the liberal community "out there" beyond the proverbial Beltway is going to express itself. Many people want to believe that the American community is in many ways fundamentally liberal. But how does one find that community? How, as Michael Dukakis must wonder, does one define it?

I got to thinking about the role of the journalist in American political culture while reading *On Bended Knee*, Mark Hertsgaard's indictment of the liberal media in the Reagan era. Hertsgaard claims that the media were "constitutionally disinclined to offer fundamental criticisms of a presidency that above all else articulated and advanced the interests of corporate America."

He argues that, during the Reagan years, the mainstream media covering the executive branch and Congress became steadily more isolated from American society. He notes that reporters for national news organizations are overwhelmingly white and

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upper-middle class. Whatever their own political views (which tend toward Dukakis-style liberalism), these journalists accept the corporate, profit-oriented, deferential culture in which they work.

David Gergen and Michael Deaver, the senior White House officials who excelled as genial puppeteers of Reaganism, explained to Hertsgaard how easy it was to manipulate the mainstream press. "I think a lot of the Teflon came because the press was holding back," Gergen told Hertsgaard. "I don't think they wanted to go after him that roughly."

Hertsgaard also generously quotes various media superstars who deny, rather too volubly, that they have been manipulated. Here's Steve Smith, a senior editor at *Time*, explaining the magazine's coverage of Reagan's first term. "For the press to say the President of the United States is out to lunch is quite a statement," Smith said, adding hastily, "Please don't have me saying he's out to lunch, because I don't think he is." Smith finally sank beneath the waves, leaving only these bubbles behind: "We try to be objective in the sense that we try to be fair. But since we interpret and analyze the news, there is a built-in subjectivity. But we are objective in terms of not having a preconceived notion how we want things to come out."

The essential needs of the mainstream media are simple, as the Reagan White House well understood. Network television correspondents need compelling visual imagery, preferably from the president, the one political representative whom the entire national TV audience has in common. Reporters from the prestige dailies and the newsweeklies need high-level sources who can provide background briefings that are "both precise and deep." In other words, network correspondents need a president as a prop; TV and print reporters alike need to be told what the baffling pronouncements of the federal bureaucracy actually mean in practice.

Gergen and Deaver provided the visuals and the sources. Deaver, in particular, seemed to have perfect pitch for American mass culture. (Hertsgaard notes that Deaver is a gifted pianist with the "musical equivalent of photographic memory.") Various pollsters and scribes were employed to provide the intellectual background music, usually riffing on the familiar chords of "foreign policy resolve," "inflation is down," and "America feels better about itself."

The result, as Hertsgaard shows, was that the press ignored, misunderstood, and assisted the deceit of the Reagan administration. He charges that, distracted by Reagan, the media paid too little attention to the "realities" of American society: the redistribution of wealth from the middle class to the rich, the dangers of nuclear war, the deficit, and so on.

I put "realities" in quotes not because these political developments are not real and serious. They are. But most Americans have neither the time nor the inclination to study nuclear war, Nicaragua, the deficit, or the causes of homelessness. These developments that Hertsgaard decries were visible to, but could be avoided by, the nonpolitical majority of Americans.

To be sure, the "fairness issue," the consequences of which Gergen and Deaver both feared, was an expression of the pervasive sense that Reagan was jeopardizing the future of most Americans. But for employed, white Americans living outside the inner city, the "realities" of Reaganism were not immediately apparent. The mainstream media, Hertsgaard insists, could have and should have made them unavoidable.

Hertsgaard anticipates some but not all of the possible objections to his argument. He acknowledges, for example, that the media have long been captive to the American presidency, and he rightly argues that a new kind of servility was practiced during the Reagan era. But was it a worse kind of servility? It would be hard to prove, for example, that Reagan was subjected to less intense scrutiny than were John F. Kennedy or Dwight Eisenhower.

Are the consequences of media collaboration more dire today than they were twenty-five or thirty years ago? The most obvious journalistic failure of the Reagan years was the media's collective inability to notice the Iran-contra machinations. From August 1985 to November 1986, the administration's illicit dealings went on in view of the Washington press corps before anyone took notice. Even when journalists did begin reporting the story, few discussed the constitutional implications of what North, Secord, Poindexter, *et al.* had wrought.

But this reticence is hardly new. Ever since World War II, the mainstream media have been reluctant to challenge the executive branch on foreign policy actions. Early in 1961, the *New York Times* learned of an imminent invasion of Cuba, and, at White House request, did not run a story. The mainstream media also neglected the question of the constitutionality of the Vietnam War until it was raised during the Nixon impeachment hearings in 1974. In challenging the executive branch, the media will go only as far as do mainstream politicians.

Furthermore, the Democratic party was as much to blame as the press corps for the lack of informed debate in the mainstream press during the Reagan years. "I don't think the coverage has been terrible," Jonathan Kwitney of the *Wall Street Journal* told Hertsgaard. "There has been some good reporting. But there is no opposition within the political system." Hertsgaard allows that the disarray of the Democratic party during the Reagan years was "part of the reason" for Reagan's political success. But the thrust of his book is to put the onus on the press.

If the press is responsible for the failure of the Democrats, Hertsgaard's implication is that the mainstream corporate media ought to serve as a kind of second-string political opposition, just in case the out-of-power party abdicates. Jim Johnson, Walter Mondale's campaign manager, told Hertsgaard that the press should have forced the president to do what the Democrats could not. "If the major networks had decided to do Day One, Day Two, Day Three since the President has answered a question," Johnson said, Reagan would have been forced to run a more substantive campaign in 1984.

To indulge such a fantasy requires us to neglect Hertsgaard's strongest point—about the structure of the mass media. As he shows, major media corporations are large, profit-oriented bureaucracies not inclined to challenge abuses of power by the executive branch. CBS, for example, is institutionally incapable of sustaining the independent journalistic legacy of an Edward R. Murrow. If Hertsgaard is right about the mainstream media being "*constitutionally* disinclined to offer fundamental criticisms [emphasis added]," then it would seem neither

realistic nor prudent to entrust them with the job of sustaining the American tradition of democratic opposition to centralized power.

But what is the alternative? If the political opposition fails, is the American public simply doomed to be manipulated? Who else but major media organizations can inform the TV-watching public of abuses of power?

One quixotic possibility is the new liberal weekly. Few pretend that one more journal of ideas is going to transform the Washington press corps or American political culture. But hope springs eternal that new publications could spur the competitive instincts of mainstream journalists, prompting them to do a better job. These publications would also provide a forum for thinkers in the political opposition. This is the dream, but the effects of such publications trickle down slowly, if at all, to the bureaucracies of major news organizations and the disparate coalition that is the Democratic party.

A second possibility, wished for by Hertsgaard, is that the mainstream media will learn from their mistakes during the Reagan years. The media, Hertsgaard declares, must "live up to the concept of a free and independent press first upheld some two hundred years ago by the American Revolution." As history, this is dubious. The press in the early republic was partisan and was openly aligned with factions in the executive branch and in Congress. In any case, these possibilities assume that the media system will somehow transform itself from within.

The third possibility, as intriguing as it is unlikely, is that the mainstream media could be transformed—or at least challenged—from outside. There are two recent journalistic precedents: the counterculture press that emerged in the Western capitalist democracies in the period between 1965 and 1972, and the *samizdat* press that has spread throughout the communist societies in the East since the 1960s.

For all their differences, these two outbursts of democratic journalism share several common features. Both flourished independently of the society's dominant and unresponsive information bureaucracies. Both were based on a fundamental rejection of the premises of the centralizing state. Both were the by-product of a new and independent political culture.

To be sure, the effects of such journalism trickle up slowly to government, but their influence ought not to be dismissed. In the torpor of the Brezhnev years, the *samizdat* culture of the East sustained the idea of a free and independent writer. This culture, especially expressed in its rock music, has irritated and goaded the authorities. Communist reformists, such as Mikhail Gorbachev, came to understand that they could no longer afford to ignore the fact that people were refusing to be manipulated from on high. *Glasnost*, it should be remembered, was not simply handed down from above. It also forced its way up from below.

Maybe the *samizdat*-rock culture of the East, and not the liberal weekly, is the model for revitalizing American journalism. In the 1950s and 1960s, rock music traveled from the West to the East and is now a powerful influence in the cultural transformation of the socialist world. If the *samizdat*-rock culture of the East comes back to the West, it would be as an echo of—and heir to—the Western counterculture and its underground press. The cheap technologies of electronic desktop publishing make journalistic innovation seem both more possible and more promising than ever before. □

BOOK REVIEW

# The Conservative Rabbinate: Looking for Men in All the Wrong Places

*Daniel H. Gordis*

*The Ordination of Women as Rabbis: Studies and Responsa* edited by Simon Greenberg. Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1988, 233 pp.

When, after years of often acrimonious debate, the faculty of Conservative Judaism's Jewish Theological Seminary of America voted in October 1983 to ordain women, many segments of the American Jewish population sensed that something of great importance had transpired. The liberal Jewish community applauded the move, while the Orthodox decried Conservative Judaism's abandonment of its prior commitment to halakha (Jewish law). Proponents of the decision who were familiar with the seminary in particular and with Conservative Judaism in general believed that, at long last, the largest branch of American Judaism had succeeded in demonstrating that a serious dialogue could take place between traditional halakha and the modern commitments to morality and to equality for women in Jewish life.

As part of the deliberative process that the chancellor and his faculty undertook from 1979 to 1983, faculty members were invited to prepare position papers on the ordination of women, to be disseminated throughout the seminary community. Ten of those papers, long the subjects of conversation and analysis within the inner sancta of Conservative circles, have now been published in a single

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volume, edited by Simon Greenberg, one of the seminary's vice-chancellors. Insofar as it makes these papers available to the intellectual community at large, *The Ordination of Women as Rabbis: Studies and Responsa* is an important publication. It deserves attention for the positions its authors espouse and, perhaps more important, for what the collection of documents ultimately reveals about what really did and did not happen in this crucial and far-reaching debate.

Despite the book's importance, *The Ordination of Women as Rabbis* is flawed by some rather simple omissions or oversights. Indeed, in reading this volume one gets the impression that it was produced without a clear image of its typical reader. Even the sophisticated lay reader will find the book difficult to negotiate. The collection contains no glossary to explicate the dozens of very technical terms that appear throughout. The papers are inconsistent in the degree to which they even translate such terms, and one of the longest essays appears in Hebrew with only a short summary in English. Perhaps more important, the papers appear in alphabetical order by author, with no introductory comments about the essential nature of their arguments, the worldview of their authors, or even their conclusions. Had the papers been grouped in "pro" versus "con" groups, or had some distinction been made among halakhic (legal), moral, and sociological arguments, the average reader might have found the terrain somewhat more navigable.

What is most astounding, however, is the book's failure to indicate which paper was ultimately adopted by the faculty as the official seminary position. Unless the reader already has some intimate knowledge of the history of this issue, she or he will have no way of discerning how the faculty reached the conclusion that it did.

The paper that the faculty ultimately endorsed was authored by Joel Roth, currently the chair of the Department of Talmud and Rabbinics. (Roth also serves as the chair of the Rabbinical Assembly's Committee on Jewish Law and Standards, which decides matters of halakha for the Conservative movement. In this unique vote, however, the ordination question was deliberated upon not by the rabbinic branch of the movement, but by the faculty and its parent academic institution.) Roth's analysis is essentially a halakhic one. In difficult prose that runs sixty pages, Roth develops his argument by noting that the halakhic objections to the ordination of women stem from the combination of two fundamental principles of Jewish law.

The first principle (explicitly stated in Mishna Kiddushin 1:7) is that women are exempted from positive time-bound commandments. In other words, according to Jewish law, although women are required to observe negative commandments as well as those positive commandments that need not be performed at a specific time of day or on specific days of the year, they are exempted from those positive commandments that *are* tied to specific times. Several of the authors note that important exceptions to this rule do exist, but none of them questions the centrality of this legal principle in Jewish ritual law.

Roth's second halakhic principle also comes from the Mishna, this time from Rosh Hashana 3:8. The Mishna there reads: "Anyone on whom an obligation is not incumbent cannot fulfill that obligation on behalf of the many." In light of the first principle (that women are not obligated to perform positive time-bound commandments), the second principle suggests that women may not fulfill the obligations of the many to perform such positive time-bound commandments. Since prayer is a positive time-bound mitzva, the halakhic conclusion is that women may not fulfill the congregation's obligation to pray (by leading the service and having the congregation answer "amen" to their blessings), and, since virtually all rabbis are called upon to lead services, women should not be ordained as rabbis.

One respondent, Mayer Rabinowitz, tries to argue that the historical function of the *shaliakh tzibbur,* this "emissary of the congregation," has changed and that women would therefore not be expected to fulfill other people's obligations. He notes that the *shaliakh tzibbur* traditionally fulfilled the obligations of others (when they answered "amen" to his blessing) only because they were unfamiliar with the liturgy. Maimonides specifically forbade this form of prayer for those who *do* know the liturgy. Rabinowitz concludes, therefore, that "today, when [we] have prayerbooks


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with translations for those who cannot read Hebrew, and often with explanatory notes, we are in the category of competent worshippers and our obligations cannot be fulfilled by a *shaliakh tzibbur*.... In today's synagogue the office of the *shaliakh tzibbur* does not involve any concept of 'agency.'" As a result, he claims, this second halakhic principle should not stand in the way of women's ordination.

Rabinowitz's argument, however, is fatally flawed by his failure to recognize that certain prayers (such as the Kedusha) are said responsively, and for these prayers even knowledgeable worshippers need an emissary. Because he is aware of this problem, Roth seeks a way around it. The bulk of his paper is devoted to proving that women may *voluntarily* assume the obligations for those commandments from which they are exempted, and that, once they have done so, they may serve as emissaries of the congregation and ultimately be ordained.

Israel Francus, however, in his paper specifically denies that an assumed obligation has the weight that Roth ascribes to it. Francus claims that though women might, indeed, be able to assume such voluntary obligations, their degree of commandedness would never equal that of men, and a woman therefore could never serve as an emissary for a man. Roth, in turn, amasses several compelling arguments in favor of his position and actually responds (albeit in a long and obscure footnote) to Francus's prooftext.

Though he seems to have found a halakhically defensible mechanism for allowing women to lead prayer services, Roth specifically states that he opposes declaring that all women are obligated to perform positive time-bound commandments. After all, not all women would fulfill these commandments, so obligating women to perform them would simply create a new category of "sinners." Instead, Roth urges that only those women who specifically assume these obligations should be permitted to lead the service.

It is unfortunate that Roth never fully articulates the procedure or ritual by which a woman would assume these obligations, but that is a comparatively minor point. More problematic are, first, his refusal to declare all women obligated to fulfill positive time-bound commandments, and second, his assumption that the way to grant women religious equality is to require them to become like men. It is in this regard that the ethical defensibility of his position begins to unravel.

For those who had hoped for a Conservative statement verging on (if not actually attaining) egalitarian treatment of the sexes, Roth's statement remains unsatisfactory. Womanhood, in Roth's worldview, is still a hurdle to be overcome if a woman wishes to participate in the body politic of the Jewish community. Any man, simply by virtue of being born male, may serve as a *shaliakh tzibbur* upon attaining the age of majority and can eventually be ordained as a rabbi. Women, however, still somehow need to reject their natural state: unless they consciously transcend their womanhood, they cannot lead prayer services. Thus, the official Conservative position still fails to validate the legitimacy of the feminine in liturgical leadership positions.

The subtle message that Roth imparts is that, in order to count, women have to act like men. Nowhere does Roth suggest that women might have something spiritually unique to offer Judaism. Nowhere does he seem concerned that women may feel a loss in trying magically to become male in the world of ritual. Roth's paper provides a clever, indeed ingenious, halakhic method for justifying the ordination of women, but he never addresses the broader, and frankly more important, questions of concern to Jewish feminists.

This is not to say that Roth or Conservative Judaism should have adopted an alternative halakhic stance. While other halakhic possibilities can be conceptualized, they all have their drawbacks. But, at the very least, one would have expected the Conservative movement to acknowledge the perennial tension between moral conscientiousness and halakhic seriousness. It is the absence of any such acknowledgement in Roth's paper that is most disappointing.

Lest one imagine that these objections never occurred to Roth, he states categorically that he rejects the legitimacy of such questions. Having laid the groundwork for his position, he states:

> Before offering a specific proposal for consideration, I would like to emphasize as strongly as I can that the issue of male-female equality plays no part in my thinking on the subject. I find no ethical objection to discrimination against an entire class, when the discrimination is justified and defensible.

In a subsequent interview (*Moment*, June 1987), he makes the same point in even more strident language: "Ethics is not the issue, nor is egalitarianism.... Being halakhically serious is."

Thankfully, Roth's statement does not represent the opinion of all Conservative thinkers. Many of the rabbis who argued for the ordination of women did so out of ethical considerations. Indeed, several of the papers in this volume make eloquent ethical appeals for women's ordination. But the adopted responsum's implication that halakha is the only relevant concern, that ethical issues aren't important, is tragic. It is tragic because if there is any movement in America that has the potential to demonstrate that halakhic seriousness and ethical commitment need not be portrayed as competing forces, it is Conservative Judaism.

And yet, the seminary's decision is not without value. Individual women, many of them long committed to becoming rabbis, are now free to pursue their chosen careers and to share their talents and insights. Young Conservative Jewish women will have role models that they never had before. Moreover, the decision to ordain women has prompted a broader discussion of egalitarianism between the sexes—a discussion that focuses on such issues as the unequal roles of men and women in the *ketuba* (the traditional marriage contract) and in the process of Jewish divorce. And interestingly, perhaps due to the negative reaction to the decision by the right wing of Conservative Judaism, the movement is now engaged in an energetic and valuable analysis of the respective roles of halakha and ethics in its platform.

For all of these reasons, the decision of the Jewish Theological Seminary of America to admit women to its rabbinical school was important and laudable. As a document that testifies to the level of scholarship and the multiplicity of outlooks that led to the decision, this new volume is important and worth reading. Ironically, however, the book's greatest importance may lie in its reminding us how much additional work remains to be done. □

Book Review

# Gramsci in Palestine?

*Madeleine Tress*

*Zion and State: Nation, Class and the Shaping of Modern Israel* by Mitchell Cohen. Basil Blackwell, 1987, 322 pp.

Antonio Gramsci, the founder of the Italian Communist party, died in one of Mussolini's prisons in 1936; he never wrote a word about Palestine or the Zionist enterprise. Yet his theories, particularly those about the state and civil society and about the formation of social movements (which in Gramscian language engage in a "war of position" with the prevailing ruling or hegemonic ideology in order to move forward to a new stage of social relations), are very relevant to the dilemmas facing progressive Jews as we reevaluate the various histories that have been written of the Zionist movement and of Palestinian nationalism.

Gramsci provides no solutions to the contradictions that exist between the competing Israeli and Palestinian claims for the same parcel of land. His writings contain no quotations that exactly describe the current situation in Israel/Palestine. What Gramsci did instead was to confront the failure of the "proletarian movement" in post-World War I Italy.

In *Zion and State,* Mitchell Cohen attempts an analogous enterprise by confronting the failure of the organized Labor Zionist project to build a socialist society in Palestine, and he demonstrates how a variety of forces made the statehood project hegemonic. In Cohen's words, the creation of the Israeli state meant, "paradoxically and dialectically, the eventual subversion of Labor's own political direction and spiritual dominance." Zionism was reified and the state became a thing in itself; Labor Zionism became particularistic rather than universalistic.

From that development sprang many problems, not all of which Cohen examines. How can one aspire toward a Jewish workers' state and claim to be revolutionary but ignore the material conditions of the majority of the population, including the Arabs? Furthermore, how was the Labor Zionist movement shaped by the contradictory impulses toward revolutionary ideals and toward alliance with first Ottoman suzerainty and then British imperialism?

These are questions that many supporters of Labor Zionism have failed to confront; instead these supporters have simply bemoaned Labor Zionism's fate and its inability to fulfill its potential. In their reconstruction of the Yishuv (the prestate Zionist community in Palestine), they depict Labor as the good guys, who by force of circumstance—particularly the rise of European fascism and nazism and the subsequent Holocaust—had to concentrate on state building. Jabotinsky's Revisionists, by contrast, are usually depicted as the bad guys, while the religious forces are portrayed as innocuous. The indigenous population of Palestinian Arabs and Jews are—for the most part—ignored, and secular Jewish anti-Zionists usually get a footnote (in Cohen's book, a parenthetical sentence on page 144).

Within this context, *Zion and State* is hardly unique. Cohen, however, parts company with his predecessors by attempting to use a variety of Marxist theories to explain what went wrong and why, and at the same time trying to legitimate Labor Zionism from a Marxist perspective. But his method is problematic, since he examines the relationships among only *some* of the components of Mandate Palestine.

The book is divided into three sections—"Foundation," "Struggle," and "Statehood"—plus a concluding chapter analyzing post-1977 events. Cohen begins with a theoretical discussion of nationalism and then moves on to the specifics of Jewish nationalism and the various problems encountered by European Jews in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Nevertheless, Cohen fails to see that the problems Jewish nationalism encountered then are the same problems Palestinian nationalism encounters today. (For example, he points out that the emancipation of the European Jews meant freedom only "as *individuals* but not as a corporation [emphasis in original]," and this sort of emancipation is not good enough for him. Yet in criticizing the lack of universalism in the Labor Zionist project, Cohen fails to notice that these same arguments for individual, as opposed to collective, emancipation are currently being used by many Israelis to deny the Palestinians self-determination.)

Next, Cohen gives an overview of early Zionist thought and the advent of the Zionist movement—including the decision to settle Palestine (as opposed to Uganda, for example). I found particularly mystifying the justification for *avoda ivrit* (Jewish self-labor) put forth by Menachem Ussishkin, a Russian Zionist leader who opposed the Uganda plan. Summarizing Ussishkin's philosophy, Cohen writes: "The Jews could only reclaim the land of Israel by working it and rooting their lives in it. Otherwise the new Jewish society would be on top of a volcano, for inevitably the Arabs would resent *their* sweat building the future of another people [emphasis in original]."

However, the early settlers *did* recruit labor from the indigenous population even though, ideologically, they were vehemently opposed to it. The Palestinian Arab population was brought into the Zionist project in only a marginal way and was never integrated politically or socially. (Early Zionists could indeed be called the original supply-siders, believing that the economic benefits of Zionism would eventually trickle down to the Arabs.)

Ussishkin's volcano did develop, but not in the way that he had predicted.

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Since there was little interaction between the Arabs and Jews in Palestine, a distinct Arab civil society emerged during the mandate period. The existence of these two distinct civil societies has caused dissonance up until the present day.

Part of Labor's problem—in addition to its alienation from the indigenous population—was its view of hegemony, which is the concern of the second section of *Zion and State*. By the 1920s, Labor believed and strived to concretize the Marxist axiom that "the ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas." Cohen, like Labor, assumes that the Zionist movement—rather than British imperialism—enjoyed ruling class status in Palestine at that time. But while Labor Zionism was hegemonic among the Palestinian Jewish population, on its own it hardly constituted the ruling class; British imperialism did. As Cohen argues, the entire Zionist enterprise was not opposed to, but rather dependent on, the "goodwill" of the British in the Middle East. Cohen's argument thus feeds the myth that Zionism is a movement for the "national liberation" of the Jewish people (terminology adopted by the Jewish left in the late 1960s) and therefore anti-imperialist.

Seeing Labor as revolutionary allows Cohen to liken its politics in the 1920s to the concomitant, spontaneous emergence of the Viennese councils. Council communism was, however, truly counterhegemonic (in the Gramscian sense.) The crisis that emerged in Austria in the 1920s did not simply involve politics and industrial and economic life; it also included a wide debate about fundamental sexual, moral, and intellectual questions. Vienna—like Germany and Italy—showed signs of crisis in the relations between political representation and parties, and a general problem with authority; in these conditions, new social, economic, and political institutions flourished. But similar conditions could not be "created" by the Histadrut, the Jewish trade union federation in Palestine.

Gramsci tells us that a crisis is a process that can last for a very long time (for example, the *intifada*). But it is difficult to demonstrate that such a crisis existed within Labor in Palestine during that time, although Palestine itself had been undergoing tremendous changes—independent of the Zionist movement—beginning in the 1860s. When Zionist settlement began, it was too dependent on outside support and power to organize against these forces. No spontaneous councils could emerge to question the legitimacy of the state's functional equivalent—namely, the British Mandate and the entire Zionist enterprise. Nevertheless, there were instances of explicitly anticolonialist (that is, anti-Zionist) organization among Jews during the Mandate period.

In March 1919, a group calling itself the Mifleget Poalim Sozialistit (Socialist Workers party, or SWP) broke off from the Palestinian Poalei Zion (Workers of Zion), the group associated with Marxist Zionist theorist Ber Borochov. An SWP faction formed within the Histadrut and in 1920 called for a joint struggle together with the Arab masses, but this call was ignored by the Histadrut's leadership. After the May Day riots of 1921, the leadership of the SWP was arrested by the British and deported to the Soviet Union.

In 1922, the Palestinische Kommunistische Partei (Palestine Communist party, or PCP) was founded, on the grounds that Jewish workers and farmers faced the same enemies as did the indigenous Palestinian Arab population: British imperialism, the Zionist bourgeoisie, and the comprador Palestinian Arab landowners. Two years later, the Workers Faction of the PCP was expelled from the Histadrut for subversive activities.

Labor, then, did not even have the complete allegiance of the Yishuv's left wing. While Zionists and anti-Zionists differed over internationalism and socialism, both displayed a tendency toward national exclusiveness. In Labor's case, Cohen writes, "the horizontal cleavages of class in Palestine were cross-cut and undercut for a vertical national cleavage," mostly because the aspirations of one national group negated those of the other, which completely blurred the entire class struggle.

Similarly, while the PCP saw socialism as primary and disdained Labor's emphasis on *avoda ivrit*, the Communists always had a tendency to split over Arab versus Jewish (albeit anti-Zionist) interests. In 1929, the Comintern called for the Arabization of the PCP. Consequently, its political line changed, as it demanded British withdrawal and an Arab Palestine.

Nevertheless, by the time of the Arab revolt of 1936–39, the Jews in the Palestinian Communist party had either organized themselves as an autonomous Jewish section, quit, or gone to Spain to fight in the International Brigades against fascism. (Proportionally, the highest number of Jews in the brigades came from Palestine—about four hundred—and nearly all were Communists.) The Jewish section of the PCP formed a separate party in 1940 and issued a statement condemning the British White Paper of 1939 on the grounds that it was another example of British divide-and-rule tactics. (The PCP had endorsed the White Paper.) Disunity between Jews and Arabs continued until the State of Israel was founded in 1948, when they jointly formed the Israeli Communist party (Maki). In 1965, the Rakakh faction split from Maki, again over the national question and along national lines. (After 1965, Maki was almost 100 percent Jewish, while Rakakh was about 75 percent Arab.)

What about the Palestinian Jewish and Palestinian Arab left? Earlier studies, particularly Yehoyada Haim's 1983 book on the Palestine revolt of 1936–39, *Abandonment of Illusions*, (Westview Press), demonstrate that there were attempts to forge links between the Jewish workers affiliated with Hashomer Hatzair and their Arab counterparts. Unlike the Communists, however, Hashomer Hatzair had observed that the Arab landowners had succeeded in uniting most of the Arabs, including the peasants and workers, under their reactionary banner. These socialists felt that the class interests of the Arab elite were so hegemonic that they were able to present them as national demands for the entire Palestinian Arab population. Hence, any call to unite Jewish and Arab peasants and workers against a comprador class consisting of Arab *and* Jewish landowners, as well as against the British, could be delegitimated by Jewish internationalists (that is, the Jewish Communists who tailed after an Arab feudal line which masqueraded as a nationalist-revolutionary position) as a Zionist plot.

Cohen—concentrating only on the Zionist forces—writes that although a Zionist working-class ideology was hegemonic in Palestine, it was not hegemonic in the Diaspora. Consequently, coalition politics increasingly domi-

nated in the formation of the Zionist Executive in the early 1930s. (The Zionist Executive is the international governing committee of the World Zionist Organization.) This was one factor in the abandonment of Labor Zionism's original project.

Another factor was competition with the Revisionist wing of the Zionist movement. In 1931, Ben-Gurion's Labor faction, Mapai, formed a coalition with the General Zionists and Mizrahi (religious Zionists), primarily to prevent a center-right coalition from emerging. As partners in state building (which was the Revisionists' goal), Labor made additional compromises with respect to class-based politics. And so, Cohen writes, "the Histadrut pillar was no longer the nation's pillar, but rather one of the nation's pillars; it was no longer the state in genesis but the tallest support structure for the support of statehood." This quest for a broader coalition continued after 1948 when Ben-Gurion preferred to form a government with the centrist and religious parties rather than with the more explicitly socialist Mapam.

Cohen suggests that the strategic change occurred in the 1930s when Labor began to pursue "a politics of hegemonic segmented pluralism, rather than one predicated on an identity of class and national interests." Yet, in a sense, Labor Zionism had already lost this Gramscian "war of position" because Revisionism had successfully redefined the parameters of the debate by focusing on state building. It was now Labor's turn to be counterhegemonic, within these new parameters. Labor was successful, but only in a new war of position.

Zionism wanted to find a home for a persecuted people. In that it was successful although the process involved the displacement of another people as well as dependence on imperialism. This does not mean that Zionism can simply be reduced to settler-colonialism, which is the way many of its detractors characterize it. The prevailing belief of many early Zionists was that they were indeed revolutionaries who wanted to build a new type of society (socialist) with a new mode of rule (Jewish sovereignty in Palestine for the first time since the biblical period). From the point of view of the indigenous Palestinian Arab population, this project constituted an infringement on their own rights, but this infringement was not the result of a deliberate decision on the part of the early settlers.

Perhaps our collective Jewish consciousness simply had not yet evolved to the point where we could look beyond our own centuries of oppression and persecution, and question whether we as victims could create other victims. Many Jews who came to Palestine had no choice as to where they would relocate once their lives in Europe were disrupted, especially in the period between 1923, when the United States instituted immigration quotas, and 1939, when the British issued the White Paper restricting Jewish immigration into Palestine. (Shanghai had an open-door policy throughout the interwar period, but the journey was too long and expensive for many Jews whose lives were in danger.)

Also, not all the victims' victims were so ideologically innocent. Many of them were blatantly anti-Semitic under the guise of being anti-Zionist—a form of Jew-hating that was not a result of the Zionist enterprise but rather a part of European anti-Semitism, which came to the Middle East with European imperialism several decades before the Zionist movement arrived.

Labor Zionism wanted class-defined politics to be primary, yet it was concerned only with toiling Jews in the Yishuv. Revisionism, on the other hand, aimed to be pure nationalism, "unpolluted by questions of class." Alternatives, of course, are pure conjecture. Certainly all of the Yishuv's various left movements had problems either in theory (Labor's narrow nationalist definition of workers) or in practice (the ignored call of Hashomer Hatzair, and the "united-front" tactics of the Communists, which were objectively reactionary). There was no "correct" left line in theory or in practice, and an entire litany of events—the worldwide economic crisis, the rise of fascism in Europe, and the transformation of class relations within the Palestinian Arab community quite independently of Zionism—served only to exacerbate tensions. All parties involved—both within the Zionist movement and outside of it—came to view their respective projects as a zero-sum game with no room for accommodating any other party's needs.

*The Labor Zionist project is a train that was derailed and, once restored to the track, proceeded toward an entirely new destination.*

For many of the reasons cited both here and in Cohen's book, the statehood project, then, may have been the most realistic, although the least desirable, of Labor Zionism's alternatives. Nevertheless, forty years after the founding of the Israeli state, which was supposed to solve the Jewish question and form a normal Jewish society, the national question still supersedes all class issues. Among Israeli and Palestinian Marxists, the national question refers to the primacy of self-determination for the Palestinians. Even the Israeli equivalent of liberation theology—Oz V'Shalom (Strength and Peace) and its partner organization Netivot Shalom (Pathways to Peace)—tends (unlike its Roman Catholic counterparts in the Third World) to see the parties to the conflict in national and not in class terms.

The Labor Zionist project is a train that was derailed and, once restored to the track, proceeded toward an entirely new destination, bypassing problematic "stations" such as class, the nature of the state, and the respective roles of the civil society that organized the state (the Yishuv) and the civil society that was organized by it (that of Israeli Arabs and West Bank and Gaza Palestinians). Cohen and his supporters cannot answer these questions. The definitive account of Zion and state has yet to be written. □

# Current Debate: Nature and Domination

## *On Autonomy and Humanity's Relation to Nature*

*Michael E. Zimmerman*

In his essay "Nature, Science, and the Bomb" (*Tikkun*, July/Aug. 1988), Steven Vogel rightly criticizes the widespread view that both the nuclear arms race and environmental destruction result from modern science, which supposedly is intrinsically geared toward "the domination of nature." Vogel argues that nature cannot possibly be dominated; only human beings can. Granted, particular social systems may use the findings of science to dominate human beings, and also to destroy the biosphere. But science, in and of itself, has no social imperatives, including military ones.

The idea that science dominates nature is a contemporary expression of the ancient claim that human attempts to change nature are signs of hubris against the existing "natural" order. The scientific "revolt" against nature allegedly alienates humanity from its natural origins and leads to our present environmental and military crisis. Vogel maintains, by way of contrast, that "the solution to our [environmental and military] crisis consists in humans' overcoming their alienation from their environment by explicitly recognizing it as theirs and asserting the right to change it. . . ." He adds that "the love of nature and the faith in nature's healing capacities seem to mask a deeper and darker *fear* of nature [emphasis in original]." Nature looms as a divine force that must be propitiated. This "environmental awe," according to Vogel, undermines human autonomy: "It is crucial for humans to learn not to feel impotent before *any* external reality, to learn that the world is *our* world, *our* creation, and should be subject to *our* desires [emphasis in original]."

While there is much in Vogel's essay with which I agree, I would like to make the following additional points. First, there is nothing self-evident about Vogel's claim that the world is "our creation" and should be "subject to our desires." In Genesis we read that humanity was given "dominion" over the earth, but Genesis also asserts that God, not humanity, created the earth. Human labor has certainly transformed much of the earth's surface in the past ten thousand years, but by no stretch of the imagination has humanity "created" the world, unless we understand "world" to mean the socially transformed earth, in which case the reference to "creating" the world is tautologous.

Awe in the face of the universe is, in fact, a legitimate response to its extraordinary scope, complexity, and beauty. Equally appropriate is respect for nonhuman reality, especially (but not only) other forms of life. Humanity is not alone on this planet: there are other forms of life that preceded us and that will no doubt survive our misadventures. These life-forms are not human "creations" (at least, not yet). While they may not be capable of autonomy (although regarding whales and porpoises I believe we must suspend judgment at present), higher mammals and primates inhabit something like a social world and obviously have an interest (even if they cannot articulate it) in preserving their well-being. While human interests may legitimately take precedence over those of other living things, I cannot accept Vogel's apparently blanket claim that "*any* external reality," presumably including other mammals, "should be subject to *our* desires [emphasis in original]."

Who, precisely, is the "we" to whose desires all external reality should be subject? If the "we" refers to a particular nation, such as the United States, then Vogel is simply supporting the current economic view that the world is our oyster waiting to be devoured. One does not have to be an enemy of modern technology to recognize that, in attempting to satisfy their infinite desires, Americans can justify turning the planet into a gigantic factory in which there is no place left for anything wild or free. I cannot believe that Vogel would willingly tolerate such consequences.

*There is nothing self-evident about Vogel's claim that the world is "our creation" and should be "subject to our desires."*

Is it not possible for us to be autonomous while at the same time respecting other forms of life, even if we often cannot avoid harming and using other life-forms for our own purposes? Can we not develop technological systems that satisfy basic human needs and desires, while at the same time preserving the biosphere and much of its diversity? A genuinely autonomous humanity, in my view, would be one that is freed not only from external constraints (both social and natural), but also from internal constraints: the slavery imposed upon us by false desires. Aristotle remarked long ago that our craving for *having* things leads us astray. Our most authentic desire involves *being* human in the right way. A society composed of individuals whose only satisfaction comes from ever greater consumption of goods is not a society composed of

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autonomous individuals.

An autonomous individual must *differentiate* himself or herself from other people and from the natural world, but such an individual must not *dissociate* himself or herself from others and from nature. I believe that we must avoid drawing an absolute distinction between humanity and "external reality." In Genesis we find support for the special character of human life ("made in God's image"), but in the Book of Job we read how God castigates Job for failing to see that the world was made for the glory of God, not for Job's purposes. In speaking to Job from out of the whirlwind, God reminds Job that nature is not to be worshiped, but is to be respected as a manifestation of the glory of God.

I suspect that the Book of Job expresses a profound truth. In reminding us that the world cannot be reduced to, or understood solely in terms of, human needs, the Book of Job cautions against human pride, a caution that does not ring less true today despite our achievements in the sciences. The world is too complex to be understood simply as "ours," subject to "our desires." How long, I wonder, would such a claim stand up if earth were visited at some point (as it may well be) by extraterrestrial beings whose intelligence, spiritual development, and technical competence far surpassed anything known to humanity?

My point can be expanded with reference to Vogel's statement that humanity's love of nature masks a deeper fear of nature. Certainly, this is an important insight. But let's explore the implications a bit further. First of all, what does Vogel mean by "nature"? Is the "natural" everything "external" to me? What of my body? Isn't my body also part of the natural world, a world of flesh and blood, air and water, generation and growth? But if I conclude that my body is "external" to me, because it is a merely "natural" entity, then what is left of me? The cogitating and, supposedly, autonomous intellect? If I identify myself wholly with my intellect, then it is understandable why I might fear and hate "nature," including my body and everything my body depends on for its survival. The body and the rest of nature are a constant reminder of the impotence of what psychologist Ken Wilber has called the "God project," the attempt by the finite ego to make itself eternal and infinite. Recently, philosopher Jean-François Lyotard has argued that the Jews, too, have reminded Western humanity that all its control-oriented projects (law, science, commerce, art, industry, war) are illusions. The Jews have been persecuted because they represent that which cannot be assimilated to human control; they stand for the hopeless character of all Western God projects.

Wilber has argued that the God project, the attempt to make the ego omnipotent and immortal, results from increasingly radical dualisms needed for human evolution toward the stage of ego-consciousness. By distinguishing ourselves from our environment, we become separate and capable of further individuation. But in our newfound state of separateness, we also begin to experience death anxiety. Warfare is an outstanding example of how people have tried to overcome death anxiety. People project onto the enemy both mortality and evil; by killing the enemy, the victors are really killing mortality and evil—making themselves immortal and good.

Another way, besides war, in which men (and by this term I mean primarily males) have sought immortality is by splitting off from themselves their bodies, their feelings, their dependency: everything, in fact, associated with the female. Having dissociated themselves from the female, the body, and everything else merely "natural," males actively repress their own feelings, discipline their organic, bodily processes, dominate women and children, and set out to conquer nature. Science *can* be used to further such a mission, even though it is not intrinsically power-oriented, and even though great scientists often remark that they are motivated to understand nature because they are so awestruck by it.

For the patriarchal ego has no time for awe. Having dissociated itself from woman, body, and nature "below," and experiencing itself as independent of God "above," the ego sets out to *become* God. There is something wrong with such dissociation, which leads some ecologists to speak as if we need to propitiate nature. Rightly understood, such "propitiation" is *not* nature worship, nor does it interfere with human autonomy; instead, it points to the integration required for genuine autonomy.

A number of notable Eastern and Western thinkers have argued that human evolution must be understood as part of the process whereby the Divine empties Itself out into Creation ("big bang"), surrenders Itself to and forgets Itself in the processes of matter-energy, and waits for these processes to evolve those self-conscious forms of life—such as human beings—that will eventually attain the Divine level of consciousness.

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*Autonomy requires us to become integrated with the rest of the natural world, to learn to respect nature, the female, and our own bodies.*

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At which point, the "goal" of cosmic history is attained. Hegel and Schelling, as well as the great Vedantic theologians, tell this kind of story of the world. Human beings are thus made in the image of God, and they have some intuition that the Divine is present in them. But often they believe that their created, finite human ego is *literally* God. This expansion of ego to Godhood, described in psychological terms as "ego-inflation," is an understandable response to the threat of mortality. A creature terrified by death anxiety will defend itself by elevating its importance to the cosmic level.

Such anthropocentrism is central to much of Western philosophy, theology, and politics. Marx made Prometheus his hero and proclaimed that "man is the only god for man." In effect, he asserted that the whole world is human, subject to human desires. Other modern thinkers, too, have defined autonomy as radical separateness both from the "inferior" natural world and from the "nonexistent" divine realm. At this most dangerous stage of human evolution, humanity uses scientific discoveries to further its God project. Nation-states, convinced that the existence of the "other" threatens their own existence, invent atomic weapons to destroy one another. Even relatively "enlightened" societies may maintain patriarchal and racist institutions to

exploit those regarded as inferior and may develop economic systems that subject all natural processes to infinite human desires. But these desires themselves are not subject to human will; rather, they are in some respects the driving force compelling humanity to control everything—and all under the banner of "freedom."

Autonomy and individuation are necessary stages in human evolution. One of the major achievements of human history has been the emergence of the self-conscious ego from the organic and social matrix. Any longing for an undifferentiated "union" with nature is certainly a sign of psychological and social regression. But genuine autonomy also requires an integrated self that can acknowledge and respect other integrated, independent selves. Moreover, autonomy requires us to become integrated with the rest of the natural world, to learn to respect nature, the female, and our own bodies. Only such recovery of what has been disowned will enable us to pass through the currently precarious stage of human evolution and move toward the next stages. These stages will presumably involve an increasing recognition of the interrelationship of all things in the universe. The movement toward differentiated unity will not be a regression to earlier stages of nature worship, but instead will take the form of a more inclusive awareness, one that will ultimately be Divine. Divine awareness appears paradoxically to be both radically other than all creation, yet also inclusive of it. □

# *A Response to Michael Zimmerman*

*Steven Vogel*

Michael Zimmerman and I agree on many things, but the differences between us are important ones. Zimmerman is quite right to connect the "fear of nature" I wrote of with a "dissociation" from nature and with a dualism in which the self is reduced to an emotionless and bodiless ego that sees itself as entirely distinct from the physical world. But he fails to note that in my article it was precisely the environmentalists (who assert that they love and respect nature) whom I accused of secretly harboring such fear. Thus, whereas Zimmerman argues that such dissociation from nature is characteristic of the scientific, technological project of dominating nature, I was suggesting that it is the environmentalist *critique* of that project that is "dissociated" in this sense. Indeed, much of the last section of my essay was designed to show that the sort of position that Jonathan Schell defends in *The Fate of the Earth* (a position that, I suspect, Zimmerman agrees with) in fact supports—more than it knows—the dualism it claims to reject, and that, far from overcoming "alienation" from nature, it in certain respects exemplifies it.

"We must avoid drawing an absolute distinction between humanity and 'external reality,'" Zimmerman writes, and I entirely agree. But it is precisely such a distinction that is drawn when certain forms of human activity ("technology") are described as somehow violations of nature, improper interventions in a magnificent and complex (and finally incomprehensible) natural order that will ultimately take its revenge by producing ecological catastrophe. Such a view sees nature as *distinct* from us, dangerous, and beyond our ability to understand or to change—that is, as *alien,* and it requires us to look at the world dualistically, so that only the activities of humans are described as "unnatural."

It's not enough to call for a reintegration of humanity and nature; at the same time one has to specify what such an integrated view would look like. To say that humans and nature are connected is not yet to indicate the type of connection. A significant number of contemporary environmentalists, I would argue, conceive of the relationship in an essentially passive manner: humans acknowledge their connection to nature when they learn to respect and obey it, to live in accordance with its laws and limits, and to fear its revenge. Only *nature* is active; humanity's role is to acknowledge its own position as nature's product.

But this approach seems one-sided, and it fails to capture the real character of our "naturalness." A truly integrative worldview would recognize not only that nature shapes us but also that we shape it, inevitably and "naturally." We are certainly nature's product, but what we do (by nature!) is to *change* nature. In other words, our connection to nature has to be understood as active. From the invention of agriculture and the domestication of animals to the development of railroads and the discovery of antibiotics—and yes, the development of nuclear weapons too—we have continually and fundamentally changed the world we live in, and to a degree unmatched by any other species.

The environment we inhabit, for better or for worse, is simply *not* the environment of our prehistoric ancestors; it is an environment that they would find literally unrecognizable, an environment that shows the results of thousands of years of human thought and action. The objects that make up our environment—the buildings we live in, the clothes we wear, the food we

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eat, even the landscapes we admire—are to an extraordinary degree *human* objects, the product of human activity; and the world that they constitute is a *human* world, filled with human meanings. This is what I meant when I wrote that it is "our world, our creation." Our real alienation from the environment lies not in our making a separation between "external reality" and the human, but in our failure to see the extent to which "external reality" already and naturally *is* human, bearing traces in its very being of human action and human thought.

*I suspect that the environmentalist talk of nature as an enormous, hostile, and incomprehensible power is a kind of projection: the projection onto nature of our sense that the social order has escaped our control.*

It is this alienation that I see in Schell's descriptions of nature as enormous, incomprehensibly complex, and beyond the reach of human understanding. And it saddens me. The implicit theology in such descriptions becomes explicit in Zimmerman's essay: to change the world is to challenge God's mastery of it, and hence is sin. Zimmerman tells a story of human beings who, out of fear of nature and of their own mortality, engage in a "God project," in a hubristic attempt to withdraw from nature by dominating it. But the Hegelian myth he refers to suggests a different story—a story of human beings who seem powerless in the face of enormous natural forces but who struggle to find, and indeed create, order in an initially chaotic (and inhuman) universe. They achieve this order not by propitiating and worshiping nature, but by *actively working* to transform the world into a hospitable environment for themselves and for the creatures with whom they share it.

*This* is the "we" whose world it is: not any particular nation, but the human community, the men and women who have shaped and reshaped the earth and without whom the world we inhabit would not only have no meaning but would quite literally not exist. To say that the world is "*our* world" is not to say that we have no responsibilities to the other, nonhuman creatures who live in it; it is, however, to say that *we,* not they, have these responsibilities. We transform the world *consciously,* and that makes us moral agents. If it turns out that porpoises or extraterrestrials do too, then they too will turn out to be part of our community, and their actions will also be subject to moral praise or blame.

Why, I would ask, is it *now* that our own world-changing activity has come to seem so dangerous and that the nature we transform has come to seem so frightening and vengeful? On one level, the answer is clear: the transformed earth is today a hideous and terrifying place; we cannot take pride in the products of our activity. What's more, as Schell points out, the transformation of nature has led us to nuclear weapons, which may well bring about the final transformation of our own nature: out of existence.

But, paradoxically, to make this claim is to indicate that the world we inhabit today is not yet *sufficiently* "our creation": it is, rather, the creation of what some people call capital, or maybe just of greed, but in any case of social forces that we have put into action but do not know how to control or even recognize as our own. In such a social order (as Marx pointed out in 1844) the products of our own activity appear as alien and independent powers: technology develops in response to the market, not in response to justified human needs. (Zimmerman is certainly right to want to distinguish "authentic," or rationally justifiable, needs from false ones.) Thus it is not that our technologies are "unnatural" but that they are in a sense *too much* like nature: unconscious, unplanned, not subject to the democratically expressed decisions of those involved.

In reality, then, it is *society,* not nature, that we fear—and that we ought to fear. Every society's view of nature is deeply influenced by its view of itself, and ours is no exception. I suspect that the environmentalist talk of nature as an enormous, hostile, and incomprehensible power is a kind of projection: the projection onto nature of our sense that the social order has escaped our control. We need to try to regain that control: to recognize that the products of human activity are not alien powers but human ones, that the world is our creation and our responsibility. To do that requires mechanisms of democratic decision making that we at this late date can still scarcely imagine. Above all, as I tried to sketch in my essay, it requires a commitment to autonomy and a faith in our communal rationality and skill. Schell's position, and that of others I mentioned, seems only to undermine such faith and commitment. □


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## LETTERS

*(Continued from p. 6)*

perpetuate the long-outdated and far-fetched stereotype of Reform as the last station on the journey to assimilation by Jews who are ambivalent about their Jewish identity. There are well over a million Reform Jews in this country who cherish an expression of Judaism which encourages intellectual searching; pluralism and diversity in thought and practice; and a sound balance between particularistic devotion to the Jewish people and a universalistic commitment to social justice. The congregations which serve Reform Jews value tradition, encourage study, and advocate practice of ritual. They also retain children to a later age in their schools than do synagogues of other movements.

We Reform Jews know who we are and for what we stand. Our movement embodies a synthesis of what is most precious in Judaism and most humane and open in Western culture. Our love for the Jewish people and Israel has been repeatedly proven. All of this is not to make an apologia for Reform, but it is meant to say that Reform-bashing should, by this late date, have seen its better day. The editors of the magazine must know that we Jews require *tikkun* within our own ranks if there is to be reconciliation in the larger world.

Rabbi Paul J. Citrin
Congregation Albert
Albuquerque, New Mexico

To the Editor:

David Mamet's experience as a youngster with Reform Judaism was certainly not mine. Had he grown up in my Reform synagogue in Philadelphia during the late 1950s and early 1960s, he would have had real pride in his Judaism.

At the same time, we did feel a kind of shame, but not about being Jews. Many of us felt defensive toward—or inferior to—our Conservative Jewish neighbors, who knew and observed more of traditional Jewish ritual. If "doing your own thing" had become acceptable twenty years earlier, we would have known then that our approach to Judaism was equally valid, if not more so. Even today, however, it is striking that a majority of the synagogues in my current locale—metropolitan Washington, D.C.—are Conservative, and that Conservative synagogues seem to be experiencing most of the growth in synagogue membership in our area. Moreover, the innovative Jewish communities (*havurot*) in Washington (Fabrangen), Philadelphia (Mount Airy Minyan), and I believe New York (Anshe Chesed) and Boston (Havurat Shalom) as well, have all adopted a Conservative style for their services. Do these developments simply reflect the Conservative backgrounds of most of those choosing to join these synagogues and communities? Or is there something more fundamental about Reform Judaism's lack of appeal to knowledgeable younger Jews with a serious interest in Judaism?

Joshua Greene
Fairfax, Virginia

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## TRANSFORMATIVE POSSIBILITIES

*(Continued from p. 16)*

the group conspires to block the revelation of everyone's real desire for a more supple and vital connection.

The same point can be made with respect to other forms of social mediation, like the media. The local TV newscaster when I was in law school would always start his newscast with something like "The Red Sox Win and a Fire in Dorchester—Back in a Moment," all spoken in a loud monotone with his eyes glazed over and his body clenched in the manner required for maintaining the kind of repression that I'm talking about. This newscaster was functioning to mediate the blockage of social desire among the viewers who were collectively passivized and atomized by his performance rather than being brought into connection by it, and he managed this controlling mediation by manifesting his social being through a decentered role intended to (painfully) deny his desire for a more human and truer reciprocity.

These circular or "rotating" processes of denial in which each person passes the same doubt on to the next person (or often to millions of people at once, as in the case of the newscaster) also account for the phantom phenomena we usually refer to as "social structures." I call these structures "phantom phenomena" because they do not really exist—they have always served as shorthand formulations for talking about the odd fact that the social world always appears to be already constituted over and against us as existential individuals, even though we know that there really is no social world apart from the one we existentially create. To give these structures ontological intelligibility, we must be able to dissolve their objectlike character by reappropriating them as experientially understandable displacements of intentionally created externalizations of intersubjective, human meaning onto an "outside world."

The reason that the blockage of social desire makes these structures ontologically intelligible is that the role-based character of the social connection that results from it necessarily involves the reciprocal projection of the foundation of this connection onto an experiential "outside." The essential purpose and consequence of the deflection of true, mutual confirmation into a reciprocity of distancing roles is precisely to "de-center" the self-other relation, to inject a rejecting distance into this relation that deprives it of any "ground" or presence to itself. The "ungrounded" social self produced by this decentration has the quality of being literally "anonymous"

because the rooted desire of the self to confirm and be confirmed by the other has been withdrawn from the self's role-performance, leaving the manifested self floating in midair, so to speak, without the anchorage and immediacy of reciprocal self-presence. As a result, the underconfirmed social self, in a milieu of misrecognition and collective denial, must project a source of agency outside of itself to ground its own identity, and then give this projected, external source of agency the quality of being "fixed" or "real," in the service of maintaining denial and containing the movement of desire. This is accomplished by the collective enactment of deference to an external source of meaning that is imbued with authority—the de-centered self looks "outside" for its "author" and defers to this author's authority in grounding its uncentered, role-based character so that the social desire that constitutes the force and movement of each person's true social existence can remain withdrawn and safe from the trauma of what we might call disrecognition. When the members of a de-centered group collectively attribute their respective, de-centered social identities to the same external source of agency or meaning, and then reify this external source of agency so that it appears "real" or objectlike, we get the appearance of a structure that seems to shape and define each of the subjects who defer to its constitutive power.

A recent public manifestation of what I'm talking about here was given by Dan Quayle during the fall campaign. In him, we could all see with striking clarity the withdrawal of authentic presence from the eyes in particular; in watching him we could not but see the surface of his eyeballs as ocular globes drained of the animation of desire and self-generated meaning. Mr. Quayle suffers from underconfirmation in the sense that I have been using the term, and precisely to the degree that he struggles to cover his authentic being with an anonymous outer self, he anxiously seeks with equal intensity to defer to an external source of authority (revealed in his "following-behavior" in relation to George Bush) and to claim this as his substitute foundation. And although Dan Quayle is an exceptionally transparent, public example of the process of alienation that I have been describing, we are all like him to a degree greater than we would like to admit, because we suffer, in varying but similar degrees, from the same history of underconfirmation. Our collective history is marked by a "rotating lack of confidence in the desire of the other," within which we each respond to the other's distance by installing this distance within ourselves and thereby become "one of the others" to each other, unconsciously complicit in creating the climate of underconfirmation that we imagine is created by others.

By the time we become parents, we have been buffeted about in these circles of denial for a very long time, and we cannot but pass a good part of the de-centration that results from it on to the new social beings we bring into the world. This is the reason why the problem of the blockage of social desire is a political problem rather than something to be treated only by individual psychotherapy—we can only begin to reverse the isolating effects of these circles of denial by gradually increasing the *public* confidence of a very large number of people that the desire for confirmation each of us feels within ourselves is also felt by everyone else around us. This is the ontological basis for my earlier claim that a moral vision attentive precisely to this problem is essential for a new approach to progressive politics. Let me now take up some of the implications of this idea for our way of thinking about progressive law practice and legal culture.

## The Impoverished Political Meaning of Existing Legal Culture

The need for progressive people to develop a new approach to politics does not apply only or even primarily to national elections like the most recent one. Presidential elections are an important element in the development of such a politics because they define—with special force because of the finality of the collective act of voting—what "we" regard to be the legitimate scope of national debate over ideas and social vision. On the one hand, it is often said quite rightly that presidential elections are too abstract and removed from the concreteness of people's everyday existence to be expected to have much of an impact on the reality of people's lives. On the other, it is much easier to get people to believe in the possibility of social change or in the possible realization of a new social vision if the people as a whole express themselves as taking such ideas seriously. There is a reciprocal relationship between the ways of being and the kinds of ideas legitimated in national elections, and more-local and concrete forms of social-political involvement (including everything from actual participation in specific political activities to the things that we talk to our friends about and the degree of passion with which we feel able to talk about them); each arena—national and local—helps to define the other's horizon, and each works to enable or limit the content and spirit of what can be expressed in the other. To give a simple example from a situation I was recently involved in, it is much easier for a health care advocate in Madison, Wisconsin, to say to a local legislative subcommittee that our ethical obligation to care for one another, as we face death or infirmity together, requires Wisconsin to provide statewide health care to all its citizens, if the same compassionate vision is being expressed by a recognized national leader. If there is

little or no indication that there is a larger "we" giving legitimacy to this kind of "soft" ethical discourse, the subcommittee is likely to respond cynically or with boredom to what they will think of as touchy-feely, unrealistic arguments, and rely heavily on the "hard" data in the staff's cost-benefit analysis to make their decision.

The legal arena plays a particularly important role in shaping people's sense of the legitimate and the possible, because it is the democratically validated, public context for mediating the relationship between every specific local case or conflict and the agreed-upon universal vision that gives these values meaning. Lawyers, judges, law students, law professors, media commentators on the law and the legal process, high school civics teachers, and legal secretaries are but some of the people who shape this culture, not to mention the long-dead architects who designed the hierarchical-majestic courtrooms in the local Hall of Justice or the producers, directors, and actors of TV law shows like "People's Court" and "L.A. Law." Taken together, these people and many more convey the culture of law, expressed through such phenomena as the evocative qualities and substantive content of legal doctrine and reasoning, the symbolic meaning of the architecture of legal settings and the uniforms lawyers wear, and the way lawyers manifest themselves through their physical presence.

Here I will focus on only two aspects of existing legal culture—what I will call the "disembodiment" of lawyers and judges, and the technical-rational character of legal reasoning. Although each of these aspects of our legal culture at one time may have manifested a certain resistance to the religious moralism of preliberal society, they have now become part of the Dukakis problem—part of the spiritual and moral emptiness of liberal political life.

To understand what I mean by the "disembodiment" of judges and lawyers, think of the physical bearing of a soccer goalie in the midst of a game. She bends her knees and moves with quickness and suppleness from side to side, anticipating the next shot on goal, the feint that she must sense to avoid losing her balance, the fully extended leap to one side or the other that might suddenly be required. In her play this goalie is present in her body, and her mind and body are relatively unified in the sense that she lives her project as a goaltender through the coordinated "praxis" of her movements. In light of the weight and poise of her presence, it would be difficult to casually push her backwards.

Contrast the physical presence of a judge. He sits on an elevated platform, his body almost entirely concealed by a black robe. His movements are usually minimal and narrowly functional, involving mainly the head and hands. We could say that *his being is in his head* and withdrawn from his body, so that we experience his presence mainly through a disembodied and slightly elevated style of speaking or writing, as if the law were above and outside of us and he were bringing it to us with his mind. This separation of mind and body corresponds to a separation of thought and feeling revealed in both the content and manner of his self-expression. In light of this absence of bodily presence, if he were standing, it would be very easy to push him off balance with a slight push.

The same disembodiment is characteristic of lawyers also. I have taught contracts for fifteen years and never fail to notice the change that comes over law students during October and November of the first year, when they first begin to learn how to "make arguments." The tentativeness, the intuitive orientation, and the feeling for justice that characterize the first weeks gradually give way to a glassy-eyed stare and a rigidification of musculature as the student learns to say in a monotone, "Well, it seems to me that you could argue there was no consideration at all here since the paper was entirely worthless." Full-blown lawyers tend to become quite addicted to this kind of glassy-eyed, disembodied power-discourse in spite of the strain required to keep it up, because the esteem and recognition that is attributed to it within the circle of collective denial makes it seem to be worth the repression required to keep it up.

My claim is that the effect of this separation of mind and body and thought and feeling is to reinforce the isolation of both the judge and lawyer, as well as those who experience them by blocking the empathic channel required to link the person to the community of meaning that a good legal culture should constantly be in the process of constituting. Like Michael Dukakis, who, except during the last week of the campaign, succeeded in emptying his body (except for his fingers) of all expressive vitality, the disembodied lawyer or judge withdraws his being from his public self in order to manifest a detached neutrality that mirrors and confirms the felt detachment of the client or citizen from the political community that the lawyer or judge is supposed to represent. To the degree that this way of being pervades legal culture as a whole, it serves to replicate the alienating structure-producing process I described earlier, because the law is made to appear as an authoritative system of thought outside of and above everyone, and something to be "obeyed" as a condition of group membership, rather than as a contingent and developing expression of social and political meaning that we actively create and interpret.

Complementing this disembodied way of being is legal reasoning itself, which for the most part aspires to be a kind of disembodied thought. The training that lawyers undergo draws them toward becoming primarily

technical analysts who learn how to "make arguments" as if their thought process were simply a function of the law as an external and authoritative discourse. If I am right that the desire for mutual confirmation is as fundamental an element of our existence as any biological need and is central to understanding the meaning of any cultural phenomenon, then legal reasoning should not aspire to the kind of analytical rationality that places the reasoner at a distance from the world and that relies upon the "logical application of the law to the facts" to resolve human problems. It should aspire to an empathic comprehension which requires the thinker to immerse his or her soul in the so-called "facts" and to interpret their meaning in accordance with the moral and social end to which he or she believes the law should be directed. Yet the existing methods of legal education and law practice actually tend to invalidate and suppress this kind of comprehensive understanding, valorizing instead an unempathic and objectified way of looking at "fact" situations and "analytical rigor" in applying rules as well as in doing policy analysis. If the legal world were concerned about empathic rigor, the entire nature of law practice and legal education would have to be changed.

The reason for this misemphasis is not that people haven't thought the whole thing through properly, but that the processes that generate the collective denial of social desire also generate forms of social thinking which reinforce and justify this denial. The predominance of technical-rational over ethical-emotional thought within legal culture succeeds in draining legal reasoning of the qualitative dimension of human situations. By attributing a privileged authority to legal thought as the carrier of our political values and by excluding this qualitative dimension from it, we privatize and define as non-political what is probably the most important distinctively social aspect of our existence—the desire for social confirmation and meaning—even though the absence of this confirmation and meaning can be overcome only through a politics that produces public social change. This split in the law is paralleled by a split in the lawyer, who has a "personal" life in which she seeks qualitative satisfactions and is guided by comprehensive or intuitive knowledge and a professional life in which she converts herself into a kind of observer-analyst, funneling her client's goals into the essentially anti-intuitive conceptual knowledge of legal argumentation. As I will discuss in a moment, this division has had very bad consequences for both social change movements and public interest lawyers themselves, but it has bad consequences for all of us to the degree that it requires collusion with the social dynamics that inhibit the realization of our own deepest social need. For the insulation of legal reasoning and of the lawyer's self from the qualitative pull of social desire just fragmentizes or serializes this desire, pooling it up within each of us as an individual, instead of allowing it to have a public voice seeking qualitative public remedies.


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A second aspect of the way that existing legal discourse reinforces what I've been calling collective denial is through the reification of legal categories. Earlier I described the way that the internalized mistrust of the other's desire gives rise to de-centered or underconfirmed subjects who collectively project (through a kind of conspiracy of rotating doubt) an externalized source of social authority or agency, which is then experienced, defensively, as fixed or "real." This dynamic is embodied in existing legal discourse, in the sense that people believe the law to be a something outside and above us that acts upon us when "it" is "applied" to our situations, and also in the sense that the categories of legal discourse form a perceptual grid that is experienced by most people as "the way things are."

To most nonlawyers as well as lawyers, the categories of "landlord" and "tenant," of "management" and "labor," of "employer" and "employee," are experienced not as contingent descriptive concepts subject to change, but as more or less fixed and immutable characteristics of the people enveloped by them. The *rights* of the landlord or tenant may be subject to change, but the categories of landlord and tenant themselves tend to be experienced as simply "part of the law of property that governs us." As I will argue in a moment, this might not have to be the case if legal interpretation were animated by a dis-alienating vision, because the vitality of such a vision might have the effect of allowing us to remember the contingency of these categories as we use them. But so long as these categories are flattened out and hardened

through the objectification that envelops phenomena when seen with a detached, analytical eye, they help to give a thing-like appearance to the very forms of blocked connection—to the "housing hierarchy," for example—that ought eventually to be opened up.

It is, of course, not the case that the existing legal culture is based upon no moral vision at all, any more than Dukakis's campaign was based upon no moral vision. The disembodiment of lawyers and the conceptual rationalism of legal reasoning are expressions of the aspect of liberal political theory that wants to use neutrality to secure the boundary between the individual and the group (to put it conceptually) or between self and others (to put it experientially). The ostensible goal of this view is to prevent totalitarianism whether feudal, fascist, or communist, and to protect individual freedom. Without denying the importance of this idea to the development of human culture, it has always been based on a mistaken notion of social existence because its individualist ontology has failed to grasp the a priori reality of intersubjectivity and the absolute need of each person for the empowering confirmation of the other. Seen from this intersubjective perspective, the political morality of liberalism can tend to strengthen fascist movements as much as to prevent them, because it fails to recognize the nature of the social inclusion and meaning that people have no choice but to seek out. If liberal legal and political culture fails to speak to and validate this intersubjective need as a central constituent of political meaning, that culture will tend to create pathological forms of community (fundamentalism, for example) which do speak to this need in a distorted and dangerous way.

## Transformative Possibilities for Progressive Lawyers

Whether they are Democratic party liberals or political radicals who continue to believe in the possibility of a humane, nonbureaucratic socialism, lawyers who want to work for social change must transform the way they think about law practice in much the same way that the Democratic party must transform its approach to politics. The failure to have engaged in this rethinking has played an important role in the spiritual enervation of the entire generation of public interest lawyers who were produced by the sixties. The splitting of desire and reason within existing legal culture has had its worst effects on these lawyers because they have for the most part accepted its inevitability, defining their legal work as the endless "making of arguments" within the confines and assumptions of existing legal discourse and roles, while relegating the expression of their true political selves to meetings or demonstrations or participation in volunteer organizations in their private lives. Many of these lawyers are now in their forties and are burned out because of this schizophrenia and because their often-exhausting work within their official legal persona has produced so much less than they had originally hoped for. It seems to me that as a group they feel both demoralized and confused about what went wrong.

Although "what went wrong" is a very complex story that certainly should not be blamed on these often courageous and self-sacrificing attorneys, it is nonetheless true that the public interest law movement of the late sixties and early seventies tended to undermine itself through its own very limited self-definition. From the beginnings of this movement until the present day, it has been difficult to tell most public interest lawyers from their corporate counterparts; they look, act, and speak alike, using the same legal language and sharing the same underlying assumptions, the difference being that the public interest lawyers represent relatively oppressed people and try to help them get their rights and entitlements, while the corporate lawyers represent relatively rich people and do more or less the same thing (if a tax shelter is an entitlement). In public interest law schools like New College where I work, we use "skills-training" classes and an apprenticeship program to teach our students the same things that corporate firms teach their young associates in their first years of practice—essentially a collection of specialized technical skills coupled with role training in how to act like a lawyer.

This approach to practice has allowed the lawyers' political and moral aspirations to be assimilated to a set of cultural meanings that contradicts these aspirations. Whether they were drawn into politics by the civil rights movement or the antiwar movement or more recently by the environmental or feminist movements, most of these lawyers originally conceived of social change in something like the qualitative terms that I have been using—they would not have used the theoretical vocabulary of desire, mutual confirmation, denial, etc., but they would certainly have said they wanted to help create a more humane world where people related to one another with more respect, affection, and solidarity. Yet the course that they chose, to the degree that it meant giving over their being to the existing legal culture, served to help reproduce in their own political arena the very social dynamics they wanted to change. However they expressed themselves and acted in their personal lives, in their public roles they felt they had to translate their socially transformative aspirations into a disembodied way of being and a technical-rational way of thinking, talking, and writing that suppressed precisely these aspirations.

In addition, the narrow outcome-oriented focus of the typical public interest practice, coupled with a theory of social change strategies that was limited to reform litigation versus service cases, meant that they were accepting a priori the moral and political assumptions of liberal legalism as the framework for articulating the meaning of their own and their clients' goals. It is difficult to expect to generate movement toward the realization of greater social connection and mutual respect when the moral and political assumptions of your own legal discourse conceive of people as discrete, competitive individuals who want to relate to each other at arm's length and who lack any common emotional-ethical desire except the desire to be free from governmental tyranny. Although most lawyers have not fully realized the nature of this ideological contradiction (in part because they were trained as legal technicians who simply use liberal-legal doctrine rather than reflecting on its meaning), many of them have been demoralized and confused by it and now really have no clear notion of how their work can have a social impact.

The alternative to this older public interest law model is for progressive lawyers to build a legal culture that rejects the strategy of trying to win cases on the other's terms (roughly the Dukakis strategy) and that asserts in all of its manifestations the political legitimacy of its own moral and social vision. I use the term "culture" here to make it clear that I am referring to more than the substantive content of legal arguments. Actually the idea that the law "is" nothing more than a conceptual-interpretive schema to which lawyers are more or less appended is itself part of the problem to be overcome, because it derives from the disembodied character of the existing legal culture that I described earlier. If the aim of social change lawyers is to give a new political legitimacy to people's psychological and ethical need to be part of a meaning-giving community, then they must actively try to reconstruct the political culture within which they work and which they partially constitute, so as to overcome the existing separations between mind and body, thought and feeling, and analysis and comprehension as these separations manifest themselves in the public space of legal settings. This is to say that in the way they organize their offices, in the qualities of being they manifest with their clients, and in the way they relate to judges, jurors, and other legal workers, they should seek to recover the relatively spontaneous and supple embodiment of the soccer goalie (obviously in a form appropriate to being a lawyer). The aim here is to reunify legal practice with the world by grounding it in being and to pull the law back from its imaginary location "above" and "outside" of the concrete settings where it is actually created and acquires its social meaning.

I don't mean by this that lawyers must wear blue jeans to the office or get deeply involved in personal conversations with their clients, but rather that they should systematically challenge, with a keen awareness of the customary constraints that limit the scope of their freedom, the modes of role-based, disembodied interaction that reproduce on an everyday level the divisions between private and public, and desire and reason, that I have been addressing. "Skills training" is required for this because the legal arena is suffused with so much authoritarian symbolism (think of the portraits alone that one finds in the average courtroom) that one must develop a highly disciplined sense of how to retain the expressive forms of the existing legal culture enough to be recognized as a legitimate member of the legal community and yet infuse these forms with a new, morally autonomous cultural meaning. I doubt that one can do this effectively, for example, without understanding the psychoanalytic idea of "transference" as it applies to both the fearfulness and idealization that tends to characterize the way clients see lawyers, the way lawyers see judges, the way judges see the Founding Fathers, and so on. The idea is not to strike out against the existing system of roles in a self-marginalizing and self-defeating way, but to manifest in a disciplined way—in the totality of the manifestation of one's being as it appears in the preverbal but intuitively accessible expression of meaning revealed through the lawyer and her surroundings—her affirmation of the social desire that others have formed a "system" to deny.

The same kind of transformative possibility and constraint exists in the area of legal doctrine and reasoning. The analogue to the laundry list of redistributive entitlement programs in Dukakis's and other recent Democratic campaigns is the endless demand on the left for more rights for oppressed groups. The problem with defining political aims in terms of entitlements or rights is not the appeal for entitlements or rights themselves, but the failure to frame these appeals within an expressive or evocative moral vision that could give them a potentially universal, desire-realizing social meaning. At best, the pursuit of more rights within the presupposed liberal framework of conventional legal reasoning simply extends the post–New Deal, liberal welfare state—that is, the ideological meaning of a conventional Fourteenth Amendment argument justifying the expansion of political rights serves to justify rather than transform an individualistic, competitive model of human nature and a pluralistic, interest-group model of social and political life. At worst, this translation of transformative political aims into existing legal consciousness serves to actually destroy the transformative hope contained in a legal claim—as when an affirmative action argument based on past governmental

discrimination that has impeded "equality of opportunity" to compete on the Law School Admission Test exam affirms both the legitimacy of competitive exams as ciphers of social value and the legitimacy of the narrow and antiempathic analytical rationality tested on these exams as the kind of "skill" needed for mastering legal reasoning (while also tending to intensify societal racial conflict between relatively powerless white and minority groups, since the ethical message embodied in the interpretive schema tends to reconfirm that the whites really merit success on the competitive ladder and are being punished for sins which they themselves had nothing to do with).

The way to surpass this contradiction which has plagued progressive lawyers for at least my adult lifetime is to start telling the truth about the vision of social life that we are trying to make real, and to treat the American people as a whole as if they also can and should believe in it. I have already stated the philosophical/ontological basis for the possibility of this occurring—the desire for mutual confirmation and the felt need of everyone to overcome the blockage of this social desire means that people will want to respond to (and in some cases, to defensively resist the pull of) evocative moral appeals which convey a sense of transcendant social purpose. Claims of right, when they are formulated with clients in law offices and whether they are made in court or through the media, should be justified legally in a way that is continuous with the qualitative political meaning that inspires them. As for the possible objection that this kind of thinking is "idealist" in the sense of not being grounded in the real socioeconomic and cultural conditions that shape people's responses to such appeals (a view shared by both Marxists and conservative economic rationalists), let me say simply that any claim must be contextualized so that it expresses some particular tendency, already alive and moving within the culture, that carries a disalienating, potentially transformative meaning which can legitimately support the political expression of this meaning in public legal discourse. If the Constitution is an "evolving document," then its meaning should always be subject to a contested debate over who "we" are as social beings and how we are or should be "constituted" as a political community.

Here is one contemporary example of what I mean. The doctrine of comparable worth has emerged from the spread of mutual confirmation that gave rise to the women's movement, but the social meaning of both the movement and the doctrine at the moment are in doubt. In its early phases, the women's movement sought to fundamentally challenge the qualities of social interaction that have been valued in male-dominated society and are reflected in everything from the market economy to positivist epistemologies in the social sciences. Today, this transformative dimension of the women's movement is being contested by a more conservative notion, which defines success and failure primarily in terms of the number of women who occupy positions formerly held only by men and by the amount of money women earn relative to men. Certainly these two meanings of feminism are potentially compatible in the sense that the struggle for sexual equality within the existing society does not imply an abandonment of the more transformative goal—but I believe that the two visions are often in tension and that the latter threatens to co-opt the former or to neutralize it enough so that it no longer carries the sharp critique of prevailing forms of social alienation that it once did.

The choice of how to articulate a comparable worth claim reflects this tension. As far as I know, the principal way that comparable worth claims are currently formulated is to claim a right to equal pay for jobs traditionally occupied by women which are comparable, in terms of educational and skill requirements and other measurable factors, to higher-paid jobs held primarily by men. The remedy sought is money damages. In one sense, this formulation does express the transformative dimension of feminism because it seeks to value—in the manner currently recognized as the measure of value—the compassion and intuitive wisdom that have long characterized many forms of so-called "women's work." But on the whole, those who have made these claims have tended to accept the division of desire and reason that feminism originally sought to oppose, emphasizing instead a quantitative meaning of equality defined by such factors as number of years of training and amount of monetary compensation which are assimilable to the prevailing liberal models of both market-based social relations and rights-based redistributive political intervention. Like labor-law jurisprudence in the decades following the rise of the labor movement, which to some degree redefined that movement's goals so as to emphasize higher wages and safer working conditions while de-emphasizing the qualitative and more transformative goal of workplace democracy, this approach to feminist jurisprudence may in the long run contribute to the dissolution of the transformative vision of human reciprocity that is at the heart of the women's movement's power to create social change. The law always has this potential power of dissolution because legal interpretation constantly reflects back to those inside and outside a social movement what society as a whole considers to be the legitimate aims of the movement; the law therefore offers its own promise of social recognition and inclusion, however alienated, that may subtly erode the movement's own self-understanding and original conception of its aims.

My claim is that it would be better, for the women's movement and for society, for feminist lawyers developing their legal theory to have as their goal a redefinition of human worth that challenges the market-based definition more directly than a pay equity theory does, and to seek a remedy that calls for some plausible modification in the organization of a workplace aimed at realizing a more nurturant and socially confirming conception of the nature of socially valuable labor. I cannot say at the moment exactly how such a claim would be formulated using the existing legal materials (there is certainly support in American legal history for a qualitative ideal of equality), but the great virtue of this approach is that it would allow the legal claim to be expressed in a way continuous with the moral passion and sense of social purpose that originally animated the women's movement itself. Not only would this fusion of desire and reason within an openly political discourse challenge the apparent inevitability of people's sense of underconfirmation by challenging the prevailing system of measuring social worth that produces that sense; such a fusion would also challenge the technical-rational character of existing legal reasoning and the reification of legal categories by calling for an interpretation of social equality that relies upon the "softness" of heartfelt thought and the kind of empathic comprehension of social qualities that dissolves the detachment of the anti-intuitive and hyperanalytical "legal mind." The moral power of such a claim, in other words, would not only be in its assertion of the possibility of a transformed workplace sensitive to the realization of a common social desire that women are speaking for, but in its assertion that political and legal reasoning must reform itself so as to be able to recognize this kind of desire if it means to really express the will of the people in the truth of their social being.

It may be that this way of framing a comparable worth claim is not currently feasible because the constraints within the social context or the available legal materials are too great. But even if the precise right asserted is more narrowly framed and the remedy sought is more conventional, the meaning of what is being asked for can be stated so as to express the deeper political goal, perhaps emphasizing primarily the intrinsic worth of the qualities immanent in the work to be valued rather than equivalence in educational qualifications. There is virtually no case to be litigated or bill to be lobbied for that does not offer progressive lawyers some opportunity to infuse their practical objective with a larger meaning that exerts a pull on the desire and longing of those who hear them, including their own supporters who face the same conflict between confidence and doubt that everyone else does. It would have mattered a great deal if Michael Dukakis had presented his student loan program within a framework of meaning that emphasized


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how the payback provision would have enabled college graduates to devote themselves to public service instead of forcing them to become yuppies, and had made it clear how this program was linked to the social vision behind his health care program and his child care program and his opposition to the war in Nicaragua and his determination to end the cold war. In the same sense, it would matter a great deal if progressive lawyers formed themselves into a self-conscious community (through a series of national and regional meetings, for example) and began to give even their most modest legal claims a sense of social meaning and purpose that could make their work an affirmation of the desire for mutual connection that secretly animates each of us. Conservative forces began this kind of self-conscious organizing in support of their moral vision after the defeat of Barry Goldwater in 1964. It seems like the right time for us to do it now. □

## KILLING THE PRINCESS

*(Continued from p. 19)*

writing has recognized: a naively driven materialism defining itself *as* Jewish.

To begin with, the Jewish American Princess who has caused us so much grief is only lately Jewish, grafted onto a much older character, the American Princess, herself sprung full-grown out of the wreckage of the Southern Belle. Preserved flower of a New World weakness for the aristocratic, the American Princess graces the rising class that Thorstein Veblen described in 1899 in *The Theory of the Leisure Class,* where he coined the term "conspicuous consumption" to describe the vocation of a class that separates itself from the world of labor by cultivating an ever-greater uselessness, by perfecting the art of flamboyant waste. Such a class defines itself, Veblen argued, not by blood, nor even by purchasing power, but by an indolence relieved in exercises of "taste," that same "taste" so mysteriously fetishized by Elana Steinberg's friends and so ubiquitous among the leisure—that is to say, female—classes of American Jews.

Indeed, what Veblen did not anticipate—though Henry James did when he noted the "growing divorce between the American woman (with her comparative leisure, culture, grace ... ) and the male American immersed in the ferocity of business"—was that, in a country without a landed class, it would fall to women to exercise the tastes their husbands labored to support; that the leisure class in America could only be a female class whose lifestyle was preserved through intrafamilial class warfare. It is this warfare that we see explode in the comedy of the fifties, where the American man as Provider is a disgruntled or bemused prole, shackled to supporting his wife's conspicuous spending. And it is this warfare that is, not incidentally, so standard in the repertoire of those Borscht Belt comics who are our mainstream American comics. When Rodney Dangerfield, Shecky Green, and Alan King pillory their wives, it is not to reveal that the wrangling over the Visa card is unique to the Jewish marriage. It is rather to point, with rueful humor, to the Americanization of that marriage.

And yet this hegemony of the family's Princess is won at a stiff psychic price. Late-nineteenth-century American literature is bursting with female characters who, made fancy ladies by their husbands' money, eroticize that money, perhaps as a gesture of protest against a culture that makes sex their only job. But the text that best dramatizes my point, even as it prophesies the forms of an ever-growing American materialism, is *The Great Gatsby.* Fitzgerald's Daisy Faye Buchanan is the ultimate American Princess whose frigid passions are slaked only by things, and the seduction scene of that novel is a veritable proto-JAP joke. The scene comes after Gatsby has led Daisy through his magnificent East Egg mansion, won all for her; they have just arrived in his bedroom. Rather than clasp a palpitating Daisy to his breast, Gatsby reads her right: he shows her his shirts. "They're such beautiful shirts!" sobs Daisy as she sinks ecstatically into the imported silks. It is this same cathexis, this same transfer of libidinal energy from the nice man who worships her to Neiman-Marcus, that the cruelest of JAP jokes lampoon; yet the joke is American, the Princess a flapper whose heart is as wilted as her daisylike innocence. Over the years the stereotype of the Princess has gained added potency when married to the troubling figure of the dark lady, the sultry, grasping bitch most recently incarnated in Alexis of "Dynasty." Long before Jews came to America the dark lady was here, the enticing Venus flytrap whose only religion was sexuality, but whose hunger for men was her lust for her own identity displaced.

Poignantly, there is nothing intrinsically Jewish about the Princess absorbed in her nails and her decor except a turn-of-the-century greenhorn credulity that read her straight, that discerned in the role of Princess the *Eishet Khayil*'s big break: over the streets paved with gold, the Woman of Valor might preside, finally coming into her own. One hesitates to gainsay the impulse, for the woman whose price was above rubies had too long shared her shtetl kitchen with the livestock and, even in America, with her piecework. And yet, as the stories of the turn-of-the-century writer Anzia Yezierska reveal, the American *Eishet Khayil* was anachronistic almost from the moment of her realization. Exiled in her modern kitchen while her children went out for Chinese food, she was made superfluous by the same ideology of help-

lessness and the same laborsaving devices that stranded her Main Street counterpart at home.

The economic dimension is key. In America, the Jewish woman who would aid her husband's ascent to the top had to learn a new relationship to her home: no longer arena for her talents, it was now showcase, setting for that highly symbolic leisure that served her husband's manly image. In other words, if, at another time, in another place, the Virtuous Woman's rubies were her market value, metaphoric crown of her labor, her vocational usefulness ("She seeketh wool and flax, / And worketh willingly with her hands"), now they functioned to mark her vocational uselessness, to crown the repose whose invisible maintenance preserved her husband's virility. In her cage hung with mirrors, the Jewish woman who defines herself in recursive rituals of self perfection—(re)decorating, make(overs), and the "functions" that commemorate the movement of other lives—is only as narcissistic as the Yankee Princess she imitates, just as her forebears imitated the grande dames of the Four Hundred. And only as trapped. Except, of course, to the extent that she believes star quality her Jewish obligation, the aristocracy her Jewish niche.

This is a characteristic swerve well-documented in Jewish American literature, a literature that tells again and again the story of a Jew who, hungry to belong in America yet incapable of abandoning tradition, makes a pious study of American values only to call them Jewish. The identity crisis such a graft provokes is first dramatized in Abraham Cahan's *The Rise of David Levinsky,* a book whose very title is cloned from William Dean Howell's *The Rise of Silas Lapham,* which points with irony to the phenomenon of ambition learned straight from Horatio Alger. Delmore Schwartz's tragicomedies of the thirties go even further, capturing the warfare of parents and children who have sacrificed their hold on a ritual culture in pursuit of American perks. In Schwartz's families, the culture of materialism is so ritualized, so artfully superimposed onto Jewish tradition, that the children prove their respect for the faith by *buying* the things their parents could not buy, by making the money their parents would have made. The American *apikores* (Jewish apostate) is not the son gone secular but the son who fails to make a million. The symbiosis that results leaves Jewish parents and children infantilized together in a world bereft of that which sustains Jewish culture: history. Lacking a sustaining code of ritual value to keep history dynamic, Jews maintain their group identity with a garish kind of supermaterialism, an adolescent out-consumering of the consumer culture. The Jew stereotypes himself as American in order to identify himself as Jewish. In other words, the young woman becomes Fitzgerald's needy, languid Daisy Faye Buchanan only in order to become Philip Roth's Brenda Patimkin.

Grasping none of this, Frondorf is at a loss to understand why, shortly after Elana's trial, Steve Steinberg would shock his community by returning to his Scottsdale synagogue to recite Birkat Hagomel—the blessing said by one who has escaped danger. While we might second Frondorf in questioning Steinberg's taste—forced incarceration for killing one's wife while sleepwalking was hardly the kind of danger rabbinic liturgists had in mind—we might also read in this gesture the recognition of a more sustaining order of value than "The Sands," an order with the power to reclaim a lost identity. One thinks of the last paragraphs of Saul Bellow's *Seize the Day,* where a middle-aged man, still a child in his father's eyes for never having achieved financial success in America, staggers into a Jewish funeral hall just in time to mourn a middle-aged man who might be himself. In his act of mourning, there is promise that he might finally grow up. How? Through a reattachment to that tradition, which, older than his father, makes him his father's equal, gives him back the perspective of history and thus his freedom to be himself—to start anew in his own time.

The paradox is that this very attachment to time, to history, to inheritance, is what rescues us from mechanical duplication of our parents' dreams. A working tradition does not repeat; it renews. Clueless about this dynamic, Frondorf fails to notice with what greenhorn innocence the Steinbergs read their grandparents' tattered Veblen, how jealously they guard their East Egg in Scottsdale, and, especially, with what circumspect care they live out an immigrant's bedazzled fantasy while the decades pass them by.

Since Frondorf understands Judaism as stuck in the past, she is forced to justify a time lag that has Elana falling further and further behind women of her generation. Judaism and feminism, ostensibly allied in Frondorf's argument, begin to seem mutually exclusive. Assuring us that "Jews have always believed that it is the role of the wife and mother to nurture, to raise the children and to keep alive Jewish culture," Frondorf can rationalize Elana's lifestyle, claiming that Elana was typical of "middle class girls of her day and age" who didn't go to college, who instead filled the time before the wedding by working in places where they would be fondly remembered twenty years later as "little dolls." One imagines that Frondorf is talking about a woman of Ibsen's *1900,* or at least about a genuine product of the fifties, not baby boomer Elana, graduated from high school in 1964—young enough to sing at Woodstock, to have read *The Feminine Mystique,* but now cheerfully ensconced by Frondorf in an American time capsule where men work and women stay home in their cool houses, "isolated during the day except for brief forays to chauffeur the




children or do errands." While she has plenteous ire to spare for the never-never land of the casino, Frondorf blithely celebrates the satisfactions of a woman living suspended between the world of the grandmothers and Calvin Klein's spring line. What is troubling is not that a woman might find fulfillment in her "cool house," for surely she might. But all evidence was that Elana, married to a man who shared her grand illusions but whose capacity as single wage earner to meet the bills had gone out with "Father Knows Best," simply didn't. So that more insulting than the egregious idea that authentic Jewish womanhood is best achieved in the 1950s General Electric home is the *bubba-mayse* Frondorf perpetuates at the expense of the women like Elana—those friends who testified about her and whose ambivalence Frondorf finds mysterious to this day.

In its misreading of these friends Frondorf's book is most dangerous and most instructive: here Frondorf condescends to the women whose exemplar she would presumably defend, much as some Jewish feminists condescend when they lament the lack of "consciousness" among self-described "Princesses." What Frondorf fails to recognize is that the woman who calls herself a "professional shopper" or brandishes "Jewish American Princess" in rhinestones on her bosom is neither a child, nor a bimbo, nor even a study in self-hatred. Often, this woman does these things in order to salvage some identity out of a profoundly compromised situation, out of vocationlessness and the ever-present possibility—through divorce, for example—of being reduced to an impoverished, unskilled serf in the consumer culture she now commands. So that if at first it seems that Frondorf is soft-pedaling, unwilling to indict Elana's female friends whose testimony to her spending habits was as damaging as the testimony their husbands offered on Steve's behalf, on closer scrutiny it becomes clear that she is doing much worse. Devoted as she is to celebrating Elana's consumerism as traditionally Jewish, Frondorf fails to see the deeply troubled and self-revealing quality of the female responses to Elana's memory. Because anything like skepticism about Elana's Jewish virtue looks to Frondorf like five points for Steve, she chooses to characterize the torn statements of Elana's friends as sour grapes. She hazards:

> My guess is that Elana stepped over the line with at least a few of the women, upsetting the very fine balance that was acceptable for this circle. They were all consumers, obviously, but each group has its own limits. Elana was very much a free spirit, and she was breaking out from the mold....

By Elana's side to the very barricades, Frondorf paints a picture of the "professional shopper" as young artist, misunderstood by those philistines unwilling to go to such lengths for their art. It is no more convincing to compare a woman who shops till she drops to a "free spirit" than it is to call a gambler who wins, favored of the gods. At any rate, how can Frondorf call "free" a woman whose self-expression depended so utterly on her husband's unreliable income, and whose option of divorce was no doubt clouded by the prospect of a poverty that offered no means of self-expression?

And notice the divisiveness of Frondorf's feminism. If Elana's onetime friends shut their doors in Frondorf's face, it was probably not that they had forgotten Elana but that they had remembered her all too well. Frondorf might have read in their testimonies not envy and bitchery but a muted, yet eloquent, solidarity. Taken together, the statements compile a vision of economic powerlessness and imperiled identity, all enforced by a communal nostalgia for the Princess that grandma never was. Elana's friends' ambivalence points not to Elana's bold spirit, but to her compromise: to an economic vulnerability so gripping and a self-abnegation so extreme that she could choose to maintain appearances while disregarding what signs there were that the man she lived with would stab her twenty-six times while her children listened, instructed by their father as they burst terrified from their rooms, to "Shut the fucking door."

That Steve Steinberg, murderer of his wife, walks free is a crime for which a cynical forensic psychiatrist

and a sexist legal strategist share blame. Elana Steinberg, brutally slain, was innocent of all crimes. She did not deserve to die, and the epithet—JAP—that provided her killer's ticket to freedom has a dangerous power fittingly dramatized by the story *The State of Arizona v. Steve Steinberg*. Yet in our haste to bury the epithet we must be very cautious not to go Frondorf's way, not to naturalize as Jewish those values that happen to be held by Jews, not to shore up those myths of Jewish American culture that call a woman's desperate narcissism her freedom, and her economic helplessness her tradition. To question the materialism of Jews is not to defame Jewish culture any more than to notice Elana Steinberg's straitened life is to murder her or her tradition. That tradition is accustomed to taking history in stride. □

## NOSTALGIA DISEASE

*(Continued from p. 22)*

information and stimulus, we have lost a distinct sense of what our time means or how it differs from (and grows out from) former times. We respond to our confusion by browsing freely and indiscriminately among the relics and styles of the past. Everything flows together, unsutured by any sense of causal connection or sequence. And when there are no laws about how things fit together, irony—bemused detachment—is the inevitable consequence.

"Nostalgia," the word, comes from the Greek *nostos,* which means to return home and survive. *Webster's Third New International Dictionary* gives the archaic definition as "a severe melancholia caused by a protracted absence from home." The more current meaning given is "a wistful or excessively sentimental ... yearning for return to or return of some real or romanticized period or irrecoverable condition or setting in the past." This nostalgia, this longing for connection that is projected upon falsified images, increasingly replaces what were once natural linkages emerging from an understanding of the progression of experience. The more that the objects of our nostalgia become calculated media commodities, the further we get from being able to grasp our condition.

The yearning itself is authentic, I have no doubt, but as the object and the indulgence are generally false, the process can only be debilitating. Nostalgia, fostered by the products of our popular culture, sets us ever more deeply into a schizophrenic relation to ourselves. When we discharge our pain and sadness at the loss of meaningful parts of the past by consuming manufactured images, we break contact with ourselves and with the truth of that past. Such nostalgia short-circuits the mourning process. And where mourning lets us lay the past to rest and get on with things, the bathos of nostalgia keeps us floating in a perpetual illusion about an attainable or renewable past. By immersing ourselves in the afterglow of our own history—the seductive, doctored afterglow—we lose the initiative to keep making history. That is, to perform freely and unself-consciously in the face of the present.*

The self-consciousness, which goes hand in hand with the distanced perception of irony, is the most insidious aspect of the nostalgia transaction. Heightening and sentimentalizing the images allows for safe consumption; it shields us from the pain of the genuine. Irony, incorporating the attitude of knowing, of being "wised-up," anticipates and preempts true response. We are rendered passive. When Garrison Keillor delivers his Lake Wobegon stories, his tone and arch pauses do the work of distancing. His every vocal gesture is telling us that, hey, this is cute and folksy, that we ought to be comfortably amused by the doings of these dear, benighted small-town folks. What was once in earnest exists now to be chuckled over. The truth has not come closer—it has receded. And when one of the characters on "thirtysomething" launches into yet another paean to the lost ideals of the sixties, it is always with a grimace that derides the very clichés that are being vented. Again, the matter of the past is hedged around with the quotation marks of our supposed superiority. The net effect is the divestiture of the past: we can't find our way back to it because its soul has been leached away.

Prepackaged nostalgia builds easy bridges to what is finally a dream about how things were. The more that such bridges are built, and the more that we use them in our daily traffic, the more likely it is that the truth about the past will slip away. That truth is complex and difficult. It reflects to us images of the present that are not always pleasing. It posits the ongoing work of culture as a massive task. Postmodernism, by contrast, offers simple, even inviting, views. We can venture into a bazaar of images and attitudes that lay no claim on us; its ironies feel cool, fashionable. But until we can break out of the cage we have made for ourselves, those ironies and the self-consciousness that attends them will be our fate.

*One might, of course, uphold the opposite case: that we take our bearings for the future from the fond ideals—and idealizations—of the past; and indeed, that to uphold a sense of purpose a nation must look back upon something brighter and nobler than the history that revisionists would offer us. What could have been more nostalgic, in this sense, than Ronald Reagan's farewell address to the nation, his invocation of John Winthrop's "city upon a hill"? I would not want to argue that we should do away with the heightenings and distortions that must attend such a vision. But I would point out that even the president—the prince of nostalgia—warned in the same speech against "an eradication of the American memory that could result, ultimately, in an erosion of the American spirit." Though his exhortation was for all Americans to learn the *patriotic* facts, he too was aware of the dangers of memory gone awry. The drive to nostalgia must be recognized for what it is, and it must be tempered consistently with the complicated truth. Otherwise we are condemned to keep dreaming.

And here is the demonic irony at the root of all others: that the quality we most prize in all of these trumped-up images of the past is the *lack* of irony and self-consciousness. We long for nothing so much as a time when people did things out of simple necessity and desire, when everything was not tainted by self-awareness, when the guy running to meet his girl under the Biltmore clock was not simultaneously watching himself running to meet his girl under the Biltmore clock. □

## WELFARE REFORM

*(Continued from p. 25)*

fornia, and so forth) experience lower unemployment rates than do the "rust bowl" of the industrial Midwest and the farm states. Furthermore, unemployment rates tend to differ widely even within states. Vigorous promotion of workfare may force poor rural families to relocate to urban areas in order to find jobs. Given this situation, welfare reform that promises total self-sufficiency through full-time employment constitutes a cruel hoax for a majority of recipients.

Structural impediments to workfare, imposed by the nature of the marginal labor market in a service economy, present serious problems for the credibility of welfare reform. When people fail to get off welfare completely, or when they return to welfare as their marginal jobs evaporate, they become scapegoats. The economic failure of society is thus transformed into the personal failure of welfare recipients and into the general failure of the welfare state.

How much "reform" is in the new welfare reform initiative? The most significant improvements are the extension of child day care and Medicaid for one year after a worker finds employment, and the inclusion of two-parent households in the program. These provisions will doubtlessly help parents who are occupationally upwardly mobile; however, the great majority of people on AFDC exhibit a job history in which welfare complements episodic and low-wage employment. In light of this fact, the new welfare reform will extend important benefits to the working poor, but it is unlikely to boost people off of welfare by itself. "Most work-welfare programs look like decent investments, but no carefully evaluated work-welfare programs have done more than put a tiny dent in the welfare caseloads," observes David Ellwood of Harvard's Kennedy School of Government. Results of various workfare experiments show that "annual earnings are raised $200 to $750," Ellwood says, hardly enough to launch AFDC families toward financial self-sufficiency. Unless wages increase and jobs become more reliable, the working poor will continue to need welfare benefits.

More important, some of the bill's provisions are clearly punitive and unlikely to enhance substantially the economic independence of those on AFDC. Requiring one parent of two-parent households to hold an unpaid job in exchange for benefits probably won't increase self-sufficiency, and it may actually impede it if beneficiaries are forced into these jobs when they could be seeking work in the labor market. Garnishing wages is unlikely to increase economic independence if a parent's wages are so low that such a requirement creates incentives to quit work in order to avoid paying child support. Finally, reliance on states to operate workfare programs that are not adequately funded is likely to result in welfare reform that is uneven—relatively wealthy states, such as Massachusetts and California, will expand on generous workfare programs that are already in place, while poorer states, such as Mississippi and New Mexico, will be hard-pressed to implement programs that are anything more than punitive. All told, the Family Support Act of 1988 is at best a feeble attempt at welfare reform, and at worst harsh and punitive.

### The Obstacles to Welfare Reform

Why, then, was such poor legislation passed in the first place? Robert Greenstein, executive director of the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, a liberal think tank in Washington, D.C., observes that the price tag of a *major* restructuring of welfare "moves outside the realm of what can even be discussed in Congress." Indeed, even groups such as the National Governors' Association and the American Public Welfare Association (APWA), previously enraged by Reagan administration strikes against social programs, backed the Family Support Act. According to APWA staff, the conventional wisdom was that, despite the bill's flaws, it was the best that could be gotten at the time. In any case, they contended, what the act lacks in clout, it makes up for in symbolic value.

In many ways, the bitter argument that ensued in Congress over the Family Support Act was both the culmination of pressure that had been building to repair the alleged damage done by liberal social legislation to the national culture as well as the opening volley in an upcoming battle over more substantial matters—specifically the social insurance entitlement programs. After all, AFDC expenditures for 1988 were pegged at $16.5 billion, while the deficit-reduction target was set at $144 billion. AFDC is small change compared to Social Security, Medicare, and unemployment insurance—programs that cost over $300 billion annually and constitute 60 percent of social welfare expenditures. Therefore, the controversy surrounding AFDC is largely symbolic; at the heart of the debate lie questions in-

volving the government's responsibility to assure "the common welfare."

Welfare reform has been a heated topic for several decades, and most presidents since John F. Kennedy have either offered specific welfare proposals or at least paid lip service to the need for reform. Until recently, welfare reform had a liberal connotation, since reform usually called for expanded eligibility as well as major increases in benefits. In the 1980s, however, there was an ideological shift that can be attributed to significant changes in the social, political, and economic spheres in America.

Instrumental among these changes was the role played by analysts from think tanks in successfully challenging the hegemony of the federal government in social welfare. Although conservative policy institutes, such as the American Enterprise Institute (AEI) and the Heritage Foundation, aspired to roll back the New Deal, initial moves in this direction were made by liberal analysts. In 1977 Charles Schultze, a senior fellow at the Brookings Institution and a former chairman of President Jimmy Carter's Council of Economic Advisors, argued that governmental intervention (through higher expenditures and increased regulation) was inferior to market strategies in dealing with social problems. Soon afterward, Henry Aaron, another Brookings senior fellow, published a critique of the War on Poverty in which he concluded that the intellectual basis of poverty programs was inherently flawed. By the time William J. Baroody, Jr., then president of AEI, promoted his post-New Deal philosophy—advocating a reduction in government involvement in domestic policy—the groundwork had already been laid by liberal scholars.

Furthermore, in a development much deprecated by liberal intellectuals, a loose amalgam of religious fundamentalists and conservative populists merged to form the influential "traditionalist movement." Seeking to reinforce basic values—respect for family and country, hard work, freedom, and independence—traditionalists challenged welfare programs, alleging that they fracture family life, erode the work ethic, and encourage undesirable behavior. The traditionalist movement flexed its political muscles during the 1980 election, which not only brought Ronald Reagan into the presidency but also placed a Republican majority in the Senate. Popular allegiance to this movement provided the Reagan administration with the political mandate it needed to alter domestic policy during the early 1980s. George Bush's election promises to continue the momentum of the traditionalist movement.

The social and political assault on the welfare state was joined by a fiscal attack that rippled through every level of government. Increased expenditures on non-welfare activities, particularly on the military, compounded the problem of "runaway welfarism" by creating unprecedented deficits. In response, the Balanced Budget and Emergency Deficit Control Act of 1985 (Gramm-Rudman-Hollings) limited future expenditures. Although certain provisions of the deficit-reduction act were ruled unconstitutional, Congressional leaders used the basic provisions of the act to make appropriations contingent on meeting deficit-reduction targets. As a result, $23 billion was cut from government expenditures in 1987, half from domestic programs, a total that is likely to increase in upcoming years.

A deficit-driven budget meant that not only were new welfare expenditures unlikely in the foreseeable future, but also that further cuts in social programs were probable. This relationship between the swelling budget deficit and the limits of social programs did not go unnoticed by Daniel Patrick Moynihan, probably the most ardent proponent of welfare reform since the New Deal. Suggesting that the budget deficit was a deliberate contrivance on the part of the Reagan administration to cap popular social programs that had been consistently defended by Congress, Moynihan concluded in *Came the Revolution* (Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1988) that the budget deficit would "virtually paralyze American national government for the rest of the decade."

Complemented by a huge trade deficit, a jittery stock market, a falling dollar, and ongoing fears of inflation, the budget deficit served as an ironclad rationale for freezing social programs and effectively straitjacketed the welfare state. Within a relatively short period, the liberal trinity of welfare reform—full employment, a guaranteed annual income, and national health care—had virtually disappeared from public discourse. No longer the expression of a moral imperative to assure all citizens of protection against economic and social insecurity, welfare reform had come to mean that the poor should work for meager benefits, that social welfare should be defined according to economic productivity, and that the family—not government—should be the rescuer of first resort for those about to fall into the social safety net.

## Toward a New Welfare Agenda

Progressives should steel themselves for a forthcoming recession and its attendant social debris. A recession—which most economists agree is inevitable—will wreak havoc on a domestic policy that is already stretched thin, thereby presenting opportunities for progressives to reassert their influence in social affairs. Ronald Reagan, for all his railing about Marxism, has managed to produce an American *lumpen-proletariat*—the underclass.

Since 1980, many scholars have identified an American underclass—a poor, largely urban population, estimated at ten million, that is so sociologically disorganized that it does not respond to conventional incentives. Ken Auletta's study *The Underclass* examined groups that make up this population and then did a public service by chronicling the extent to which traditional job training programs are ineffectual for this group. Nicholas Lemann's *Atlantic* series on "The Origins of the Underclass" attributes the worsening circumstances of Chicago's Blacks to the exodus of middle-class Blacks who had provided a stabilizing influence on the inner-city ghetto. Some courageous Black scholars, including William Julius Wilson and Douglas Glasgow, have discarded academic protocol and acknowledged that many minority communities are literally imploding—black holes sucking up and annihilating the very economic, social, and spiritual resources that they desperately need. In this light, the prescriptions advanced in the Family Support Act—paternity determination, child support enforcement, workfare—seem naive in the face of a population for whom employment is not seen as possible and for whom illicit activities are more profitable. Liberals can regain an important measure of public credibility if they propose viable alternatives for addressing the needs of the underclass.

In fact, liberals can make a compelling case about a general slide in the American standard of living. Between 1960 and 1979, the poverty rate decreased from nearly 24 percent to just over 11 percent. But by the early 1980s it started to climb, reaching an almost twenty-year high of nearly 15 percent in 1985. In 1980, the number of people in poverty stood at 29.3 million; by 1987, it had increased to 32.5 million. What makes these figures so extraordinary is that in 1980 the unemployment rate was close to 11 percent, almost double its current level. In addition, these high poverty figures come in a period marked by the longest economic recovery in modern U.S. history. In essence, economic data suggest that a growing number of Americans are impervious to the ebb and flow of economic life. Relatively good economic times seem to have little impact on their condition. What's more, if relatively good economic times sustain a poverty population of over 13 percent, what numbers can be expected in the event of a severe recession?

Progressives can turn this bleak forecast in their favor if they can accommodate core social values, which in the U.S. are more conservative than those associated with European-style welfare states, and begin to conceive of new strategies to serve disadvantaged Americans. Any plan for revitalizing welfare must be grounded in hardheaded pragmatism. It is apparent that the middle and upper classes are reluctant to provide additional welfare benefits unless they perceive those benefits to be in their best interests. William Julius Wilson notes that "the hidden agenda for liberal policy makers is to improve the life chances of truly disadvantaged groups such as the ghetto underclass by emphasizing programs to which the more advantaged groups of all races and class backgrounds can relate." In a society less able to fund a welfare system that keeps large numbers of people idle, welfare must be viewed as fostering America's economic advantage rather than curtailing it. Any feasible welfare reform proposal must therefore contain elements of traditional values tempered by the current economic reality.

Reciprocity must be a key component of any sound welfare reform plan. Indeed, society has the right to expect more from a recipient than his or her ability to pick up a welfare check. Those able to work should do so. Welfare receipt should be linked to reciprocal behaviors, and the social marginality encouraged by non-reciprocal forms of welfare must be shelved in favor of a new social contract—one that is based on mutual obligation. Welfare measures must also be tied to productivity. Rather than being a drag on the economy, welfare can and should be an institution directly contributing to the economic viability of the nation. America can no longer afford the luxury of maintaining idle welfare recipients while its schools, bridges, roads, and inner-city communities are rotting. Putting the recipient to work rebuilding the infrastructure can be justified as a way to enhance the recipient's self-image and to meet pressing social goals. Allying welfare with productivity also draws social programs closer to the American economic system, a strategy that may be necessary to justify additional expenditures for social welfare in the future.

## Community Development and Welfare Reform

The previous suggestions are imitative of traditionalist rhetoric, of course; what is also needed is a progressive context within which to put this rhetoric. Progressives should insist that *community* be added to the values welfare reform already emphasizes—reciprocity, productivity, familial responsibility. "Reviving civic virtue," in the words of Minneapolis's Mayor Donald Fraser, should be an objective of future welfare initiatives. For liberals who were singed by the Community Action Program experience of the War on Poverty, such a suggestion will be met with some apprehension.

Yet, there are compelling reasons to shift the focus from the federal government toward the community as the basis for social welfare. Writing in *Tikkun* (Vol. 1, No. 1, 1986), Harry Boyte and Sara Evans contend that local voluntary organizations have been a source of social transformation in the past and offer the same promise

for the future. Elsewhere, Marc Bendick has noted that social welfare in the United States has been associated with local voluntary associations more than with the governmental megastructures of the European welfare states. Recent experiments in community development support this position. The Enterprise Foundation, founded by James Rouse in 1981, has pumped millions of dollars into poor communities, primarily for the construction of badly needed housing. By 1983, the Ford Foundation–sponsored Local Initiatives Support Corporation had supported 197 community development projects that provided a variety of tangible benefits to poor communities.

A community development strategy could be the basis for welfare reform in several ways. For example, welfare beneficiaries should have a community development agency to which their benefits would be assigned. In order to collect benefits, those people on welfare would have to engage in joblike tasks identified by the community development agency. Community development entities would be nonprofit organizations that would meet the standards of the welfare department with respect to personnel and benefit management but that would otherwise be free to define community development projects and assign beneficiaries to them. Unlike people on public welfare, who are regarded as dependent, beneficiaries would be treated like employees of the community development agency. Although still receiving public assistance, these beneficiaries could develop a track record that would be of use in the private labor market. In the process, one of the more insidious problems of welfare, pointed out by syndicated newspaper columnist William Raspberry, could be overcome. Raspberry writes: "You cannot get good at welfare. It does no good for a welfare mother to impress her caseworker with her quick grasp or her sense of responsibility or her willingness to take on an extra task. There is no way for a welfare client to distinguish himself, in any economically useful way, from any other welfare client. There are no promotions on welfare."

Welfare recipients should have a choice of community development agencies in which to enroll. Once enrolled, beneficiaries could transfer to another community development agency—or to other employment—much like employees change jobs in the labor market. Such an arrangement would assure a measure of social responsibility on the part of welfare beneficiaries in a way that directly benefits the communities in which they live. Community-centered welfare would address Barbara Ehrenreich's contention that to rebuild community in America, "we need a tough-minded communitarianism that goes beyond coziness."

Investing in this kind of welfare reform would also help to reorganize public welfare departments. Reliance on nonprofit organizations to provide services and opportunities to clients places the public welfare department in a broker role—establishing and monitoring contracts with community development agencies as opposed to providing services directly. This change would entail a long-overdue reorganization of an administrative apparatus that has remained largely unaltered for fifty years, and it would allow welfare administrators to select those providers that are best suited to deliver particular services. In their blanket defense of social programs, liberals have backed themselves into a corner, defending a public welfare bureaucracy that is consistently denigrated by its clients.

Liberals' failure to critique the administrative apparatus of social programs is a major oversight, probably due to their belief that administrators of local public welfare programs manage benefits in a manner consistent with legislative intent and client need. But, as author Michael Lipsky has shown, for a variety of reasons many people otherwise eligible for social benefits are "disentitled" to them by welfare bureaucrats. Thus, it comes as no surprise that, with the exception of correctional facilities, the "welfare department" has become *the* public institution held in greatest contempt by those dependent on it. Indeed, the public welfare department has disintegrated to the point that Alvin Schorr, longtime supporter of public welfare initiatives, has admitted (*Tikkun,* Nov./Dec. 1987) that "many human service departments cannot manage to answer the telephone, let alone conduct a civilized interview." That being the case, why maintain an antiquated and discredited bureaucracy when an alternative is plausible?

Another way to strengthen communities would be to create a community enterprise zone (CEZ) program that would provide technical assistance and time-limited grants to poor communities for the purpose of providing basic commodities, such as jobs and housing. The geographic basis of a CEZ would be an economic catchment area of four thousand to fifty thousand people that would accommodate rural and urban environments. Eligibility for community development benefits would depend on the social and economic conditions of the catchment area as determined by specific socioeconomic indicators—incidence of poverty, unemployment, and business closings. Catchment areas in which the rates for two of these three variables exceeded one standard deviation above the national average would be eligible for benefits.

Two types of aid would be provided to communities. For those communities in which the infrastructure had deteriorated substantially, CEZ benefits would consist of technical assistance and development grants. Rather than provide assistance directly, the government would

contract services from organizations, such as the Enterprise Foundation or the Local Initiatives Support Corporation, that have established a successful track record in economic development. For communities experiencing acute dislocation, a system of incentives, including tax credits, would be instituted to retain and promote entrepreneurial activity.

Funding for the CEZ program could be gotten from a CEZ insurance fund created by taxing private and public construction. In 1986, for example, a 2 percent tax on construction in the United States would have netted $77.7 billion, more than the amount identified by Jesse Jackson during his 1988 presidential campaign as necessary for domestic economic development and neighborhood revitalization. In effect, CEZ funding would protect communities against economic dislocation by providing them with a safety net. Since benefits would be drawn from a self-financing insurance fund, they would not be as vulnerable to budget rescissions imposed on programs that are dependent on general revenues.

Proponents of welfare reform must get beyond the intuitive response of defending programs grounded in the New Deal and creatively address the role of the welfare state in a postindustrial, global economic environment. If welfare reform is to be more than an illusion, the welfare state must be reorganized to address the current realities of an increasingly complex economy unable to provide a high volume of good-paying jobs, economic mobility for large numbers of its citizens, stable employment situations, and the promise of occupational mobility and full employment. Unable to keep pace with the new economy created by the mobility of international capital, the concentration of corporate power, the decreasing competitiveness of American industry, and the export of relatively good-paying jobs, the current welfare state is anachronistic—grounded in another age of real economic growth, occupational mobility, and an expanding industrial base.

If the left is to reassert its moral leadership in social policy, it must deal realistically with welfare reform. The failure to consider tough questions, such as social control of the underclass and the competence of welfare administrators, will leave progressives on the sidelines of the debate—in the words of policy analyst Lawrence Mead, "defensive, bemoaning the cuts [in social programs] but helpless to do much about them." In the absence of an appreciation for the structural problems of the American welfare state—which are so evident in the Family Support Act—social welfare will founder as new proposals fail. The eventual disappointment with workfare will result only in increased hostility toward the poor, with both policymakers and workfare recipients being held responsible for another failure in welfare reform.

This is clearly a difficult time for the American welfare state. Despite enormous investments in social programs, the United States ranks twenty-third internationally in terms of the comprehensiveness of its welfare system, according to professor of social work Richard Estes. Progressives recognize that the social development of the United States is unlikely to advance based on the job market alone, but illusory welfare reform will not solve the problem either. Welfare reform that incorporates the economic and social needs of the nation, on the other hand, stands a good chance of reestablishing the welfare state as a viable institution in American culture. Rather than accept the inadequate provisions of the Family Support Act as authentic reform, progressives should seize the challenge of creating a more just society within existing limitations. What is needed is a radical pragmatism that acknowledges the present economic reality but proposes policies that reflect the need for social justice, a communitarian approach to society, and a heavy dose of compassion. □

## JEWISH DRAMATIC THEORY

*(Continued from p. 28)*

or sections down into individual impulses, moments, choices. To stage a text, however reverently, is to shatter it: one shatters it as pure verbal construct and rebuilds it, out of other materials, into something else. But "shattering the text" may also stand as a trope for Jewish interpretive activity as such. Midrash fragments the biblical passages it explicates. The Gemara (commentary) portions of the Talmud break off sections of the Mishnah for analysis. Later commentary breaks down the page of Talmud itself. "It was necessary for Moses to break the book in order for the book to become human," writes the French-Jewish experimental novelist Edmond Jabès. *To break the book in order for the book to become human* accurately describes the persistent efforts both of Jewish commentators to relate the sacred texts to common experience and of theater artists to bring dramatic texts before us in the flesh.

If midrash, Talmud, and even scripture itself can thus all be heard as speaking of theater, why has there been so little place for theater in Jewish tradition? While rabbinic attitudes toward representation in general, and toward the late Roman stage in particular, no doubt played some role, Judaism's recoil from theater is first and foremost a recoil from something in Judaism itself.

A theatrical performance, whatever it may happen to be a performance *of,* always involves "another world" erupting into the audience's time and space: the world of the script's events and characters. Judaism was, at one point in its development, supremely hospitable to

eruptions of this sort. What, after all, were the Sinai theophanies—the burning bush, the fiery cloud, and the mountain storms recounted in the book of Exodus—if not such visible and audible "explosions" of a numinous "other reality" directly into our space, our time, our world?

But over the centuries Judaism has gradually lost confidence in its own capacity for theophanic experience. There is a midrash to the effect that the slaves at Sinai saw and heard what not even the most righteous people who come after them will see or hear. The God-revealing flame that flared upon bush and mountain peak in Exodus is subsequently accessible to Ezekiel only as a visionary experience (the fiery chariot of Ezekiel 1) and to the kabbalists only as a philosophical theme (the light of the *Ein Sof*). The God-disclosing voice that resonated in the air over Sinai becomes, by the time of Elijah, the "still, small voice" of 1 Kings (19:12), then the merely human voices of the later prophets, and at last the merely textual "voices" of rabbinic commentary. To us, meanwhile, Elijah, the later prophets, and the rabbinic commentators are all available only between the covers of a book.

The great texts of Jewish tradition may thus be seen as marking the sites of so many vanished theophanies. The same thing could be said of *dramatic* texts, which also present themselves as events that have unaccountably "lapsed" from their event-status into mere writing. And theatrical production amounts to a procedure for reversing this lapse, for restoring to the "lost" events of the dramatic text their status as present theophanies. By routinely achieving such restorations, theater demonstrates the continuing availability of a kind of experience that Judaism has long since come to regard as irrecoverable. Viewed in this light, theater work appears to be not so much a practice alien to Judaism as a possible *way of return* to a forsaken region of Jewish experience.

Of course, to speak of "return" in such a context is to speak metaphorically. Theater cannot put the children of Israel back on the mountain with the fire and the thunder playing about them, and it cannot reinstate Judaism in its moment of direct theophanic encounter. What theater can do is to provide its audience with the imaginative equivalent of a return to such a moment.

Thus, it is not by espousing Jewish values or treating Jewish themes that theater enters into a relationship with Judaism, but simply by being the kind of event it is: a present otherness, Theophany Now. And this fact in turn suggests where the emphasis must fall in any effort to think about this relationship theoretically. Not a theater of Jewish aims, but the aims of theater itself, understood in terms of their implications for Judaism—here, it seems to me, is the appropriate focus for a Jewish dramatic theory. □

## TWICE AN OUTSIDER

*(Continued from p. 31)*

defend oneself *as a Jew.* Not as a German, not as a world-citizen, not as an upholder of the Rights of Man [emphasis in original]." I read that and I was ready to change the sentences to read, "When one is attacked as a woman, one must defend oneself *as a woman.* Not as a Jew, not as a member of the working class, not as a child of immigrants."

My father had to be Jewish; he had no choice. When he went downtown he heard "kike." I live downtown, and I do not hear "kike." Maybe it's there to be heard and I'm not tuned in, but it can't be there all that much if I don't hear it. I'm out in the world, and this is what I *do* hear:

I walk down the street. A working-class man puts his lips together and makes a sucking noise at me.

I enter a hardware store to purchase a lock. I choose one, and the man behind the counter shakes his head at me. "Women don't know how to use that lock," he says.

I go to a party in a university town. A man asks me what I do. I tell him I'm a journalist. He asks if I run a cooking page. Two minutes later someone asks me not if I have a husband but what my husband does.

I go to another party, a dinner party on New York's Upper West Side. I'm the only woman at the table who is not there as a wife. I speak a few sentences on the subject under discussion. I am not responded to. A minute later my thought is rephrased by one of the men. Two other men immediately address it.

Outsiderness is the daily infliction of social invisibility. From low-grade humiliation to life-threatening aggression, its power lies in the way one is seen, and how that in turn affects the way one sees oneself. When my father heard the word "kike" the life-force within him shriveled. When a man on the street makes animal-like noises at me, or when a man at a dinner table does not hear what I say, the same thing happens to me. This is what makes the heart pound and the head fill with blood. This is how the separation between world and self occurs. This is outsiderness alive in the daily way. It is here, on the issue of being a woman, not a Jew, that I must make my stand and hold my ground.

A few years ago I taught at a state university in a small Western town. One night at a faculty party a member of the department I was working in, a man of modest intelligence, said of another teacher who had aroused strong feeling in the department, "He's a smart Jew crashing about in all directions." I stared at this man, thinking, "How interesting. You *look* civilized." Then I said, quite calmly, "What a quaint phrase. In New York we don't hear ourselves described as smart

Jews any more. Is that still current out here?" The man turned dull red, and the exchange was at an end.

A few weeks later at another party I saw this same man engaged in conversation with another member of the department, a woman. I knew this woman, and in my view her gifts of mind and spirit were comparable to the man's. She was not a scholar and he was not a scholar. She was not intellectual and neither was he. They were both hardworking university teachers. I watched the two standing together, talking. The woman gestured widely as she spoke, smiled inordinately, fingered her hair. Her eyes were bright; her tone was eager. She exclaimed; she enthused; she performed. The man stood there, pulling at a pipe, silent, motionless, his body slack, his face immobile, his entire being unreadable except for his eyes and his mouth: in them an expression of mockery and patronage as the woman grew ever more frantic in her need to gain a response. It was clear that the harder she tried, the more secure he felt. At a certain point it became obvious that he was deliberately withholding what he knew she needed. I was watching a ritual exchange of petition and denial predicated on a power structure that in this instance turned wholly on his maleness and her femaleness.

I watched these two for a long time, and as I watched I felt my throat tighten, my arms and legs begin to tingle, a kind of sick feeling spread through my chest and belly. I wanted to put her up against the wall, but I wanted to put him through the wall. I realized I'd been absorbing this kind of thing twenty times a day in this department, in this university, in this town; and it was making me ill.

This daily feeling, this awareness of the subtle ways in institutional life that the most ordinary men accord each other the simplest of recognitions and withhold these recognitions from the equally ordinary women with whom they work, is palpable, and it burns inside every woman who experiences it—whether she is aware of what is happening or has numbed herself to what is happening.

When I hear an anti-Semitic remark I am hurt, I am angered, but I am not frightened. I do not fear for my life or my livelihood or my right to pursue the open expression of my convictions. When I hear a sexist remark I feel all of the above. I feel that stomach-churning rage and pain that tells me that I am in trouble, that I am up against threat and wipeout. I am in the presence of something virulent in the social scheme directed against me not because of what I actually am but because of an immutable condition of birth. Something I might once have experienced as a Jew but today can feel only as a woman.

Bellow, Roth, Allen: these are writers who have had only the taste of their own lives as the stimulus for creative work—and a rich, lively taste it has been: tart and smart, full of bite and wisdom. But these writers were allowed to become so fabulously successful precisely because the stigma of Jewishness was fading even as they were recording it. When Bellow wrote *Herzog,* being Jewish was no longer the open wound it had been when he wrote *The Victim;* and by the time Allen and Roth were coming into their own they were far more integrated into the larger world than their work suggested. Therefore, for Allen or Roth to go on making the golden shiksa the foil, or for Bellow to keep portraying the Jewish intellectual who can't arrive as his foil, is tiresome and unpersuasive. It does not speak to the lives that any of us are now living. Such work strikes no chord of recognition; it strikes only chords of memory and sentiment. The thing about outsiderness is that one feels it in the flesh every day; one feels oneself invisible in the ordinary social way. These are requirements of the condition.

This invisibility once made Jews manic and Blacks murderous. It works on women in a variety of ways:

I leaned across the counter in the hardware store and said to the man who had told me women didn't know how to use the lock I'd chosen, "Would you say that to me if I were Black?" He stared lightly at me for a long moment. Then he nodded. "Gotcha," he said.

To the man at the university party I explained my work in great and careful detail. The man, a sixty-year-old Ivy Leaguer, was frankly puzzled at why I spoke of something fairly simple at such excessive length. I knew this was the first time he had heard what I was *really* saying, and I didn't expect it to sink in. What I did expect was that the next time he heard a woman speak these words, they would begin to take hold.

At the dinner party in New York I made a scene. I brought harmless sociability to an end. I insisted that everyone see that the little social murders committed between men and women were the real subtext of the evening, and that civilized converse was no longer possible unless this underlying truth was addressed. I did this because these were liberal intellectuals. They had heard it all before, many times, and *still* they did not get it. It was as terrible for me to go home that evening with the taste of ashes in my mouth as it was for everyone else—we had all come expecting the warm pleasures of good food and good conversation—but I couldn't have lived with myself that night if I hadn't spoken up. Just as I would have had to speak up if the conversation had suddenly turned politely anti-Semitic. Which it would not have in this company.

The Jewishness inside me is an education. I see more clearly, can think more inventively, because I can think analogously about "them" and "us." That particular

knowledge of being one among the many is mine twice over. I have watched masters respond to "them" and "us," and I have learned. I wouldn't have missed being Jewish for the world. It lives in me as a vital subculture, enriching my life as a writer, as an American, and certainly as a woman. □

## BIBLE'S SLEEPING BEAUTY

*(Continued from p. 41)*

direction of the activist and masterful pole, women in the direction of the nurturant and mysterious pole, the traditions have tried to make sure that there would be some balance in the world between these poles.

How was the power of men and women balanced? Through the family—which until the modern age had far more presence, power, and domain in the world than we are used to thinking. It was families—clans—that made up not only the institution of sex and child rearing, but most of the economy, most of the polity. Even a monarchy or a major commercial firm was really a clan, a household. It might command more power or more money than any other clan or household in the land, but not enough to eclipse them. And the monarchical or commercial clan had within itself all that was familial, nurturing, and self-limiting about the weaker families: the loves and quarrels, the creative tugs and ineptitudes of sisters and brothers, husbands and wives, parents and children. For *all* families had within them both men, who were encouraged to seek mastery and activity, and women, who were encouraged to express mystery and nurturance. The women's expression of mystery and nurturance surrounded, infused, diluted, the men's pursuit of mastery. Even though men were dominant in the family, women and their values could not be ignored. And *all* families in the land, even the most powerful, were affected by this balance.

Now let us look more deeply and more practically at what the Bible taught and practiced about the intertwined male and female in all human beings—the androgyny within each man and woman. It was not only in the mythic stories of Creation and Eden but also in the commands for an everyday path of life that the biblical traditions looked beyond the rigid roles that might imprison men and women. Or rather, the traditions looked beyond these roles in regard to men, by creating forms in which men could be nurturing and could experience mystery—could be "female," as the biblical traditions understood femaleness.

Priests, rabbis, monks, and mystics are not masterful or activist in the world—especially not when they are compared with kings and explorers, engineers and entrepreneurs. Priests, rabbis, monks, and mystics are "women." They celebrate mystery and nurture the community. To the extent that they become the models for how other men are supposed to be and live, they encourage androgyny in men.

It has even been argued, in David Bakan's *The Duality of Human Existence* (Beacon Press, 1971), that many of the practices that the Bible enjoins upon men are precisely intended to "motherize" men: to limit or dissolve their mastery and their activism lest it swallow up and destroy the world.

For example, it may be that the biblical command that fathers circumcise their boy children was intended to "motherize" both the father and son. How does this work? First of all, this moment of intense physical and emotional connection binds the father to his son in a way analogous to the mother's physical and emotional connection through the birth canal. Otherwise, fathers might feel only distantly connected. And this act of connection is one in which the father *almost* enacts the impulse to murder his son, but deliberately refrains. What does he do instead? By hallowing the child's genitals, he looks forward to the next generation, to his grandchildren. He becomes "motherly"; he focuses on nurturing the cycle of the generations. As for the son, removing the tough outer casing of his genitals makes him—at least symbolically—more vulnerable, more open, more "womanly." By shedding even a little blood from his genitals, he imitates women's menstrual bleeding.

And the spiraling cycles of the seventh day (the Sabbath Day), the seventh month (with four festivals in its four phases of the moon), the seventh year (the Sabbatical Year, when the whole land and all workers were allowed to rest), and the seventh cycle (the Jubilee Year, when all social mastery was disrupted by redistribution of the land) may also represent the periodic honoring of the earth mother that women knew was necessary: a kind of rhythmic menstrual period for the earth as well as for society, a periodic rest in which their fertility was allowed time off. So this spiraling cycle, too, may have taught men to intersperse their active, productive work with periods of rest, contemplation, nurturance.

These efforts of the biblical traditions to androgynize men by teaching them elements of nurturance and mystery are not matched by similar efforts to androgynize women by teaching them elements of mastery. The biblical stories do, however, celebrate specific women who are active and masterful—in the Hebrew Scriptures, Rebecca, Tamar, Miriam, Ruth, Deborah, Yael; and in the Christian New Testament, Mary and the Magdalene. It is noteworthy that some of the early activist women come from communities that were only loosely connected with the People Israel—communities in which women had a more independent

and empowered place. Thus Rebecca, Leah, and Rachel are from a family of strong women for whom wells and sacred objects called *teraphim* may have some connection with the moon and menstruation. Tamar, who in the guise of a sacred prostitute seduces Judah for the sake of what he later admits is greater righteousness, is a Canaanite. Tzipporah, who knows the sacred blood mystery of circumcision when her husband Moses doesn't, is a Midianite. Ruth, who wins Boaz at a sacred moment in the barley harvest through sexual assertiveness that redeems the land and the family, is a Moabite.

These women may have brought from other cultures into Israelite life what might be called "protofeminist" values of independence and activism, as well as the spirituality that gave form and support to such values. But the Bible does not lay out a path of life that would shape such women. It only hints at wells, water, the moon, the Queen of Heaven, the sacred use of sexuality—and then stigmatizes some while treating others (for example, moon and water symbolism) as legitimate but marginal. At best it only keeps such possibilities alive in secret—the Sleeping Beauty.

In our own generation, many women enter on a collision course with the old religious traditions precisely because the Bible fails to be symmetrical about encouraging the public, the assertive, the "male" within women, in the way that it encourages the receptive, the mysterious, the "female" within men.

What happened in the modern age?

The family lost power. It had been the institution that shaped all worlds, even politics and economics. Since mystery and nurturance had been located in the family, mystery and nurturance also lost power when they were ghettoized into the home and family. All the weight of nurturing the human race was dumped onto women, and the only institutional framework for nurturance that women were given was the family. And the impulse toward mastery was unleashed in men. They could pursue it in the public world of commerce, industry, science, politics, and war. Pursue it without pausing—rework all the institutions of public life so that these institutions carried forward the impulse toward mastery.

Indeed, even the distinction between "private" and "public"—between the home and family on the one hand and all other institutions on the other—became much sharper as the family became tiny, or "nuclear," and its extended network much weaker. At the same time, the "public" institutions became much bigger, grander, and more powerful. In the modern age, one set of families—the monarchical and commercial set—became less families than engines of efficiency and bureaucracy. And the other set of families—those with less power and wealth—gave up their ability to be economic or political units, stopped being clans, and disintegrated into tiny nuclear households. In the big new bureaucracies, men ruled and women obeyed. In the tiny new nuclear households, women kept some power. But it was power only to rule the lives of children, and even that power was grasped more and more by agencies of the state.

At the theological level as well, feminine aspects of the Godhead lost power. Mary was eclipsed in Protestant Christianity, and the Shekhinah in modernist Judaism.

And these shifts of power in the direction of men—and of mastery—showed in the world. We have already seen how dangerous the results have been. For if we—the human race—can make an Auschwitz and prepare to make a worse—a worldwide—Auschwitz, the imbalance between our ability to act and our ability to nurture has become an issue of life and death. Action, "I/It," is on the verge of devouring nurturance, "I/Thou"—and with it, the world.

So at this moment of our history there is an uprising of women. At the moment when nurturance has been cramped into the ghetto of the tiny nuclear household, those most skilled at nurturance break out of the ghetto, go into public streets, and insist that nurturance reenter the public spheres where the future of society as a whole is being made: the spheres of power and wealth. Why is this happening? Because women are discovering and insisting that their nurturance will come to nothing—indeed, be burnt to ashes—unless they act to make things happen, to change the future. So they have tried to carry the values and skills of nurturance into public space, by intertwining with them the "male" values and skills of activism and mastery.

The goal of these changes—dimly seen though it may be—is a world in which the balance of mastery and mystery, activism and nurturance, is achieved not, as before, by a balance of power between activist men and nurturant women, but by a balance of activism and nurturance *within* men and *within* women. The passage from the one world to the other is extremely hard for the women and men who are attempting it.

How to ease this passage? Here the Sleeping Beauty of the biblical traditions—if we are able to reawaken her—may be of crucial help. So let us now turn to the place in the biblical traditions where the Sleeping Beauty of women's life experience has her home: the Song of Songs.

What is the Song? First, it is one of the greatest love poems in all of human literature—erotic, playful, passionate, funny, tipsy with love for the spring, the flowers, the smells, the legs and breasts and forehead of each lover's sweet beloved.

But wait, maybe it is not "one" of anything. Maybe it is a weaving of erotic strands that sometimes seem to

have a woven unity—even a plot—and sometimes seem to dissolve into a collection of poems that share only the theme of love. If there is a plot, a story, it is about lovers who seek each other and who passionately celebrate each other's bodies, but who vanish from each other just when they are about to join. It is about watchmen and brothers who seek to impose order, and how the order vanishes. It is about . . . but the plot, the story, also vanishes . . . and reappears . . . interrupted by flashes of the comic: "the foxes, the little foxes, are come to frolic in our vines!" Interrupted by a vision of the King in his jeweled chariot—reduced to pallor by the glory of the spring. "Your breasts are like twin fawns. . . ."

An unsatisfactory uncertainty! If we cannot be sure what the Song *is*, what *was* it? Where did it come from?

We have it because, after a vigorous debate, the rabbis of ancient Palestine, about a generation after the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem, decided that it was part of the holy canon that we call "The Bible," and that it belonged among the Writings (like the Scroll of Esther and the Book of Job) that had been touched by the Holy Spirit. A peculiar book to be part of the Bible, they noted: a book in which the People of Israel is never mentioned, a book in which God's Name is never mentioned, a hymn of wild goats, mountains, brooks, and springs, in which God is never praised for all these wonders.

And before the Rabbis voted? Quite possibly, it was a group of songs that came not from specifically Israelite tradition at all, but centuries before from those earthy gods-and-goddesses-worshipping traditions that Israel lived among, within, and around—that intertwined with Israel. The Song par excellence was the Sleeping Beauty of the Bible, hidden away deep in the palace of the King by women who felt there need not forever be a battle between God and the Goddess. Ready to awaken her when new women, spiritually open to her, would be ready to kiss her to consciousness.

To all who preserved the Song of Songs, it seemed like something "more." To the Rabbis who voted to make it part of the Bible, to the Jews who have for centuries chanted it every Passover and every Friday evening as the Sabbath comes, to the Church in which it became a fruitful text for mystical meditation—to all these people and institutions, there was something "more" that arose from its words.

Why? How? The Rabbis and the Church came to similar conclusions: the former, that the love story of two lovers was an allegory of God's love for the People of Israel; the latter, that it was an allegory of Christ's love for the Church.

Today, perhaps we do not need to choose between seeing the Song as either physical or allegorical, either sexual or mystical. We do not need to see *one* of the lovers in the Song as God, and the other as the Church or the People of Israel. Instead, we may see God everywhere in the Song and the earthy earth everywhere in the Song. The Song is filled with God because the Song is filled with passionate love, flowing fluid erotic love. God is everywhere in the Song precisely because God's Name is nowhere in the Song. Nowhere specified, nowhere differentiated, nowhere singled out.

Who is this God that is everywhere in the Song—in the bodies of the lovers, in the birds and flowers of the spring, in the fluidity and evanescence of all its images and indeed of the "story" itself that emerges from the poems? This God is the God Who is Immanent—present so fully in the Creation that S/He does not bother to be visible outside it.

The Song offers us an Eden—but not the infantile unconscious Eden. Instead, an Eden for grown-ups. We have a Garden—and we have a man and woman living in it. But the Parental God of Eden is gone—as would indeed be the case if the Parent's children had grown up. And the adolescent stirrings of a fearful sexuality that shadow Eve and Adam are gone: in the Song, sexuality is vigorous and playful, unforced and unforcing. Indeed, with all their Eros the lovers never quite consummate their love, never quite achieve an orgasm. And this is never shown to be a result of asceticism or a cause for mourning. The joy of Eros does not need a climax, according to the Song: the joy is in the process, just as God is in the Process.

The Song is a hymn to fluidity and flow, rather than to rigidity and structure. "Do not rouse love until it please," sings its refrain—as against the "clockiness," the calendar, of most biblical religion.

The form of the Song itself is a hymn to flow; that is why it is so hard to be sure whether there is or is not a story in it. It is intended to be evanescent: now you see it, now you don't. Like the lovers. Like love. Like God. Here humans have at last been able to eat from the flowing Tree of Life. The Tree of Distinctions—of Knowing Good and Evil—has taken its proper place within the Garden. There is neither an unconscious embeddedness in the humus, the earth, nor an embittered enmity. There is a free and playful relation. The era of Cain and Abel has ended: in the Song, the Shepherd and the King can live at peace. There is no murder.

And of the two lovers, the woman leads the story. She speaks more lines than does the male lover; she seeks; she is the more active partner. She leads androgynously—assertively but fluidly. She is the fulfillment of those assertive, fluid, androgynous women—Eve, Rebecca, Tamar, Miriam, Ruth, Mary.

And the man of the Song is also androgynous—vigorous and virile, but also nurturing, fluid, given to mystery. In the Song, Adam and Eve are again

androgynous—not quite like the original Adam, for each is still a separate man and woman; but each bears, within, an aspect of the other.

If we hear the Song in this way, what does it come to teach us? Let us be clear that this is a way of hearing the Song that is quite different from the way in which Jewish and Christian male mystics, in male-dominant traditions, have heard it: for they have leached all of physical, sexual passion out of it and have insisted on seeing God in it as separate from the People, the Church, the Earth, the World. It is also quite different from a purely pagan way of hearing the Song, in which God is totally absent or totally present, totally infused within the earth. Hearing the Song as both the fulfillment and critique of Eden puts it in relationship and tension with the whole rest of the Bible (and with the biblical traditions). This way of hearing the Song also puts it in relationship and tension with the images and myths and mythopoeic histories of the prebiblical, "preancient" period that have so stirred the imaginations and energies of many contemporary women.

To put it in other words: hearing the Song in this way can give us a way of both affirming and going beyond the conventionally opposed polarities of "theism" and "paganism." It can give us a way of going beyond the conventional polarization of "the biblical traditions" and "feminist spirituality." It can give some men (and some women) a way of celebrating the evolution of the religious traditions that men have dominated, without getting stuck in those traditions as they were, or in male domination of them. It can give women (and some men) a way of celebrating the prebiblical "pagan" traditions, and the matriarchies that may have housed them, without getting stuck in paganism or in endless arguments over whether matriarchy actually existed.

Hearing the Song as a culmination of the mythohistory that begins with Eden would teach both women and men a way of looking at the past that is a compound of less triumph and less anger, and more sadness and more joy. It would remind us to accept that there was some value, as well as some loss, in the process of change; that our history has been a rising spiral; that at each stage of the spiral we gave up something that would have been valuable to keep; that we gave it up because we saw (rightly) something more valuable to be learned that seemed to contradict it; and that *at the next level of the spiral we can reappropriate, relearn what we gave up—this time more richly and more knowledgeably.*

To say that in our own turn of the spiral the Song should be learned in *a* context *with* the rest of the Bible does not mean that it should be learned in *the* context *of* the rest of the Bible. We must give the Song a much larger place, much more on its own terms, than it has had before. Here the great Rabbi Akiba is instructive. When some of the rabbis wanted to toss the Song out of the Bible altogether, Akiba fought to include it—and won. He said three things about it: that all the Writings were holy, but the Song of Songs was the Holy of Holies; that it was holiest precisely because God's Name was not mentioned in it; and that *the day on which the Song was created was of equal worth to the day on which all the rest of the world was created.*

Now imagine how deeply both our secular modern cultures and the biblical religious traditions would change if we saw the Song dancing in equal and creative tension with them:

The Song, where a woman leads;
The Song, where flow has loosened structure;
The Song, where sexuality is freed of rigid definitions;
The Song, where women and men are androgynous;
The Song, where "God" is both absent and immanent

- Imagine life paths of character building that would encourage androgyny in women, with activism and adventurousness—as well as in men, with nurturance and mystery.
- Imagine a life path of politics and economics that would take the world of deer and doves and mountains and crocuses as seriously, and as lovingly, as we have taken the world of wheat fields and towers.
- Imagine life paths of sexuality that would celebrate fluidity of loving passion in some times and parts of life, as well as celebrating firm commitments to partnership and family in others. That would say aloud, with honor and celebration, that in some seasons of life it is good to embody love with our bodies even when we are not yet ready to affirm that the love is permanent, committed, exclusive. That could *also* affirm seasons for commitment, permanence, the creation of families.
- Imagine a spiritual practice that would use dance and gesture, flowers and trees, taste and smell, as richly as Judaism, Christianity, and Islam have used books and words in prayer—without giving up on books and words.
- Imagine making the words and music of the Song an important part of our symbols, our cultural, and our spiritual lives. Imagine drawing on it to shape new kinds of people as powerfully as we have used the Passover Haggadah or the Passion Story or the Pilgrimage to Mecca or the ritual of voting to shape our lives as Jews, as Christians, as Muslims, as citizens of secular democratic societies.

Only a few mystics (in several different traditions) have taken the time and energy to focus on the Song, share it, meditate with it, dance it.

What if we all did? □

# After the Conference: An Open Letter

## *To:* Jews who have been alienated from their Jewishness or from the "organized Jewish community"

There is a very large group of American Jews who are hungry for a different way to be Jewish. They are neither willing to buy the kind of Jewishness they find in the organized Jewish world nor willing to cede the tradition, history, and heritage to the conservatives and conformists. The eighteen hundred people who showed up at the *Tikkun* conference were visible proof of the new possibilities of creating a community of Jews in America who, precisely because they are rooted in what is best in our radical prophetic tradition, reflect *your* values. You, as a reader of *Tikkun,* are one of the people who should be, who *must* be, the leadership of an alternative Jewish world.

I imagine it's the last thing you want to do. If you are like many readers of *Tikkun,* you probably are just beginning to get used to the idea, presented in *Tikkun,* that Jewishness is much more alive and open and radical and exciting than you learned as a kid. However, here is what we have in mind.

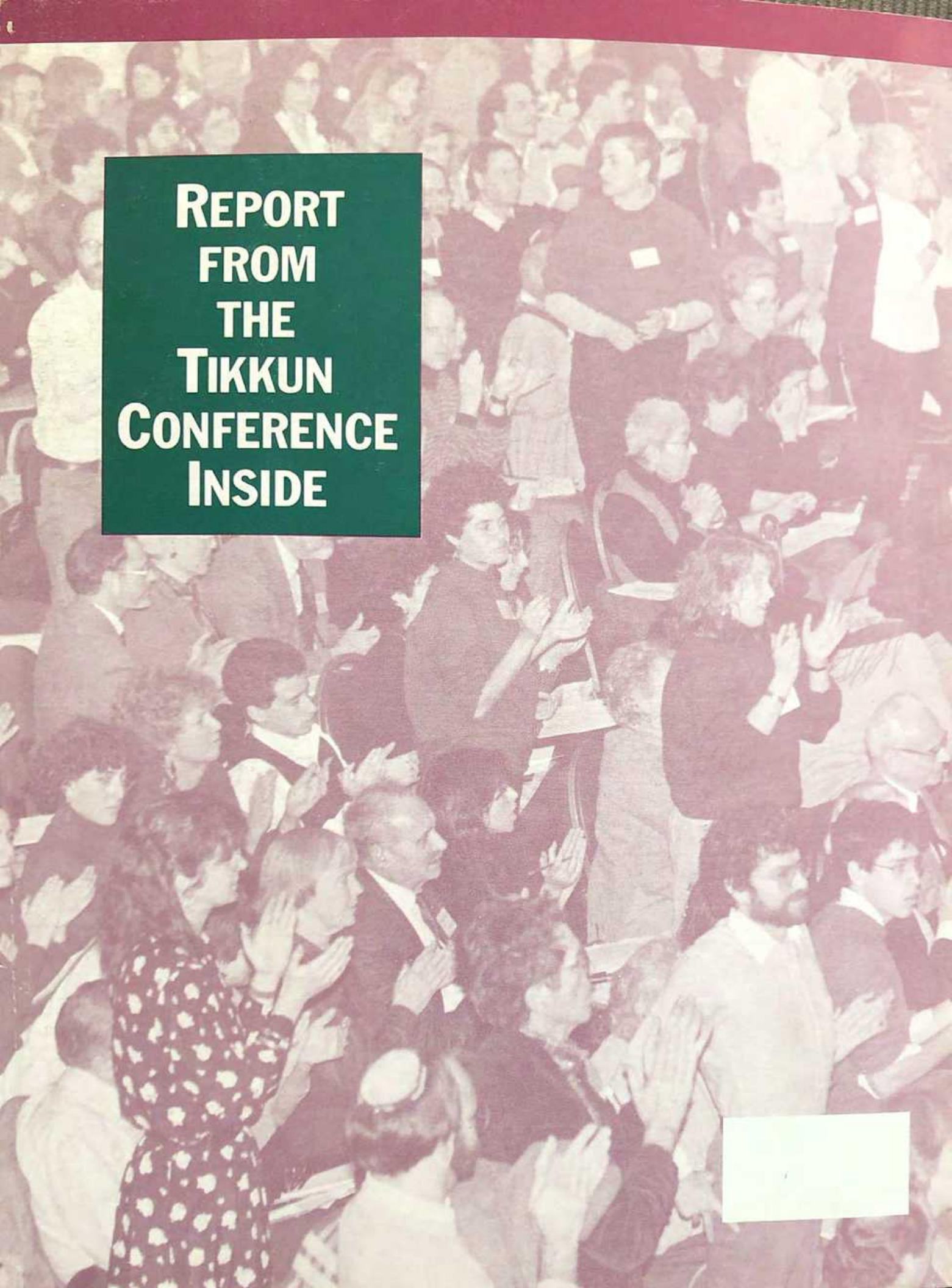
We think that the next step is the creation of a network of small groups of Jews who meet together to talk about the kinds of issues raised in *Tikkun.* Imagine the following: in every city in America several such small groups gather once every two weeks or once a month, discussing articles in *Tikkun* or books on Jewish subjects, or studying texts, or discussing current events in Israel and the U.S., or exploring among themselves the meaning of their own Jewishness—including all the things that have kept them distant in the past.

I'm asking *you* to consider spearheading such a group. I'd like to invite you to go through your personal Rolodex and invite a group of eight or ten of your personal friends or acquaintances to get together to participate in such a group. Although we've had some very successful areawide *Tikkun* discussion groups, my guess is that this type of gathering would work much better if it were based on your preexisting network. (However, if you'd prefer to meet with people you don't yet know, we can help you connect with other *Tikkun* readers in your area who might be interested.)

Sure, you are overextended, and you doubt if many of your friends would be interested in this kind of discussion. Not to mention your own ambivalence about suddenly becoming more focused on your Jewishness, when that has already produced pain and disappointment in your life. But I'm convinced that the experience is likely to produce powerful results—for you and even for those friends you might have to pressure into coming. What we saw at the conference is that many respected intellectuals have a lot of unresolved issues around their Jewishness, and, although they might need some legitimating pretext to get them into the discussion, once there they have a lot to say. And a lot to contribute—part of our reason for encouraging this discussion is because we think that the group you form will likely produce ideas and experiences that will be of benefit to all of us.

The Committee for Judaism and Social Justice (CJSJ), *Tikkun*'s education arm, will provide you with assistance in figuring out how to organize this group, select discussion materials, and so forth. Just as consciousness-raising groups deepened the impact of the women's movement, we believe that groups of this sort can have a profound impact on changing the face of American Jewry. But we have no one but you to make it happen—so please help us. Call or write CJSJ c/o *Tikkun,* 5100 Leona St., Oakland, CA 94619 (415-482-0805).

*Michael Lerner, Editor*



# Report from the Tikkun Conference Inside