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

TIKKUN

SEXUALITY AND JUDAISM

Orthodox and Gay: My Dilemma
Rabbi Yaakov Levado

A New Sexual Ethics for Judaism?
Rebecca Alpert, David Biale, Elliot Dorff, Howard Eilberg-Schwartz, Tamar Frankiel, Reuven Kimelman, Daniel Landes, Judith Plaskow, Ellen Umansky

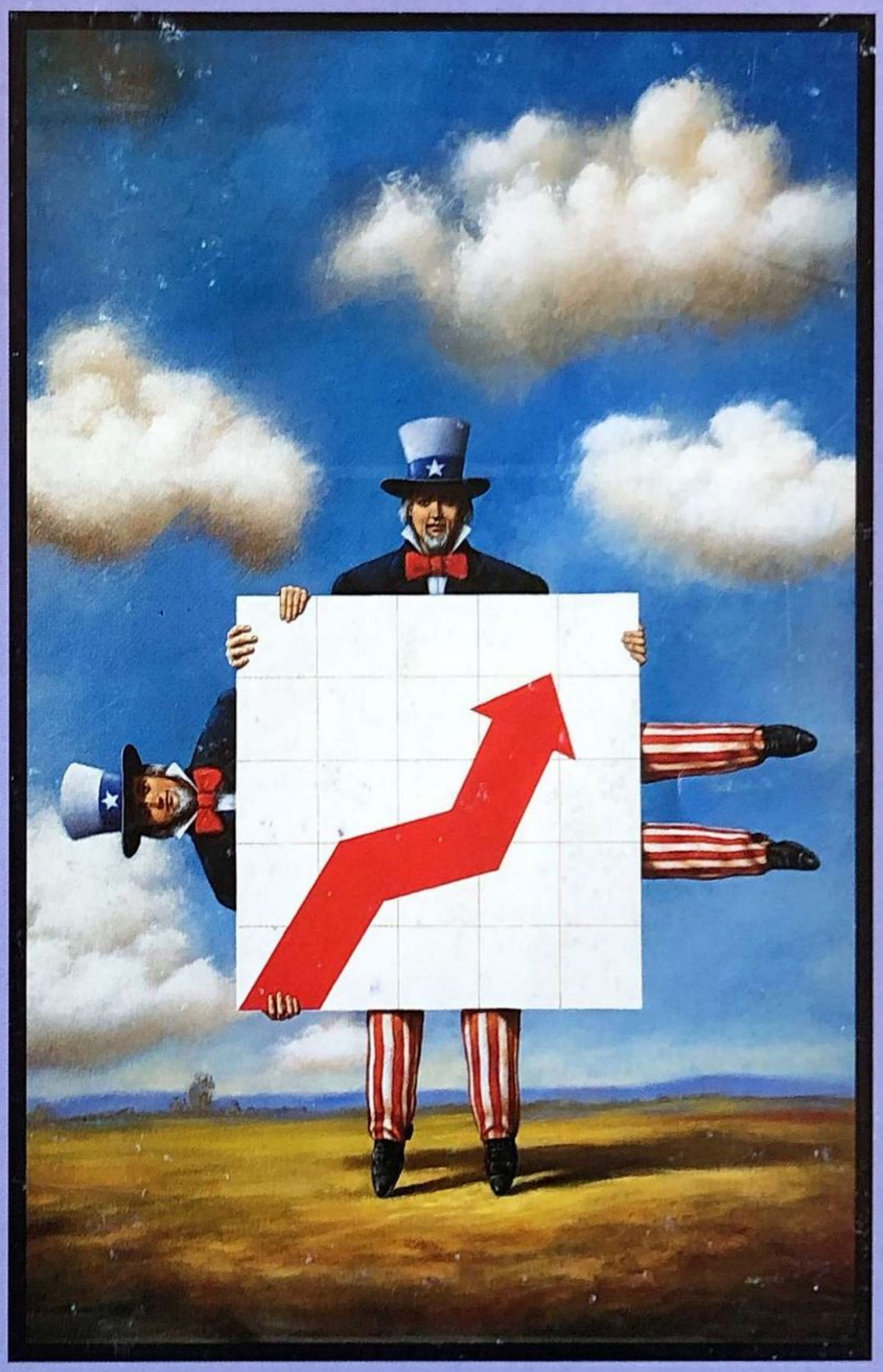
A BIMONTHLY JEWISH CRITIQUE OF POLITICS, CULTURE & SOCIETY SEPTEMBER/OCTOBER 1993 $6.00

Which Politics? Whose Meaning?

New Republic Follies
Linda R. Hirshman

Curing Homophobia & Other Conservative Pathologies
Michael Lerner

Roundtable:
Charles Derber, Mary Edsall, Peter Gabel, Ruth Rosen, Michael Sandel



Jews & Money
Larry Bush & Jeffrey Dekro

The Coming Abortion Debate
Paul Savoy • Laurie Zoloth-Dorfman

Censorship & Popular Culture: An Exchange
Philip Berroll • Danny Goldberg

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Breadcrumbs

Some time on Rosh Hashana I go,
a time dictated by tide charts,
services. The once I did tashlich

on the rising tide and the crumbs
floated back to me, my energy soured,
vinegar of anxiety. Now I eye the times.
I choose the dike, where the Herring River
pours in and out of the bay, where at
low tide in September blue herons stalk

totemic to spear the alewives hastening
silver-sided from the fresh ponds to
the sea. As I toss my crumbs, muttering

prayers, a fisherman rebukes me: It's
not right to feed the fish, it distracts
them from his bait. Sometimes

it's odd to be a Jew, like a three-
legged heron with bright purple head,
an ibis in white plumes diving

except that with global warming
we do sometimes glimpse an ibis
in our marshes, and I am rooted here

to abide the winter when this tourist
has gone back to Cincinnati.
My rituals are mated to this fawn

colored land floating on the horizon
of water. My havurah calls itself
Am ha-Yam, people of the sea,

and we are wedded to the oceans
as truly as the Venetian doge who tossed
his gold ring to the Adriatic.

All rivers flow at last into the sea
but here it is, at once. So we stand
the tourist casting for his fish

and I tossing my bread. The fish
snap it up. Tonight perhaps
he will broil my sins for supper.

Coming Up on September

White butterflies, with single
black fingerpaint eyes on their wings
dart and settle, eddy and mate
over the green tangle of vines
in Labor Day morning steam.

The year grinds into ripeness
and rot, grapes darkening,
pears yellowing, the first
Virginia creeper twining crimson,
the grasses, dry straw to burn.

The New Year rises, beckoning
across the umbrellas on the sand.
I begin to reconsider my life.
What is the yield of my impatience?
What is the fruit of my resolve?

I turn from frantic white dance
over the jungle of productivity
and slowly a niggun slides,
cold water down my throat.
I rest on a leaf spotted red.

Now is the time to let the mind
search backwards like the raven loosed
to see what can feed us. Now,
the time to cast the mind forward
to chart an aerial map of the months.

The New Year is a great door
that stands across the evening and Yom
Kippur is the second door. Between them
are song and silence, stone and clay pot
to be filled from within myself.

I will find there both ripeness and rot,
What I have done and undone,
What I must let go with the waning days
and what I must take in. With the last
tomatoes, we harvest the fruit of our lives.

Marge Piercy

TIKKUN

A BIMONTHLY JEWISH CRITIQUE OF POLITICS, CULTURE & SOCIETY — VOLUME 8 NUMBER 5

2 **Letters** Media Mush; The Politics of Meaning

Special Focus: Which Politics? Whose Meaning?

5 **Michael Lerner** *Curing Homophobia and Other Conservative Pathologies* President Clinton can redirect American politics by honestly addressing the real issues of power and control in our society and embodying a new model of male strength.

11 **Linda R. Hirshman** *If This Is The New Republic, Madam, Then You Can Keep It* After several decades of moving to the Right, The *New Republic*'s cynicism and radical individualism fueled its ferocious assault on the Clintons and the politics of meaning.

15 **Kim Chernin** *The Politics of the Small* We can't all embrace the politics of total commitment, but each of us can move from inaction to small acts that generate consequence.

19 **Roundtable: Charles Derber, Mary Edsall, Peter Gabel, Ruth Rosen, and Michael Sandel** discuss critiques of the politics of meaning. Are the Clintons the real targets, or is TIKKUN's message simply too threatening for the journalistic and political status quo?

Articles

27 **Paul Savoy** *The Coming New Debate on Abortion* It's time to reframe the abortion debate in terms of equality and social justice. Men, too, must have a right to choose.

32 **Laurie Zoloth-Dorfman** *Response to Paul Savoy* The real-world debate about abortion should be about our responsibilities to one another and issues of power, not sex and murder.

33 **Larry Bush and Jeffrey Dekro** *Jews, Money, and Social Responsibility* Judaism should and does concern itself with the holiness potential of money. Developing a Torah of Money that implements the Jewish idea of the stewardship of wealth is crucial.

37 **Paul Krassner** *Confessions of a Raving, Unconfined Nut* In this excerpt from his forthcoming memoirs, the publisher of *The Realist* offers a glimpse of the FBI's dirty little tricks.

39 **Philip Berroll** *Cultural Elites, Closet Values* Progressives need to own up to their values and admit they find some art offensive.

45 **Danny Goldberg** *Less Noblesse Oblige, Please* It's too simplistic—and demagogic—to place America's social ills at Hollywood's doorstep.

49 **Amitai Etzioni** *On Communitarianism and its Inclusive Agenda* Communitarianism's founder replies to Charles Derber's critique in the July/August 1993 issue of TIKKUN. **Charles Derber** responds.

52 **Judith Plaskow** *The Year of the Agunah* The plight of Jewish women whose husbands refuse them divorces is indicative of Judaism's fundamental power imbalance between men and women.

54 **Rabbi Yaakov Levado** *Gayness and God: Wrestlings of an Orthodox Rabbi* Accepting his homosexuality, an Orthodox rabbi seeks a way both to serve God and affirm his identity.

61 **Rebecca Alpert, David Biale, Howard Eilberg-Schwartz, Elliot Dorff, Tamar Frankiel, Reuven Kimelman, Daniel Landes, Judith Plaskow,** and **Ellen Umansky** *Roundtable: A New Sexual Ethics for Judaism?*

69 **Andrea Cohen-Kiener** *Purity and Power* Despite Rachel Adler's recent repudiation of her groundbreaking feminist interpretation of Judaism's family purity laws, the author argues that Adler's original arguments still hold true. **Rachel Adler** responds.

Reviews

81 **Paul Buhle** on Kenneth L. Kann's *Comrades and Chicken Farmers*; **Ruth Rosen** on E. Anthony Rotundo's *American Manhood*.

Fiction

72 **Steven Stern** *From the Annals of the Kabakoffs*

High Holiday Supplement

Al Cheyt ... A TIKKUN addition to the penitential prayers for Yom Kippur

Poetry

95 **Merle Feld** *Yizkor*

Marge Piercy *Breadcrumbs; Coming Up on September*

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Letters

MEDIA MUSH

To the Editor:

I've been outraged at the way the media tries to construe you as "self-promoting." What you have been doing is promoting a set of ideas and using the occasion of Hillary Rodham Clinton's speech about the politics of meaning and her invitation to you to come to the White House to discuss these ideas as a perfect moment to get press attention to the ideas. I noted that some media accounts even mention that you strongly deny being Hillary Clinton's "guru" or anyone's guru. From my standpoint, there is nothing that could be a better service to the world than for more people to read TIKKUN magazine and for more people to learn about the politics of meaning. So though they try to demean you, I say "keep it up." What they call "self-promotion" I call very good political organizing and mass education. What strikes me as most absurd about these attacks is that what you actually do with your time is put out a magazine that gives voice to a wide range of people with whom you personally disagree. Far from being self-promoting, you are constantly promoting the voices of others. What gives with all these attacks?

Janet Litwak
Berkeley, California

Editor Responds:

I think I made some errors in the process of promoting the politics of meaning. When I first heard that Mrs. Clinton was using the very words that we had been pushing in the magazine, and not mentioning their source, I felt that it was important to use the opportunity to get some attention to TIKKUN magazine and its much fuller and thought-out exposition of the

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ideas. But what I should have realized is that in meeting with Mrs. Clinton and having her acknowledgment of the ideas, I had stepped into an already stirred-up hornets' nest. The media were, at the time, using everything they could to attack and ridicule the President. I should have realized that I would offer them a particularly juicy target, not only because of my past as a radical in the '60s, but also because I was crossing so many categories in my current work (psychological, political, religious, Jewish). Moreover, I should have known that there would be an immense legacy of hostility from people in the organized Jewish community who feared that my influence on the Clintons might lead the President to be more sensitive to the Israeli peace movement perspective on the Middle East, and this would lead them to encourage the White House and the press to interpret my moves in the most negative possible ways. Instead of recognizing the sharks in the water, I began to swim in it. Naively, I imagined that the various reporters coming to interview me would in fact present to their readers an account of the politics of meaning. Instead, they focused on me personally. Some used neat tricks, saying, for example, "I need some more information on you and your personal life in order to get a human-interest angle on this story, but don't worry, I promise you that most of it will be about your very interesting politics- of-meaning-idea." Imagine my surprise when stories emerged that would discuss my appearance, my apartment, the way I walked, the way I talked. When I admitted to one reporter who had won my confidence and whose interviewing of me for a *New York Times* profile had begun months before my visits to the White House, that I was single and didn't really want to be, I found this momentary admission of vulnerability and desire for a relationship turned into a theory that I had moved to New York to meet a woman. (Although I had told him that this was not true, this appeared in the story as a further way to belittle me). I talked to these reporters as though they were people whose promises and reassurances to me could be trusted, in part because that openness is part of who I am.

One interesting sidelight. I had always thought that television was a greater distorter than newspapers or magazines, because of the short time frame. But I found that the attacks and distortions in the newspapers piqued the interest of television talk shows, and it was when I was on "Larry King Live," the McLaughlin show, Charlie Rose, and I was able to speak directly to tens of millions of people about the politics of meaning, that the response was extremely positive. People from dozens of cities around the U.S. have reported to us that "the politics of meaning" is almost a household term among people interested in politics, and among a lot of people who aren't so interested in politics, for the very reason that it tends to ignore these topics. Television made possible a direct, unmediated outreach that I could not achieve through the print media. I hope our readers will use this moment to convince friends to begin to subscribe to the magazine.

Although this was a good consequence, there was some negative fallout as well. I think that I played into the "self-promotion" stereotype by being overly eager to discuss these ideas with anyone who would listen, and not adequately careful about rep-

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An opportunity to explore the ideas in depth

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For information, call 212-864-4110

Conference of Jewish Writers and Jewish Writing

January 16-18, 1994—New York City

What is the place of Jewishness in the emerging multicultural world? Is there a way of embracing our Jewish particularity without falling into the kind of ethnic chauvinism whose manifestations in Bosnia and Eastern Europe we find abhorrent? How do we overcome the compulsive individualism of contemporary American culture and reconnect with what is exciting and nurturing in our Jewish cultural heritage? We invite novelists and poets, writers for magazines, television, movies, and academics. There will be a special focus on the needs of new writers just beginning their careers.

Pre-registration until Nov. 1: Incomes under $15,000/yr: $55; $15-30,000: $70; $30—60,000: $125; over $60,000: $170. Prices rise dramatically after Nov. 1.

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resenting my tie to the Clintons. Though I insisted that I was not an adviser, the way that I used the phrase "Hillary and I" in contexts in which I was discussing what we had in common in our interpretation of the politics of meaning could easily have led people to feel that I was suggesting that there was a much greater connection than actually existed. This was unintentional, because when I was asked I actually played down the connection (and have never, to this moment, disclosed some of the aspects of the conversation with her or subsequent conversations with others at the White House). But unintentional or not, it was sloppy.

In short, much as I wish I could blame the whole matter on a hostile press, I think that my own mistakes and personal shortcomings were part of the problem. Though I think it particularly vicious and uncharitable to interpret these mistakes as flowing from a desire for self-promotion, I should have known that my zealousness in promoting TIKKUN and the politics of meaning would lend itself to this kind of caricature. Nevertheless, the attacks hurt me.

THE POLITICS OF MEANING

To the Editor:

It is wonderful that you are encouraging us to be less selfish and more compassionate. Though don't Jews also respond to Hillel's message: "If I'm not for myself, who will be for me?" Only after we've taken good care of ourselves can we healthily expand ourselves by saying, "and if I'm only for myself, what am I?"

The poet Auden suggested that "we have to either love one another or die." This appeal to enlightened self-interest is particularly true today: Either we care for the Earth, each other, and the air, or we're going to die in a polluted way. To truly care for ourselves, to be deeply selfish in a sensible way, ultimately requires caring for our world.

I don't think the struggle is between selfishness and compassion. Isn't it rather between enlightened self-interest and stupid self-interest? Most of us would like to care as much as we can for our world. But as I'm sure you know, it's hard enough to take care of ourselves, not to mention others. When we can really take care of ourselves, we want to really take care of others. But it's hard to know how to care well.

Who among us hasn't cared too much as well as too little? Haven't most of us, at least for some significant time, been caught in caring too much for others and not enough for ourselves? Of course, we all want clean air, good schools, meaningful work, and healthy love. I think your campaign for a new America would sell better and be more honest if it said, "Stupid selfishness will kill you. Only with enlightened self-interest can we survive."

Nothing could be more interesting, invigorating, fun, and healthy than to have enough outrage at injustices to make justice flood our world like streams of water crashing over a waterfall! How sweet to be furious with our world instead of ourselves. Especially when we can be furiously eloquent—like TIKKUN and our prophets. What could be more healthy than to work with people you love to make a better world? What a large self we can have when we feel part of the human community, animal and plant community, star community, and God community. But even then, as I'm sure you know, if we don't care for our little self—eat the right food, make trustworthy friends, have a good home, etc. etc., we can muck up the great work we'd love to do.

Your selfish zeal for TIKKUN and all it can be is what makes TIKKUN work so well. New Jewish Agenda, composed of many selfless people trying to do good, is not nearly as effective a force for social change as TIKKUN. The main difference is your passionate concern for your baby—this great magazine.

Much thanks to your enlightened selfishness, Michael.

Michael Koran
Cambridge, Massachusetts

To the Editor:

The young African-Americans I am working with in Chicago don't need a politics of meaning, they need a politics of resources. A friend of mine is supervisor of the Garfield Park Field-house in the West Side of Chicago. He runs a basketball program for 1,000 kids in one of Chicago's poorest neighborhoods. He doesn't need philosophy, or talk about meaning—he needs money, better facilities, a way to

(Continued on p. 96)

TIKKUN NOTES

NEW YORK TIKKUN SALON SEASON **Monday, September 27th, 7:30 p.m.** Michael Lerner and others will lead a town meeting on the politics of meaning. Bring everyone who wonders what it's all about. Meeting at Congregation B'nai Jeshurun in the Church of St. Paul and St. Andrew, 86th and West End Avenue. $10 for subscribers and $12 for non-subscribers. **Saturday, October 23rd, 8:00 p.m.** Blacks and Jews in New York: Wounded Partners. Vegetarian pot-luck dinner. Free to subscribers; after Oct. 12th, call 864-8253 for location.

WEEKLY TIKKUN NYC SHABBAT GROUP Saturday afternoons 5p.m. through Havdalah. Studying Jewish texts, singing, political discussion, vegetarian pot-luck. We welcome committed participants. Write to TIKKUN, 251 West 100th St., New York, NY 10025.

ARTISTS WANTED We are interested in considering for publication your black and white line art, editorial cartoons, illustrations, full color paintings, and black and white photographs. Please send copies that can be kept permanently on file. We pay for work that is used. Send to TIKKUN, 251 West 100th St., New York, NY 10025.

• • •

TIKKUN media editor Jay Rosen will become the director of the Project on Public Life and the Press, a two-year effort funded by a grant from the Knight Foundation to encourage journalists to support civic participation and public debate in local communities. The project will be conducted by the Kettering Foundation in association with New York University's Department of Journalism and the American Press Institute.

MEMO TO CLINTON

Curing Homophobia and Other Conservative Pathologies

Michael Lerner



Dear Mr. President:

Now that you've won the budget battle, you are relieved of the immediate pressure to defend your presidency. Perhaps, then, you have the time to consider some suggestions about how to be more effective in combatting the conservatives' assaults.

I know that you think that you had no alternative to compromising away most of the progressive aspects of your budget in order to win on some issues and that at a later point you'll be able to turn things around and come forward with more visionary programs. Similarly, I imagine that you'd argue that you simply had no choice in compromising on gays in the military, since you lacked the votes to override a likely congressional attempt to write legislation that would have overturned your promised executive order lifting all restrictions on gays.

But in both cases, there *was* an option: to be willing to lose in the short run in order to win in the long run. Had you been willing to do that, and to use your office to explain to the public a different way to think about politics, you would eventually win big,

because you would be using your office to change the dominant conceptual framework that is working against you. Unless you are willing to do that, fewer and fewer people are going to be willing to stand behind you. While the American people know what the conservatives stand for, they are increasingly skeptical that you stand for anything except winning—and it is that perception, much more than any possible defeat you'd face by standing firm on principle, that will ultimately undermine all the good you are doing by getting a severely scaled-down national service program through Congress.

I have argued in the past that the dominant framework you need to articulate is a politics of meaning that explicitly confronts the ethos of selfishness in American economic and political institutions and the cynicism of the media. When Hillary Rodham Clinton was attacked and ridiculed for her politics-of-meaning speech in Austin, you should have made it a cause célèbre, pointed out the manner in which her ideas were being misrepresented, and talked directly to the American public about the distorted picture they were getting of you through the media. Instead, you apparently decided to capitulate to their logic, and the result has been a succession of compromises, presumably to appear "in control" and presidential.

But all this is bound to backfire. Instead of educating people to principles that you deeply believe in, you've been resorting to principles that will come back to haunt you. You won't succeed in reducing the deficit far enough, particularly if you do start to fight for health-care reform and other badly needed programs, and people will judge you negatively because you didn't do what you said was important to do.

I know that you've been up against an unparalleled assault since you took office—a series of preemptive strikes by elements of America's ruling elites, aided by the media, sustained by an obstructionist Republican Party using tactics Democrats never dreamt of using against Reagan or Bush, aimed at destabilizing your presidency. We can't afford to let that happen. If your presidency repeats the ideological drift of the Carter years, it will recredit the Right. That disaster must be averted. But unless you appear ready to fight *some* fights to the finish, most Americans won't know which battle is the *real* one for which they must be mobilized. And unless you explicitly and consistently embrace the politics of meaning or some other unifying ideological stance, people won't know what principle you want them to rally around.

Moreover, even your friends are going to be hard to mobilize, because when you do compromise on principle you don't share with the public why you believe the compromise is the higher good. Instead, you attempt to present the outcome as if it were what you intended from the start, a position the American people know to be untrue. In this way, you're undermining the goodwill of people who want to be on your side. Many of us continue to try to offer the best interpretation of your tactics, but how long can that go on?

Still, you might respond, what exactly were you supposed to do? Take gays in the military, for example. Was there really an alternative to the tortuous path you found yourself taking? I would answer yes. You could and should have used this issue to focus on one of the basic problems facing American men, a fear which, when not confronted, makes them particularly vulnerable to the psychological appeals of conservative politics.

Homophobes in particular, and people attracted to conservative politics in general, are often people in a great deal of pain, and their attraction to right-wing ideas is often a response to that pain. Over and over, liberals have shown that most "rational" arguments about the danger that gays might pose to families or to an ethos of committed relationships are based on misleading stereotypes. Rational arguments miss the point: homosexuals reawaken deep fears that many men have of their own nurturing side which they are invested in repressing.

The desperation of so many men throughout history to prove themselves to be real men, to show that they are not weak or overly idealistic but can embody the toughness and meanness and self-interest that is conservative "realism" does not flow from a rational argument that needs to be dislodged. Rather, it is a response to the real pain that these people experienced growing up in a patriarchal society.

Contributing to what went wrong in your handling of the issue of gays in the military was your failure to understand or address this underlying pain. And one of the reasons that liberals and progressives keep winning arguments but losing elections is their failure to be empathic. They cannot recognize that many of the people who are sometimes attracted to right-wing perspectives are basically decent people whose perceptions are distorted by emotional trauma. We must continue to resist the content of the homophobia, racism, sexism, or anti-Semitism that these people exhibit. But if we want to effect change, we'd better understand the underlying trauma and begin to develop strategies aimed at addressing that trauma and dislodging it.

The fear raised by gay rights, the panic that it generates, strikes so deeply into the psyches of many people precisely because it touches on one of the greatest tragedies of patriarchal society refracted

through the nuclear family: the assymetry in the way that boys and girls develop a sense of identity.

In patriarchal societies characterized by nuclear families, it is the woman who provides the early nurturance for children. She feeds them, caresses them, touches them, and changes their diapers. The helpless infant would be unable to develop into a human being without this mothering; thus, the mother takes on paramount importance for the baby. On the other hand, it is also the mother who frustrates the needs of the baby, taking the breast away, setting limits, toilet training, saying "no." As the infant becomes a toddler, he or she develops resentment and a profound ambivalence toward the mother. The child learns that his or her initial identification with the mother must be superseded by a knowledge that the mother is "not-I," and it is the mother who must enforce this suppression of the child's identification with her.



As Nancy Chodorow points out in *The Reproduction of Mothering,* the identification stage is likely to be longer, and the separation-individuation stage murkier, for girls than for boys. The mother tends to extend the identification with daughters longer than with sons. The male child, on the other hand, quickly learns from the mother and the surrounding society that he must differentiate himself from the mother more completely if he is to become a "man." He learns that he must suppress the "female" inside of him, the ways that he previously identified with his mother and her nurturance.

To achieve the required individuation from his mother, the boy will seek to establish a tie to his father. In a society where men do not share child-rearing and are often absent from the household, the identification will often be tenuous—the child will have to identify more with the position that the father holds in the world than with the actual experience of a specific human being. Given that distance, the father cannot begin to replace the emotional intensity of the boy's relationship with his mother, and the ambivalent attitude will be reflected in the boy's treatment of girls and women. As Dorothy Dinnerstein puts it, "If woman is to remain for him the central human object of the passions most deeply rooted in life's beginnings, his relation to her must embrace … both the worshipful and the derogatory, the grateful and the greedy, the affectionate and the hostile feeling toward the early mother." (*The Mermaid and the Minotaur, p.69*).

Boys will bond with each other to reenforce their ability to make the separation from mother, and in adult life they will continue or strengthen the male bonding to control and mask their emotional dependence on women. They will seek to be cool, distant, and unemotional in order to feel in control rather than desperate about their need to be close to women. Adult women will often restimulate the feelings of childhood—the sense that women have overwhelming power from which the boy must escape lest he re-experience both his vulnerability and his rejection. One way that men escape from this dynamic is to infantilize women by removing them from political, technological, or religious areas in which they might appear powerful. And male bonding allows men to minimize their emotional dependence and reassure themselves that they are not so needy.

These dynamics face all men in a patriarchal society refracted through nuclear families in which men are rarely involved in child-rearing. But the particular way that these dynamics get refracted through the specific cultural and psychological inheritance of individual families makes a great deal of difference. Not all fathers are equally absent, not all mothers equally harsh in the ways that they manipulate or reject their son's affections and anger, not all cultures equally committed to a father ideal that insists on emotional detachment. There is a continuum of responses on these and other dimensions that create a set of different responses

among men to the basic assymetry of their position. But in most patriarchal societies, achieving male identity requires repressing those parts of themselves that are most nurturing, caring, and maternal.

To some extent, the separation from mother is an ontological necessity, required in order for any child to achieve independence. But in societies with extended families in which men do a relatively greater share of child-rearing, the mothering roles are shared across gender boundaries, thus buffering the degree to which the complicated feelings of desire and anger are focused exclusively on women. Similarly, though independence and separation from mother occur in every society, the degree of independence and atomization required in advanced competitive market societies is considerably greater, and hence the degree of rejection of mother-ties is all the more intense.

Feminists have tended to place this assymetry within the context of male power and to focus on the fact that men have a great compensation for the pain of dis-identifying with their mother: namely, the privileged positions they hold in patriarchal society. There is no denying or minimizing that privilege. But if your goal is to help men come to understand that patriarchy is not really in their interest, it makes sense to return the focus to the pain that men have had to endure in this process and to remind them of what they had to give up.

The more pain involved in giving up mother and/or the more difficulty in establishing a tie with father, the more desperate the need to repress feelings of pain and loss that were involved in this process, and the more exaggerated the attempts by the boys or men in question to adopt stereotypical male qualities and to defend their "macho" against actual or imagined assault. Yet the repression of one's soft, nurturing, and caring parts is a very difficult task. The more one is enmeshed in a life of macho, the more one actually needs the caring, softness, and nurturing that one is forced to repress. Sometimes these nurturing qualities can be supplied by a woman. But as increasing numbers of women have entered the work force, they have found that these very qualities tend to disadvantage them in the world of work. They have, as well, recognized their own right to seek nurturance. Thus they are less willing to be involved in unequal nurturing relationships. As men have found it increasingly difficult to use women to provide nurturance, their need and fear of that part of themselves that they have had to work so hard at repressing has increased.

The attraction of conservative politics is precisely that it promises rigid boundaries and assistance in repressing these parts of the male psyche that are traditionally seen as feminine, soft, caring, and giving. Conservative politics provides a variety of rationales for negating this part of the male personality, for assuming that these parts are not functional for the society, and for strengthening sex roles that re-enforce the macho energy needed to repress desire for nurturing and in particular to repress the parts of the male personality that might still be struggling with the desire to be like the nurturing mother. Whenever you see a man rigidly insisting on the traditional macho style, allow yourself to see underneath this a child desperate for love, attention, and caring who has been forced to deny and repress those needs.

All this comes to the fore most intensely in the male homophobe. The little boys in the school playground who are continually testing each other for softness are, in fact, trying to reassure themselves of their own control over their desire to be soft and nurturing, qualities that they know will make them look "like a girl." This is the ultimate insult precisely because what they most desire and fear are those parts of themselves that initially identified with a nurturing mother and then found betrayed, abandoned, or repressed, first by mother, then by the social arrangements of a patriarchal society. The more unresolved the conflict, the more intense the need to assert one's maleness, and the more one feels threatened by those who are not doing so. The degree of macho is directly proportionate to the unresolved pain.

Men who have made a career for themselves in the male-dominated, male-bonding, military establishment are often those who are most intensely in need of these external supports to buttress their defenses against the allure of the caring and nurturance they were forced to abandon when they were young. No wonder, then, that they are particularly threatened by homosexuals' presence in the military. When they talk about gay men, they talk about people who are weak, "pussies"—like women, soft, unable to maintain the toughness and courage that it has taken for the rest of the military to be "real men."

Of course, these characterizations often have little foundation in the realities of the kinds of gay men who are attracted to volunteer for the military. What straight men are fearing is precisely what they most desire—the permission to be caring and weak, a permission which they will not allow themselves to hear because of the degree to which it runs against their own self-conception of being a male. Incidentally, this same characterization of Jewish men as weak, soft,

and feminine often accompanies the most intense anti-Semitic caricatures, and it is to compensate for these characterizations that many Jewish men became enamored of the Israeli army as a way to show that there really could be "tough Jews." Precisely because the Torah tradition commands caring and nurturing of others, men within the tradition have often found it all the more necessary to build rigid boundaries to ensure that this nurturing doesn't get "out of hand," and they've done so by religious discrimination against gayness and against women.

Our attitude toward these men desperately shoring up their macho must be one of compassion and caring. However much we reject the way that they have dealt with their pain, however much we must and should repudiate the homophobia, patriarchal attitudes, macho, insensitivity, militarism, sexism, and racism that these attitudes incubate, we need to see these people as victims rather than as the embodiments of evil. And it is as victims that we have a first chance to talk to them, not just at them.

We want them to hear the psychological account of their pathology because we want them to know why we are able to care about them and their pain even as they treat us as demeaned others. And we want them to know that there are other ways to be a man, ways that reflect a willingness to be caring and nurturing *without* giving up one's sense of being strong, independent, and able to take care of oneself. There is an emerging men's movement in the United States composed of men who are attempting to embody these characteristics—and to the extent that they see themselves as consciously engaged in bringing this message to other men, they deserve our support. But one need not be part of a men's movement to understand that the legitimation of a soft, nurturing, empathic capacity in men can be a central part of the strategy to undermine conservative politics and to weaken the homophobia which is central to it.

This is why a politics of meaning becomes so important as a strategy to defeat conservative ideology in general and homophobia in particular. The politics of meaning transcends the normal categories of political discourse and addresses the underlying psychological, ethical, and spiritual needs. In particular, it insists that the central task for this historical moment is to overcome the ethos of selfishness that predominated in the 1980s and move toward an ethos of caring. In so doing, it challenges the macho male conceptions of what politics should be about—and it raises the issue of the manner in which a patriarchal, competitive market system undermines our ability to have the kind of loving relationships we desire.

Tackling this issue head-on is not a luxury, it is a political necessity. When I raised these matters with some of your White House advisers, I was told that they feared the perception of "the feminization of Clinton." But what men are fearing, the sense of weakness that would make them feel that they couldn't defend themselves, gets communicated much more in a president who backs away from principled fights than one who takes them on, even if he sometimes loses. You need to talk with moral courage about homophobia in the military and in the society. Present to the American people an explanation for this stance based upon the understanding of why men are so traumatized that they constantly feel compelled to prove themselves "strong."

I know that this is going to provoke a powerful reaction from the Right, precisely because they will feel themselves exposed. You need to predict their response and show them that you won't retreat, even when the media try to distort your message. If you draw your understanding of the social and political problems confronting you from this psychological analysis and maintain that real men are strong enough to refrain from repeatedly having to prove their strength through control and can allow themselves to feel soft, vulnerable, and caring, and that those who cannot are victims of childhood trauma and deserving of our compassion, you will not only build a consensus for gay rights, you will pull the psychological rug out from under the feet of the American Right. In the process, you will also create a powerful majority willing to back much of the rest of your agenda.

As a first step, offer the military an explanation like this:

> I know that it's going to take special courage for those in the military to deal with their fears about their manhood. Underlying their panic at having homosexuals in the same room are their own doubts about whether they can sustain their manhood, and whether they can keep under control their own desire to be more caring, more nurturing, more like a woman. They question whether they can stand the anxiety of being with men who might remind them of the part of themselves that caused them so much pain to repress. The courage that it will take for them is *not* the courage to retain their current conception of manhood, but rather the courage to imagine a different kind of manhood, a kind of manhood in which one can be strong and still soft, one can be masculine and yet still nurturing to others, one can show courage not just by taking risks in war but by taking risks in changing traditional

definitions of courage. I believe that this is the task not just for men in the military, but for all men in the society, and that's why I'm going to stand strong for my insistence that we need not fear homosexuals. As a society, we are strong enough to allow their different way of being sexual without feeling that we will be overtaken by it.

If you publicly articulate what it is to be a real man, a powerful man, and show why conservatives have a mistaken model of manhood that comes from the pain of their childhoods, you would also have to talk about your own childhood, and the pressures you faced to compensate for not having a father by becoming macho. Explain what you did to resist the macho impulse and to keep some of your own caring qualities intact.

Finally, you'd have to couple this kind of talk with a very clear program focused on providing paid parental leave for at least the first six months of each child's life, together with flexible work schedules and other changes in the world of work to privilege child-rearing as a central societal good. This will also require demonstrating our respect and honor—measured both economically and socially—for those who become the family nurturers and child-rearers. More men will become child-rearers when they recognize that it is a genuine expression of real manhood, and boys will no longer need to repress their nurturing capacities when it is precisely those capacities that men most desire to embody.

I wish I could promise you that if you take this road, it will be easy. Unfortunately, many of your liberal and progressive allies, although they will agree with your programs, will be fearful of this position, in part because some of them suffer from the very ambivalence you are seeking to reveal and overcome. (Some policy wonks, after all, use "tough-minded" programs the way some militarists use guns—as a way to defend themselves against being seen as weak or needy.) Furthermore, in talking compassionately about conservatives and homophobes, you would be expressing empathy for the very group that liberals frequently revile: white men.

The common instinct of liberals and progressives is to demean the homophobes and the macho males. I'm calling for the opposite: A politics based on compassion and caring not only for the most oppressed but also for those in the population who adopt oppressive attitudes and behaviors. I don't ask for compassion for the oppressive behaviors—these must be vigorously opposed. I don't want to let down our vigilance against racist, sexist, anti-Semitic, or homophobic behavior. But I do want the discourse of the liberal and progressive world to change so that we may begin to highlight the underlying pain that leads people into conservative or even reactionary politics. I want us to acknowledge that it is the oppression of a patriarchal, competitive market system, not simply the benefits of that system, that glues people to it.

I am well aware of the resistance that this brings up among groups that have fought so hard to establish their credentials as "oppressed." "Wait a moment," many are likely to respond, "We've worked so hard to get people to understand *our* pain, and now, before we've even begun to win that battle, you want us to switch our focus and pay attention to the pain of the oppressors? That's simply ridiculous and probably reactionary."

My point is not that we have to give up our understanding of the pain of the oppressed, but that we have to make room for an understanding of everyone else's pain. And the reason we ought to do that is first, because it's a truer account of reality, and progressive social change has no stronger weapon that its willingness to tell the truth even when the truth is complex and doesn't always fit our theories; and second, because it's the only plausible way we are going to win over people that haven't been won over by twenty years of carping about our rights and trying to teach people that they need to be sensitive to the rights of others. This second point is critical: One reason to pay attention to the pain of homophobes, racists, sexists, or anti-Semites is that in so doing we can figure out ways to dislodge them from their racist, sexist, homophobic, or anti-Semitic agendas.

Of course, this second point needs to be made much more carefully—by taking into account the psychological realities of different sectors of the conservative constituency. It seems quite plausible to me that there is a hard core of as much as 20 percent of the American population (and perhaps more in Europe) whose racism, sexism, homophobia, or anti-Semitism is so deeply ingrained, and their fears of softness and caring so great, that nothing could possibly get through to them. Yet there is another 30-40 percent of the population who sometimes swing toward voting for reactionary candidates, but who often do not, and whose pathologies around caring, nurturance, and softness can be addressed and alleviated.

Mr. President, dealing with these issues openly and directly is risky, but not as risky as the path you've been taking, a tack in which you've been seen as weak, unwilling to fight for what you really believe in, and too prone to compromise. The public will continue to perceive you this way, in part because of the constraint you've created for yourself by insisting that one criterion by which you should be judged is your ability to lower spending and reduce the

(Continued on p. 93)

If This is The New Republic, Madam, Then You Can Keep It

Linda R. Hirshman

When Martin Peretz, The *New Republic*'s editor-in-chief and chairman, took conservative politics into the pages of the magazine years ago, optimists on the Left hoped it might be just to support his hawkish position on Israel. But The *New Republic*'s ensuing enthusiasm for the *contras* showed that its right-wing beliefs were far more pervasive. The magazine's alliance with the Right has even borne fruit in the form of the youthful Andrew Sullivan, a self-described gay Catholic conservative, who became editor of The *New Republic* in 1991. Since the advent of Sullivan—just thirty and apparently arrested at the life-defining moment of his admission to Harvard University—and his team of boy-wonder editors, The *New Republic* has resembled nothing so much as a retrograde version of the Harvard Lampoon. Their precocity is apparently a source of pride among the *TNR* crowd; the renovated Washington schoolhouse Sullivan calls home is known as the "kindergarten."

Young children are notoriously self-absorbed. It's not surprising, then, that the only remnant of progressive politics at the once-critical voice for social change is the social change that Sullivan wants: gay rights. During Sullivan's editorial tenure, The *New Republic* has carried dozens of articles, including a cover story, about gay rights, gay marriage, gays in the military. Recently, as the magazine was trumpeting its post-ideological cynicism on all matters of meaning, Sullivan's senior editor Jacob Weisberg spent half of his "Washington Diarist" column analyzing in detail the political correctness of calling someone a "queer."

Now, don't get me wrong: I was an advocate of gay rights long before Andrew Sullivan even knew what sex was. Twenty years ago, I represented two of the first American sailors to fight their discharges for homosexuality, and, as recently as last summer, I took on the Republicans in the op-ed columns of The *Los Angeles Times* for their shameful gay-bashing campaign strategy. But the essence of being human is recognizing that something other than your own interest counts. As the founder of old republicanism, Aristotle, put it: Man is a social animal. And that is exactly where the new republicanism of Andrew Sullivan and his high-flying *wunderkinder* just doesn't measure up. On almost every critical domestic issue save gay rights, The *New Republic* has been squarely on the Right—and usually in the wrong.

Dissatisfied with merely advancing a conservative agenda in politics, the journalists at The *New Republic* have recently taken the conservative position on foundational questions such as who counts as a political player and whether we can even know answers to such questions. This philosophical turn was apparently inspired by TIKKUN editor Michael Lerner's attention to the subjects of political identity and human knowledge in the pages of this publication, and the interest in Lerner's politics of meaning taken by The *New Republic*'s favorite whipping couple, the Clintons.

The *New Republic*'s new conservatism is particularly damaging, because the magazine's wrong positions have been treated as permission from liberals for the people in power to take these wrong positions themselves. Thus, on a TV talk show this past summer, the conservative position was officially represented by gut-fighters Robert Novak and Rush Limbaugh and conservatism was *unofficially* represented by *TNR*'s Mickey Kaus, who was ostensibly representing the liberal view. The most egregious example of this is the recent "Borking" of Lani Guinier, President Clinton's erstwhile nominee to head the Justice Department's Division of Civil Rights, in which *TNR* played an enthusiastic part. If the only one crying for Guinier's scalp had been Clarence Thomas sidekick Clint Bolick, the counsel of the conservative advocacy group, The Institute for Justice, who started the attack on Guinier, the affair might have had a very different outcome.

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Since The *New Republic*'s overall conservative turn is well known among media types, the propensity of television's talking heads to allow *TNR*'s editors and writers to represent the progressive perspective cast serious doubt on the integrity of their selection process. The time to withdraw the mandate from The *New Republic* to speak for progressive politics is long overdue. If *TNR*'s editors want to weigh in on the talk shows, let them compete with pundits from The *National Review* and the Free Congress Foundation for the seat on the Right where they belong. That way, the American public might get to see truly progressive positions represented in the national policy dialogue that is serious talk television.

Wrong on Politics

When Bill Clinton won the 1992 election, The *New Republic*'s editors faced a crisis. It's cool to critique and risky to defend. Although they didn't wait long to pick cool, they were refreshingly honest about it. They didn't want to be caught later, they said, having written mash notes to the new administration.

Given the rocky start of the Clinton administration, you could say that on Clinton, The *New Republic*'s editors were both Right and right. But it's not that easy. For one thing, the media's feeding frenzy around the missteps of the new administration was in many ways a self-fulfilling prophecy. As *TNR* itself pointed out, once the campaign was over, the media were ineluctably going to shape the way the public perceived the President, so it was foolish of him to tick them off. Once baby George Stephanopoulos antagonized the White House press corps by confining them to the press quarters, Bill Clinton could do no right.

Being thus self-aware, a magazine of serious political opinion might be expected to foreswear the temptations of jackal journalism and criticize the President only when serious issues of policy were involved. Instead, in their anxiety to avoid uncool adulation, they not only attacked Clinton on his policies, but for every imaginable offense, including calling him a crazed overweight Hollywood groupie.

Relentlessly searching for any gaffe, Jacob Weisberg regularly castigates Clinton for what he has dubbed "Clincest"—an elaborate conspiracy theory tracing the Clintons' relationship with an old-boy/old-girl network, including fellow Rhodes scholars who send their offspring to the same exclusive private schools and who the President sometimes appoints to high office. Weisberg makes no effort to suggest what other selection methods or appointment criteria he would have preferred the President to use. A lottery? No Rhodes scholars need apply?

Private-school educated, a Rhodes scholar himself, and a resident of the kindergarten suite with his own boss, Weisberg makes an unlikely populist spokesman. His fellow American princes, the typical *New Republic* readers—white, affluent, male, with incomes around $100,000—are not likely to be outraged by news of their fellow elites in high office. But it didn't take long for the down-home *Arizona Republic*, that state's largest newspaper, to cite and adopt Weisberg's newfound populism in an editorial to their pickup-driving readership, with predictable effects on Clinton's standing in that decidedly non-*New Republic* community. Surely a Rhodes scholar like Weisberg is smart enough to figure out the demagogic potential of his hypocritical class war on Clinton.

Since the election, *TNR* has taken conservative positions on a range of critical issues: abortion, welfare, and hate speech, as well as the nomination of Lani Guinier. The magazine's anti-abortion stand is both subtle and overt. The overt opposition surfaced last fall when it ran "Pro-Choice Bigots," by Nat Hentoff. The article was part of a back fire the opponents of reproductive choice tried to light by leveling charges of oppression by a totalitarian pro-choice Left. It doesn't take a Rhodes scholar to recognize the well-established conservative strategy of crying "bigot" at the people you're trying to oppress. *TNR*'s decision to run the Hentoff entry into the double-speak politics of anti-choice last fall was a shameless blow at women's rights.

After the Republicans lost the presidential election in 1992, and it seemed that basic choice was safe from criminal prohibition for the time being, Sullivan announced that although he, a Roman Catholic, was basically pro-life, that was not the magazine's position. But Sullivan's *New Republic* continues to advocate limiting women's freedom with every remaining viable argument. This campaign takes two forms: Mickey Kaus's articles on how abortion should be submitted to popular vote, and legal affairs editor Jeffrey Rosen's trashing of the pro-choice movement's efforts to monitor Clinton's judicial appointments.

Kaus takes his cue from John Ely, a Stanford University legal theorist who wrote a whole book, *Democracy and Distrust*, articulating a theory of constitutional interpretation that protected every activist Supreme Court decision except the one that mattered most to women, *Roe v. Wade*. Rights are rights to be enforced by the courts, according to his theory, and they include such controversial rights to clear the political process as legislative reapportionment, desegregated schools and even the

use of birth control. But when it comes to women's rights, we're going to leave it to the legislatures. To their credit, many libertarians, unlike the weirdly erratic Hentoff, understand that you can't ask the Court to protect, for example, a person's beach house as holy constitutional writ and leave women's bodies to the winds of politics. But fine distinctions like this don't matter to anti-choice activists masquerading as democracy-lovers, such as Mickey Kaus.

Kaus is the author of *The End of Equality*, a recent book on welfare reform. He argues that welfare must be tied strictly to work, a position that's hard to dispute, but that's far from the end of it. Because Kaus believes so fervently in workfare, he has spent the better part of the last six months trashing Marian Wright Edelman, the head of the greatly respected Children's Defense Fund, for her efforts to keep the whole burden of the deficit from being extracted from urban kids. Throw in Health and Human Services Secretary Donna Shalala and you have the top names on Kaus's enemies' list—once you add his chief bête noire, Hillary Rodham Clinton.

Now Kaus's effort to theorize away America's systemic racism often leads him to say some hilarious things. For instance, in a television interview a few months ago, he opined that the LaCrosse, Wisconsin, experiment with integrating a handful of poor Cambodian immigrants into their white schools provided a blueprint for the future integration of American schools. It's pretty silly to compare LaCrosse, Wisconsin, to huge cities with hundreds of thousands of students mired in systemic poverty and abandoned by the flight of every light-skinned person who could hang onto a suburban housing lot. But the funniest thing is that the good citizens of LaCrosse responded initially by refusing to integrate even a hundred Cambodians and sought by referendum to undo the plan.

It may just be that Kaus hates Hillary, because he fears she might have higher expectations than he does about racial justice. But there is an intensity to his attacks on her and Edelman and Shalala in The *New Republic* that looks like something more than just disagreement over policy. One explanation is of course that Peretz is disappointed because his former student Al Gore didn't get to be President. He didn't even get to be co-President, as The *New Republic* might have anticipated from the Clinton-Gore campaign style; Hillary Rodham Clinton seems to have prevailed as her husband's closest associate. So The *New Republic* might be feeling a little like a bested suitor for Bill Clinton's hand. Or it might be old-fashioned, garden-variety sexism. The *New Republic* has a scant few female editorial personnel (one of the few who remained under Sullivan was recently replaced by a man); the editorial meetings must resemble nothing so much as a party in a fraternity house basement.

The entrenched conservative establishment of rich white men has no weapon as lethal as skepticism. If nothing can be known, nothing can be changed, and the existing relationships of power remain in place.

What's interesting is that Kaus, who began attacking Hillary Rodham Clinton because she didn't stick with the Nancy Reagan image with which he tried to saddle her during the campaign, is almost the last one left still doing it. Even the hate faxmen of the Right have slowed the flow of their venom, perhaps because of her rising favorables in the polls. Maybe the next time Rush Limbaugh and Mickey Kaus are brought together on a TV talk show for balance, they could just trade sides.

The possibility that the men's club at The *New Republic* might be motivated by nothing more theoretical than sexism is reinforced by their gratuitous piling on in the case of Clinton's civil rights appointee, Lani Guinier. What's interesting is that in the crucial television analysis of the decision during the last days of Guinier's candidacy, her conservative opponents made the Bolick coup look like consensus politics by invoking the name of The *New Republic*. Former Supreme Court nominee Robert Bork did it; so did the conservative columnist and ubiquitous ABC talking head George Will. Let's be clear: it was The *New Republic*, not the *Wall Street Journal*, that killed Guinier's chances to head the civil rights division.

None of this would be damning if *TNR* sincerely believed that Guinier was just way outside the mainstream of American legal thought, as her attacker Clint Bolick (who, by the way, thinks public schools are unconstitutional) said. But just two months before Guinier's appointment, The *New Republic* ran a long and very scholarly article by Richard Pildes, a University of Michigan law professor and voting rights expert, endorsing virtually every aspect of Guinier's main thesis. There is deep racial division in this

country, Pildes wrote; the Voting Rights Act is supposed to correct the electoral process, so that no minority can be ghettoized structurally, but existing remedies aren't working. He argued that cumulative voting is democratic, integrationist, deeply rooted in many free societies, and worth a try.

Recently, the Colorado Supreme Court restrained enforcement of Amendment II, that state's anti-gay rights amendment, adopting much of Guinier's reasoning that politics in America can't be structured so that a discrete group is systematically denied effective participation. I just bet The *New Republic* doesn't come out against the Colorado court's decision as outside the mainstream of American legal thought. *TNR*'s editors knew full well that Lani Guinier was getting a bum rap. Whether or not her views on political democracy in a society riven with racism were controversial, they certainly weren't outside the intellectual mainstream. There is no good faith explanation for what Sullivan and Co. did to Lani Guinier.

Wrong on What Matters

The years 1980 through 1990 saw a huge transfer of American wealth up from the poorest to the richest third of American households ("trickle-up"). It is now a cliché that the infatuation with unrestricted free-market economics and political individualism did not produce an unalloyed political or social good. The totem of the eighties—"Greed is Good" entrepreneur Ivan Boesky—is a federal felon.

In the past several years, a number of political and intellectual leaders have been trying to articulate serious alternatives to the discredited self-involved culture of the eighties. They range from academics such as the philosophers Alasdair MacIntyre and Charles Taylor and the sociologist Amitai Etzioni to Democratic Leadership Conference policy analysts such as William Galston (now a White House aide) and Elaine Kamarck of the Progressive Policy Institute. While their specific remedies vary, they share a common rejection of the extreme individualism held up as the ideal in the Reagan and Bush political philosophies.

TIKKUN has been one of a handful of publications to support this important development. Indeed, it was dissent from the individualistic, self-seeking amorality that characterized American society in the 1980s that defined and distinguished TIKKUN. Michael Lerner, TIKKUN's editor, laid out the elements of an affirmative alternative to the individualism of the eighties—what the magazine dubbed "the politics of meaning"—in an article in the summer of 1992. Last April, as her father lay dying, Hillary Rodham Clinton publicly set forth her own politics of meaning perspective in a speech in Austin, Texas.

The cool heads at The *New Republic* lost no time in jumping all over her. "What are these people talking about?" asked an unsigned piece in the magazine's "Notebook" section. The unnamed author displayed archness coupled with ignorance; apparently, his education, whether at Harvard or elsewhere, did not include the line of thought from Aristotle to Charles Taylor. Like Bolick's catchy line about Guinier, "Clinton's Quota Queens," *TNR*'s cynical one-liner reproduced like rabbits, as newspapers and magazines across the country asked the same question, profiling Lerner and examining the Clintons' relationship to the politics of meaning. Fortunately, there is enough intellectual diversity in the journalism world these days so that the question of alternatives to self-seeking cynicism did not die entirely under *TNR*'s wise-ass sound bite.

Having failed to kill the politics of meaning with sniper fire, in late July The *New Republic*'s literary editor, Leon Wieseltier, rolled out heavier guns. In an article occupying one-fifth of the issue, Wieseltier trashed the politics of meaning for being at once naive and hypocritical, hopelessly romantic and dangerous, academic yet, worst of all, inadequately footnoted. Then Wieseltier accuses politics of meaning proponents of saying inconsistent things.

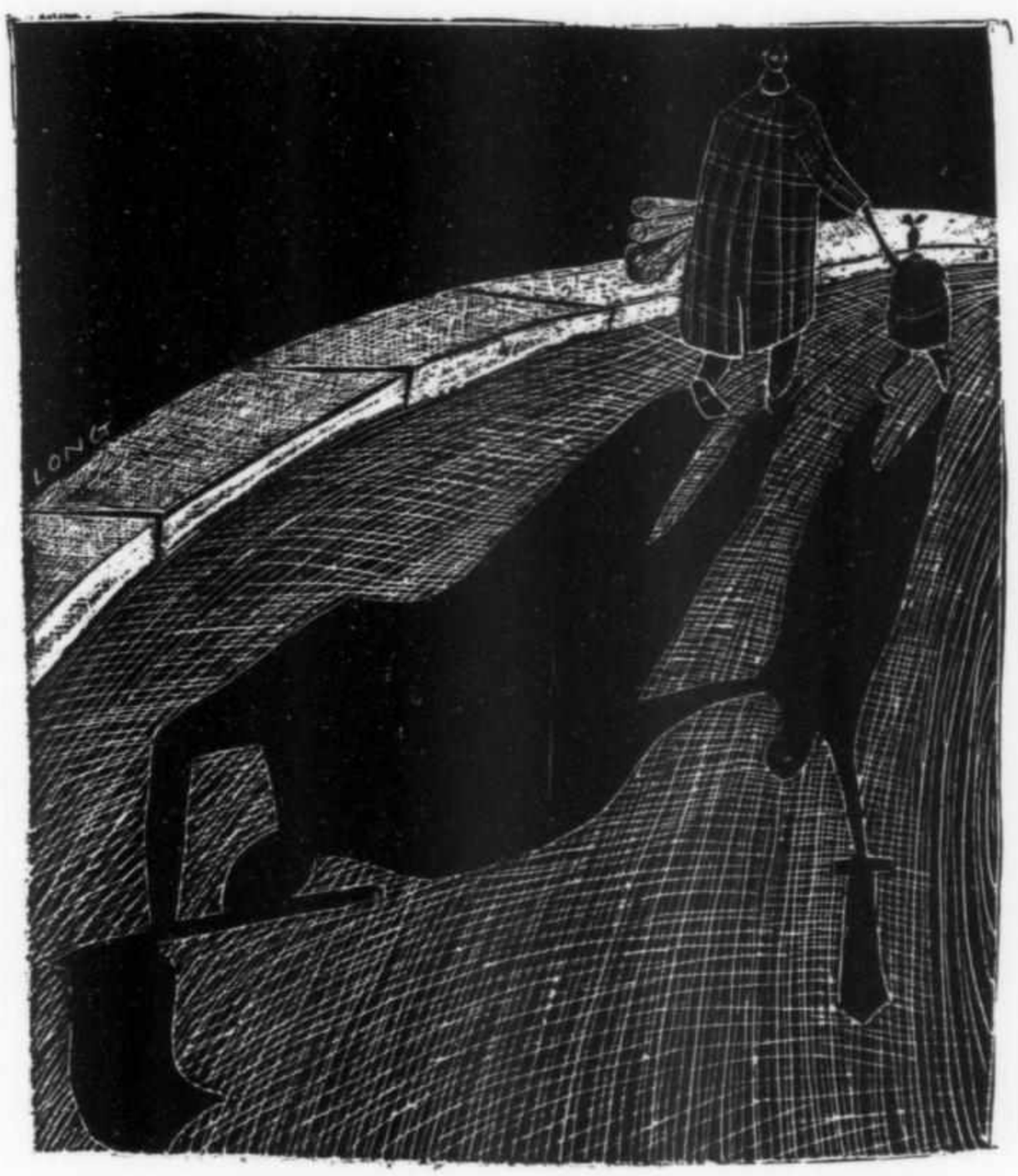
One of Wieseltier's main themes is the relationship he believes he has discerned between communitarian politics and a management theory for institutions developed by W. Edwards Deming known as "total quality management." Deming's theories, designed to institutionalize greater management control over the workplace, urge cooperation over competition in the workplace, stronger leadership from the top, and a systems approach to enhancing quality.

Yet had Wieseltier bothered to read the "Platform for a Politics of Meaning" that appeared in TIKKUN in the fall of 1992, he would have understood that Michael Lerner's approach is radically different from Deming's. Lerner doesn't merely want to enhance respect for workers, or to celebrate their contribution to the firm—he wants to empower them. The heart of his politics of meaning is a strategy to do just that—through the election of occupational safety and health committees empowered to make changes at the workplace to make it less stressful and more humanly fulfilling. Lerner contrasts this sharply with

(Continued on p. 90)

The Politics of the Small

Kim Chernin



I am trying to find out something about the state of mind in which it is possible to act politically. I do not have this state of mind but I would like to have it. My mother had it. She spent her entire adult life, from her early twenties until she retired at eighty-six, involved in politics. But my curiosity is piqued less by people like my mother, whose natures are fulfilled in political action, than by people like me, whose principal fulfillment is not through political action, although we are concerned about the world.

I take it for granted that political action is desirable, that it fulfills a basic need for social responsibility and collective involvement. A neighbor of mine, for example, has been building bird houses for endangered species. I am willing to consider this a political act, although my mother would have been scornful of it.

A woman of the old Left, my mother cared about immigrants, the poor, exploited and oppressed people, the hungry, all of whom she herself was or had been. The misfortunes of these people were a relentless goad to her. They kept her awake at night—organizing demonstrations, planning rallies, writing leaflets, dreaming up legal strategies, answering emergency telephone calls. I, her daughter, prefer to stay home and read a book, or listen to music. For me, public action requires a supreme effort of will. My mother was in her element when people had gathered and she could address them.

My father, a man of the old Left, found it possible to act, although he was not by nature an activist. He was a quiet, thoughtful, intellectual person who played chess very well. On Saturdays, during the late forties and early fifties, when left-wing newspapers were hard to peddle, my father and I would go from door to door in our neighborhood hawking copies of the *People's World*. We set out on our rounds every weekend although some people, once they recognized us, hurried inside and set their dogs to barking.

My mother, I believe, felt some contempt for my father's activity since it failed to generate radical change. My father's actions had more in common with my neighbor's birdhouse project, which my mother would have regarded as sentimental in the very worst sense, an indulgence of private sensibility at collective expense. She saw knocking at doors as time taken from other, more urgent social endeavors. The unemployed, the battered, the evicted, the wrongfully jailed would

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have seemed to my mother more worthy of committed effort than birds. And put that way, as an absolute choice between urgencies, I suppose most people would agree with my mother. Nevertheless, I don't think she was right, although for most of my life I did think so, and this is, I imagine, one of the reasons I have not been able to act.

The politics that derive from my mother's vision of the oppressed masses is a politics of total commitment, a giving all one has to right the injustices of the world, which must be intolerable to decent people, who simply cannot go about their own more privileged lives without working to change an unfair, unjust, exploitative society. My voice changes when I write these words: My mother comes to speech through me, hortatory, convincing, fist clenched, eyes blazing. Her's was politics on a grand scale, requiring an all-consuming dedication.

As a girl, my sympathies, although not my sense of what really mattered, were always with my father. I thought there was something a bit sad, maybe even a little silly about his weekly paper-selling rounds but I went with him because it was better than staying home alone. My father walked with a sense of courtesy for a child—slowly, with short steps, willing to stop to stare at things most adults would have counted foolish.

My father took on his paper-selling job because, I imagine, he did not regard the spare time he spent teaching Marxism to other Marxists as having sufficient scope. But he was a shy man, and it took courage for him to set out into our neighborhood, to encounter hostile neighbors, to raise with them some of the urgent social issues of the day.

He was also nobody's fool. He didn't expect to have a major impact on the class consciousness of our lower-middle-class neighborhood. He seemed satisfied if his reception, over time, became somewhat less cool. We were a mixed community by then. Some of our neighbors were African Americans; there were also a few Asians, but the whites, who had not yet moved away, were definitely the most hostile to the grey-haired man in his corduroy jacket walking hand-in-hand with his daughter each Saturday. Early on, I learned not to expect much from them, although my father had clearly not yet given up. "You never know," he'd say, with his own gentle brand of humor. "The mind of man is an inscrutable document."

So, there was my father, getting himself to do something difficult because he felt there was some small chance he might encounter or awaken a sensibility such as his own must have been before he read his first Marxist paper as a young man. He never said this; he never told me it was hard for him, but I knew it was, or at least I know now. Nevertheless, this activity suited him because he was a quiet-spoken person who could never have taken to a soap box to address multitudes. Undoubtedly he would have liked to stay home on Saturdays reading a book or playing chess, but he went out to discuss politics with our neighbors. His quiet, persuasive skills, although we did not admire them in my family, where my mother and I liked to shout, were in fact considerable, for he had the capacity never to get angry during an argument or to respond irrationally to hostility, but always to counter it with reasoned discourse. While they used to seem somewhat sad and perhaps a bit silly, my father's weekly walks out among our neighbors, because they required some effort and yet were temperamentally suitable for him, may now serve as my model for political action.

When I was a small girl, about three years old, I developed a theory about the sun and moon. I told my mother that the moon was always there in the sky but we could not see it because during the daytime the sun was brighter. This counted as a sign of precocity in my family, but I do not think I was talking so much about sun and moon as about my mother and father, and the way the dramatic scale of her activity blinded one to him, obscured him with her greater brilliance.

If I were to give a name to my father's orientation, I would call it the politics of the small, to distinguish it from my mother's worldview, in which all acts derived their significance from the way they led to radical social transformation, even revolution. I cannot claim that my father (dead these twenty-five years) would have endorsed the train of thought I am about to derive from those Saturday walks. Nevertheless, his acts had consequences. I observed these as a child, because they affected me and made a difference in my life.

During the time my father and I sold newspapers, a cross was burned on the lawn of the first Black family that came to live in our neighborhood. My mother organized a vigil, to welcome our new neighbors, to let them know there were decent people around who would not allow them to be driven out.

I have a vivid memory of my mother charging out to gather people for the vigil. Until recently, I didn't think much about my father's version of this behavior (my father and I stood vigil too, but we weren't organizers), which took place after the cross burning, when the neighborhood was still largely white, and a Black man moved in a few blocks away and was tolerated but isolated by his neighbors. My father struck up a conversational friendship on Saturdays with the newcomer. They were both quiet-spoken men—I could see that it was a relief to both of them to have found one

another, which was a relief to me too, because I used to fear that my father's feelings would be hurt by our neighbors' rebuffs. I played with the man's dog while he and my father talked. This man began to buy our newspaper regularly, so now there was always *his* house.

My father's new customer was a janitor in the local school system and used to walk home from work just after dark, which may have accounted for the fact that in passing our house he noticed a car parked across the street, first one night, then the next, and the next, which made him suspicious, so that he knocked at our door for the first time to tell my parents. That is how we came to know my mother was being followed by the FBI. Armed with this knowledge, we were silently able to start preparing for her arrest on the charge of "conspiring to overthrow the government by force and violence." When her arrest came, a few weeks later, we were taken by surprise. Still, I imagine I (an eleven-year-old girl) was somewhat less terrified than I might otherwise have been, because of this neighbor, who knew what was at stake, who took a risk, who looked scared, but let us know what he thought was happening.

If my father's relations with this man can be thought of as behavior derived from the politics of the small—by which I mean also the individual, the personally significant, the small acts of engagement in which you do what is a natural expression of your own temperament, without having to believe that you are going to change the world—our neighbor's behavior when we were in danger might also be understood as the consequence of the politics of the small. For a chain of consequence was set in motion by my father's pleasure at finding a neighbor friendly to his radical thought. It is this sort of consequence we tend to overlook when we think about the world through my mother's eyes, with the vision of the politics of total commitment on a grand scale.

Our neighbor had a niece who lived some blocks away in our neighborhood. She used to visit him occasionally on weekends. After a time, she and I began to play together with the brown dog while the two men talked. The niece and I attended the same junior high school, but we didn't become friends although we said hello to one another when we passed in the hall or on the playground. Nevertheless, after my mother was arrested, in the first difficult days when other kids avoided me, she sometimes walked home with me, as if she were just stopping in to say hello to her uncle.

Thinking back on these walks, which meant a lot to the lonely, isolated girl I then was, I see them as among the consequences of my father's activities. Our neighbor told my father he had never thought some of the thoughts he read in our left-wing newspaper and that he was happy to have come across them. That too was a consequence of my father's Saturday walks, which led to the man's friendship in a hard time, which led to his niece walking home from school with me.

We, the privileged in a society of growing poverty, are damaged by our efforts to deny what is happening to our less privileged neighbors.

The politics of the small seems to consist of acts that may require some self-discipline, but remain nevertheless acts that are temperamentally appropriate to oneself, belonging as they do to one's natural sphere of interest. Often, they are acts one might take for granted as the natural exercise of human decency, until one finds oneself failing to do them when one might, because the world has begun to look so troubled that small acts of engagement and concern begin to lose their meaning and gradually give way to a self-protective indifference. This is the state of mind I discover in myself when I reflect on my failure to engage in political acts.

I believe, as my father did, that it would be best if all people were capable of giving their life to acts of social responsibility and concern. But my father and I are not such people. At the same time, we cannot content ourselves with small, local acts that do not affect the larger world. And because we cannot content ourselves with such small acts, although my father nevertheless engaged in them, we are eventually faced with the dilemma that what is right for us temperamentally seems inadequate from a political point of view. This is a considerable self-division, characteristic of many of us who have a desire to make the world a more just place, but who feel a kind of dogged futility that makes it difficult to engage in any kind of political act because most acts seem either too large or too small, requiring too much, or issuing in too little consequence.

Last night I dreamed that I was lecturing about how we, the privileged in a society of growing poverty, are damaged by our efforts to deny what is happening to our less privileged neighbors. We do not understand how to help them and therefore we close ourselves off to knowledge. In the dream, I grasped in graphic detail the way this self-insulation was making us shrink, impoverishing us, covering us in layers of stiff gauze, so that soon, I kept

saying in my dream, we will have enclosed ourself in an indifference so profound we can no longer be said to be alive inside all those layers of denial.

I know, I was making this speech to myself, trying, even from within my dreams, to awaken myself. But what is this awakening supposed to be? I will not wake up to discover I am, after all, a woman like my mother. Of course, not everyone has had a mother who was a born activist on a grand scale. But a figure of this type, endowed with the capacity to act grandly, informs our political musing, even when this figure has not been derived from one's own childhood. Most people with a sense of social responsibility, who nevertheless do not act, are often (if unknowingly) measuring the acts of concern they might spontaneously undertake against a social imperative that immediately dwarfs them.

We tend to overlook the fact that most people, when confronted by social injustice on a global scale, tend to withdraw.

The small is problematic, but it is often redeemed by its capacity to generate consequence. My childhood story does not end where I left off. It has an interesting twist, which once again involves my mother. The thoughtful man who was our neighbor, who began to buy the *People's World* from us, eventually moved back to the South because his mother was ill. But his niece had grown fond of me and often came to visit us, so that my mother, when she got out of jail, got to know her well. In the summers, my friend and I used to dance together in our backyard with three or four drummers from our school, and that girl was a wonderful dancer. Soon, my father talked to her mother, who worked hard and didn't have money to spare, and when that girl was starting to get into some trouble and might have been kicked out of school, or worse, my mother arranged for her to get a scholarship to Bella Lewitzsky's dance school. And so it came about that this girl became a professional dancer, and was one of the very few kids I know from that neighborhood who left it for the larger world.

Or so I thought. Some years ago I found out that she had come back to our neighborhood after a fairly successful career and was now teaching dance there. I like to imagine that just one of her dance students in the converted garage was saved from something difficult that might have happened to her if she had not met this teacher, just as who knows what might have happened to me if this teacher, when she was a girl, had not walked home with me from school in that difficult time after my mother was arrested?

My mother, thinking back on her life, would surely not remember this story about my school friend who made her way back into the neighborhood where her uncle, who used to buy papers from my father, had been living when we went out on our Saturday walks. But I bet anything my father, if he were living, would remember her.

"The life of man, what a fathomless enigma," my father used to say. I like to think he meant by this that we do not know much about the consequences of our acts, I like to imagine he was aware of how the small grows by its connection to other small things—acts, gestures, moments of courage or concern. I have come to think of this as the generation of consequence from the politics of the small in the hope of inspiring myself to stick with the small, because of the possibility that all our acts unfold by knocking into other acts sent spinning on their way to effect yet others, in a vast chain of consequence that may in the end lead to the very goal my mother desired when she set out every morning to do big things.

In some abstract scheme of value (in which I myself do not believe), human misery may count higher than the homelessness of birds. But if my neighbor stopped building birdhouses for endangered species she wouldn't be down on Telegraph helping the homeless. Not recognizing this is the error of my mother's political thought, and of those like her who urge all of us to become as politically engaged as she was. The capacity for political activity on a large, life-consuming scale, may be a gift, like absolute pitch in music, or the ability to create a literary masterpiece. If the desire for political activity on a large scale is a temperamental endowment, or an expression of an imperative inner need to organize, speak out, protest, fight for rights, these traits will never appear in all people, no matter how insistently we strike the moral note, urging them to wake up, become conscious, recognize injustice, act.

Because we make our political appeals, to ourselves as well as to others, in moral terms, playing more often than not on the politics of guilt to persuade people they must act, we tend to overlook the fact that most people, when confronted by social injustice on a global scale, tend to withdraw. We of the Left tend to feel that people must overcome this withdrawal by facing the harsh truth of the world, and we overlook the fact that action is always motivated by temperamental affinity for the acts one manages to perform. Undoubtedly it is

(Continued on p. 91)

ROUNDTABLE

The Politics of Meaning

Peter Gabel is president of New College of California and associate editor of TIKKUN. *Mary Edsall is co-author of* Chain Reaction: The Impact of Race, Rights and Taxes on American Politics. *Ruth Rosen is professor of history at the University of California, Davis and a contributing editor of* TIKKUN. *She is the author of* The Lost Sisterhood: Prostitution in America. *Charles Derber is professor of sociology at Boston College and author of* Money, Murder and the American Dream: Wilding from Wall Street to Main Street. *Michael Sandel is professor of government at Harvard University and a member of the* TIKKUN editorial board.

TIKKUN: The politics of meaning has evoked considerable enthusiasm in the American public despite considerable attacks and distortions from the media. Many Americans resonate to the notion that progressives are finally seeking to address the psychological, ethical, and spiritual needs that have been previously ignored by people in the liberal camp. Yet that resonance has been matched by a huge amount of hostility from the media and the official gatekeepers of public consciousness.

Much of the media hostility has to be understood in terms of what could be defined as a preemptive strike aimed at clipping the wings of the Clintons' possible turn to the Left. Mrs. Clinton's politics of meaning speech in April used words that could have been construed to be explicitly anti-capitalist, and when the media asked themselves "Where would she get this kind of thinking?" they focused on the similarity of her language and thoughts to the politics of meaning that we in TIKKUN have been articulating for years. The first strikes were at Mrs. Clinton herself, then at TIKKUN, then at TIKKUN's editor. The excessive and intemperate language of these attacks, their personal nature, their refusal to even consider the substance of the ideas put forward, bespoke a desperate desire to discredit. In so doing, they sought to raise the political cost to Bill Clinton of any overt siding with Hillary Rodham Clinton's supposedly leftish slide (which was derided as "psychobabble," since to examine it seriously as Left ideas would have been to expose the general public to ideas about which the media hoped the American people would remain ignorant), and to raise the cost to Mrs. Clinton of any overt affinity with TIKKUN.

Charles Derber: The language is challenging to two very basic pillars of American politics that don't normally get questioned by the White House: individualism and the free market.

A lot of the people in the media who have been very upset have been conservative and neo-con columnists who have enjoyed a monopoly on the discussion of values in American politics, and the politics of meaning might potentially undermine their exclusive ownership of concern about family, religion, values, God, neighborhood. That is a serious challenge, and one that they would want to discredit.

Ruth Rosen: There's a fear that the politics of meaning, as a kind of communitarianism, might involve restrictions and restraints in their lives.

Mary Edsall: TIKKUN's politics of meaning is part of a radical challenge to certain aspects of market capitalism and rampant individualism that is taking place across a wide variety of institutions and publications that speak to the concerns of a cohort of the population of people aged 30-55 who have been experiencing a great deal of anomie and alienation in daily life. The critique is coming from all sides, and Hillary Clinton was speaking to a widespread perception, using the language that Michael Lerner developed because at times he puts it better than anyone else. We have to separate this critique from the somewhat discredited criticisms of capitalism that have been articulated by Marxists. Marxist economics didn't take into account, among other things, the ecology of human motivations. Everybody knows that capitalism has costs that are substantial in terms of human suffering, alienation, degradation, and almost everybody wants to ameliorate these costs (including, arguably, management and the well-to-do). The concepts of freedom and autonomy and the glorification of the self are now beginning to come under criticism from every corner, even the neo-cons.

But the Right will not link this to a critique of market capitalism.

In bringing ideas from psychology and religion into the political sphere, Michael Lerner has broken a certain societal taboo, and that also has something to do with the response—but I think it's creative and good to have broken the taboo.

Peter Gabel: Whatever legitimate criticisms might be raised about the politics of meaning, the vehemence of the attacks are parallel to the attacks on Clinton himself. At the time of the election people experienced an opening up of desire, hope for human connection, in a way that we haven't felt for a very long time. Everyone who voted for Clinton tried to affirm that in everyone else who voted for Clinton. There was a hope for community and the possibility of being seen by one another in an empowering way. The fragility of that hope exists in everyone. Our tendency is to put our toe in the water, to vote for Clinton, but also to have a lot of cynicism and fear about the consequences of that hope—it makes people feel vulnerable to one another. The reason for the vehemence of the attacks on Clinton, the hysterical nature of the counterattacks on Clinton, is connected to this fear of psychic opening. The fragility of that opening makes it very vulnerable to the cynicism and alienated media response that actually occurred. The politics of meaning evokes the same sense of possibility in people, so apart from the legitimate criticisms that might be raised, the hysteria of the criticisms, the dismissing of the ideas as "psychobabble" or totalitarian, or the attempts to diminish Michael Lerner by labeling him the Clintons' guru, or talking of Hillary Clinton as trying to be "Saint Hillary," must all be understood in terms of these fears of possible social connection and the fulfillment of desire that Bill Clinton's election opened up. People on the Left have this fear as much as people on the Right—this general terror of the opening up of desire.

Wherever people are located, each of us has a simultaneous longing for social connection and a fear of this connection because of our previous experience of hurt that we've had when we've had these hopes in the past, beginning in our childhoods. Journalists are formerly idealistic people who have abandoned their idealism for cynicism. The cynicism is a defense against the possibility of pain that will result if we overcome our paranoia and actually attempt to create a meaningful world.

Michael Sandel: One feature of the politics of meaning that may make it particularly vulnerable to ridicule is the running together of moral and psychologistic categories. Inspiring debate about the larger moral purposes of American life is an important thing to do. For too long many liberals have fled from engaging moral and religious discourse as part of political discourse and have left the field to the religious Right. Where the politics of meaning have gone wrong is in confusing the moral and ethical dimensions of politics with sentimental or psychotherapeutic dimensions. For example, to talk about love or a society built on love seems to me to be a wrong turn. Love is not a political term. Solidarity, yes; mutual responsibility, yes; but love seems to me an implausible basis for a political ethic and leads to an easy dismissal of such a view as sentimental.

It's important to get clear on the terms of the discourse because it defines what kinds of programs flow from it. One illustration of this misplaced emphasis on sentimental and psychologistic notions is the program in your "Platform for a Politics of Meaning" that calls for teaching courses in empathy in schools. I don't think we should teach empathy for other cultures and religions in the schools; we should teach *understanding* of those cultures and religions. To a certain extent, all understanding is sympathetic understanding, but it should also be critical understanding. The idea of teaching empathy rather than critical understanding of cultures and religions reflects, it seems to me, the tendency to view politics in psychologistic terms.

TIKKUN: The word "love" has been so frequently manipulated by religious charlatans that people are right to be suspicious when they hear this word. We've used the word "caring" recently, in part because of this consideration. But I still believe that it would be a mistake to cede the word "love" to the new charlatans. "Caring" also has the advantage of suggesting a course of action that moves beyond an internal psychological state.

But that shouldn't satisfy Sandel's objection, because caring still refers in part to an inner feeling.

Yet, isn't ethical behavior dependent upon our ability to have the other elicit in us a certain inner state, namely one in which we feel love or caring for that other, and wouldn't ethics simply be impossible without having had that relevant experience? Might it not be the case that the degree to which childhood experiences, socialization, and contemporary social realities block our ability to have that relevant experience, people begin to respond to the language of ethics as though it had a hollow ring, as though it didn't quite move them, as though the words have a

distance that doesn't quite connect to anything in their experience and hence, though they know they are supposed to salute when words like obligation and responsibility are sent up the flag pole, they can't quite remember why and don't really feel anything but uncomfortable when this kind of discourse gets introduced by preachers and political moralizers whom they try to get away from? Or, in Levinas's terms, doesn't ethics require the recognition of the Other—and that kind of recognition is more psychologistic.

Sandel: We don't need people to love one another in order to build community and engage in a common public life together. There has to be mutual respect among citizens and a sense of participating in a larger public life with common purposes and a shared fate—those are the ingredients of solidarity, but "love" is too narrow a demand. People don't need to love one another to share common purposes.

TIKKUN: Isn't there some set of psychological experiences that is a prerequisite for people to be willing or interested to build a community together. And if societal practices and socialization tends to block experiences like mutual recognition or caring, isn't it less likely that people will have any motivation to join together with others to build shared projects?

Sandel: It's a misplaced emphasis to find a psychologistic basis in love. For there to be a sense of community there do have to be shared habits, dispositions, qualities of character, a sense of mutual responsibility, and it's important to build a politics that can cultivate a sense of shared purpose and mutual responsibility. The way one goes about such a community has less to do with the psychological categories and more to do with political, economic, and cultural concerns. Those are the things that should be emphasized as an alternative to the notion that politics should be a neutral arena for the pursuit of selfish interests.

Edsall: The politics of meaning seems to be introducing into the traditional political vocabulary ideas from the psychological and religious traditions that have previously been seen as "private" realms divorced from politics.

Sandel: I object to the psychological categories, not the religious ones.

Edsall: The word "love," while it has private and erotic connotations, also has a long religious history, as in "Love your neighbor as yourself," and Michael Lerner uses the word in both capacities.

Derber: Sandel is right that the psychologistic language is a source of vulnerability. Yet the charismatic character of Michael Lerner's language stems from the fact that it seeks to introduce a political discourse that resonates in a much more direct way with people's daily needs that have remained largely invisible and have not been articulated in other political discourse. The one discourse that has done this is the women's movement with its insistence that the boundaries between personal life and political life are very hard to draw. There are a lot of dangers of the therapeutic language and culture that a politics of meaning ought to try to avoid, but a politics that speaks to people's hopes and possibilities will have a difficult time avoiding the vulnerability Sandel talks about if it simultaneously wants to have a mass appeal.

Liberalism lets people do whatever the hell they want. In this sense, liberalism speaks to people's passion—their id—in a way the politics of meaning may not do.

Rosen: One strand of feminism offers a politics of care, mutual responsibility, rather than complete individualism and rights talk. Feminists have often criticized a world that only talks about rational, legalistic forms of political discourse. Carol Gilligan and Sara Ruddick have offered a model of maternal care as an alternative way of thinking about politics. This doesn't imply that we need to love one another. In Carol Gilligan's works it implies that we care for other human beings because they are human, not because we love them or even like them. It's necessary in a complex multicultural society that we create solidarity based on our common humanity and common needs, but we don't have to love each other to frame a commitment to a common good.

TIKKUN: That's why we've framed our motto in terms of shifting the dominant discourse from an ethos of selfishness to an ethos of caring—we haven't insisted on love.

Edsall: To repudiate the dominant concept of love,

when Western civilization has underlying it the Biblical command of "love your neighbor as yourself," is, I think, a bit naive.

Gabel: I don't think "care" is adequate to capture what we should be talking about in a politics of meaning, because "care" is too adult and parental a notion. We are talking about a fundamental need, which I'd call desire—an intense human need at birth for connectedness and feeling that you are part of a live community of vital social connection. It is only psychologistic because talking about this need has been limited to the private realm; it's not inherently psychologistic.

It is precisely the desire-realizing qualities in Clinton—the sense of openness, the sense of fondness and affection and spontaneity—that led people to support him, not a set of theorems about the moral life. We are talking about something direct and immediate that liberal thought has basically excluded not only from public discourse but also from liberal ways of being and acting.

Rosen: How can you say that "care" is distant? When people care for each other, whether it is taking care of their parents or children or friends, they don't really have the luxury of distance.

Gabel: When you talk about caring for children or parents, it has the sense of openness and directness that I value. My concern about the politics of meaning is that it may be heard as part of some distant communitarian philosophy that people are asked to join. When people hear this they feel queasy because they think they are being recruited to be part of some kind of large group process, whether it be a corporation that starts to talk about an ethos of caring, or whether it's some kind of New Age group.

People have a legitimate fear about being recruited to a "caring" community that in fact is going to suffocate them.

The one thing about liberalism is that it lets people do whatever the hell they want—at least they don't have to be in some totalitarian group. They can watch porno movies if they want, or join gangs, or hole up in their rooms and stuff themselves with junk food, whether anybody else likes it or not. In this sense, liberalism speaks to people's passion—their id—in a way that the politics of meaning and communitarianism may not do when they talk about love and caring. We have to speak in a better way to what liberalism speaks to in a distorted form.

TIKKUN: Are you saying people should be able to do whatever they want whether or not it expresses love and caring?

Gabel: I'm saying that liberalism at least leaves people alone to gratify their desire for connection, even if only in the distorted form of perverse fantasies, or joining together in gangs or the military to kill other people. The paradox is that liberalism also causes these distortions by isolating us from each other and denying us real community, in part by creating a neutralized public life that does not allow us to see our passionate desire for mutual recognition and connection reflected back to us. I'm not sure that "love" and "caring" are evocative enough of that passion for connection to outweigh the appeal of liberalism with its protected private sphere.

Sandel: A politics can be about identity and solidarity and building community without being therapeutic. In fact, the therapeutic and psychologistic emphasis can be very damaging. I suggest two alternatives: explore the ways that moral and religious discourse might inform public life from a progressive point of view (and TIKKUN could be a forum for this discussion) and explore ways to empower American citizens in their local communities, through community development corporations, community development banks, employee ownership plans, and other economic institutions that might contribute to a more vital and engaged civic life.

Derber: For me the most attractive element of the politics of meaning idea is that it talks about the connection between personal troubles and public realities. Private life is heavily structured by public institutions, and the effort of the politics of meaning is to help make these connections clearer. So much of our individualistic public discourse prevents people from moving across these levels and understanding the way that public realities structure personal experience. So many of our personal troubles are deeply shaped by the social realities, and what's exciting about the language of the politics of meaning is that it helps direct our attention to these connections.

Sandel: I'm no defender of a sharp division between the public and the private; feminist theorists have offered strong reasons to call that distinction into question.

The underlying frustration that has risen to the surface of American politics in recent years, it seems to me, is this: Notwithstanding the expansion of

individual rights and entitlements and the expansion of the franchise, there is a growing sense that, individually and collectively, we are less in control of the forces that govern our lives, rather than more. There is a growing frustration abroad in the land that the reigning political discourse has not addressed this sense of disempowerment and loss of community. Ronald Reagan tried to address this longing. It was the communal strand of Reagan's rhetoric—about family, religion, patriotism—not his individualistic, free-market ideology, that had the greatest appeal.

Liberals, on the other hand, have for the most part lacked a communal voice in recent decades. Those who would revitalize progressive politics need to speak to the moral and civic aspirations of the American people and to strengthen political communities as vehicles for meaningful self-government. But I doubt that even the most successful politics we can imagine would make a difference in whether people were capable of loving relationships. To involve people in some meaningful civic engagement is ambitious and difficult enough.

Derber: I would add a slightly different emphasis with a workplace example.

In the past few years there has been a tremendous shift in America's employment picture toward part-time and temporary workers. Liberal and Left politicos tend to address this by focusing exclusively on the economic dimension of this structural change. They don't focus on the social relationships and the declining sense of attachment, connection, recognition that these changes generate. I recently talked to one temp secretary who said that in a five month job stint in one office, none of the permanent employees ever met her eyes and said hello or good morning. Traditional liberals and conservatives can debate the economic problems of temping, but they do not address the issues of recognition, respect, and belonging which haunt temporary employees. This affects people's lives directly and is experienced on the personal and psychologistic level—it impacts family life and personal relationships. And talking on this personal level is the basis for reaching people politically.

Rosen: What worries me are people who are so involved in creating a "politics of meaning" that they may forget to ask people what they are doing about not having benefits and how they are surviving economically. We have to keep some parts of the liberal agenda that emphasize these economic issues.

Derber: Of course this needs to be put in the foreground. But what political people have tended to do is to ignore these other levels that may be central to political mobilization.

Sandel: As your own example illustrates, what's at stake for the temporary worker is lack of recognition, not lack of love. And lack of recognition is a political not a psychological category. Perhaps you should call this enterprise the politics of recognition, because that would cut across the public/private distinction without lapsing into psychologistic categories.

People need to see something from the public arena reflected back that validates their experience, or they tend to become hopeless.

Edsall: If you think of recognition, connection, attachment and love as existing on a continuum, and that continuum functioning along a double axis—these words operate, in one dimension, in the world of work, and they also operate in the second dimension in the sphere of private life. The erosion of private family life in its various forms has created an enormously chaotic social situation—and this is in part a reflection of the anarchy and chaos that capitalism inadvertently generates in the larger sphere. These multi-dimensional interactions are complex, but they are important to consider.

Gabel: I think your first point there is what should be foregrounded. It's paranoid social relations that produce paranoid economic relations, although the resulting economic system does coercively reproduce the paranoid social relations. But we can't reach people and move people by speaking to economic injustice without speaking to their alienation at the same time.

Tikkun: The politics of meaning came out of the experience that we had at the Institute for Labor and Mental Health dealing with working people for ten years. What we discovered was the framing of issues in the narrower way that Sandel describes, even with some degree of communitarian rhetoric supplied by the labor movement. The unions were thus unable to keep the interest or loyalty of the workers. You could sing about "solidarity forever" and talk about the need for civic responsibility, but you couldn't get a rise out of anyone. People simply didn't want to be part of that

kind of a movement. They were feeling the hurt in their lives on the level of family life and stress at work, the feeling level of their experience. And if you didn't address that feeling level, and explain the connection between what people were feeling in their personal lives and what was happening in the larger society, you got nowhere. That's why the labor movement, an implicitly communitarian movement, has lost most of its members and lost its hold over those who remain members.

Sandel says that he can't imagine a political movement that addresses these personal life issues or that helps people with them. But that is exactly what we did with our family support groups and occupational stress groups. Building on the experience of the consciousness-raising groups of the women's movement, but using somewhat more structured format and workbooks, we held groups that met once a week for twelve sessions. Through a combination of lectures, group discussion, sharing about personal life and the world of work, videos, and psychologically sensitive interventions, these groups aimed to help people understand the strong connections between:

- the stress that they were feeling at work and the way the workplace was organized;
- the way that stress got brought home into family life and directly affected their relationships with spouse and children;
- the way that similar dynamics had affected their parents' relationships with them and their experience of childhood;
- the various ways that society encouraged people to blame themselves and obscured societal structures shaping the breakdown of family life and the emergence of narcissistic individuals who were unable to make long-term, loving commitments either in families or in friendships;
- the ways that the competitive dynamics of the marketplace, the rewarding of selfish and egotistical behavior of individuals and corporations, and the bottom-line materialism enshrined in the marketplace all contributed to the creation of a culture that mocked ethical and spiritual sensibilities, encouraged looting or what Derber calls "wilding," hence making the teaching of moral values to children very difficult; and
- the complex ways that these dynamics play out in every human interaction, so that people's expectations of others and their perceptions of their own responses are deeply connected to their assessment of the degree to which they imagine that everyone will act in a selfish manner.

We helped the participants see that through social movements these distortions can be moderated, so that people can begin to have the experience of trust and mutual support, leading to an entirely new perspective on their daily relationships with their primary love partners. Furthermore, the participants in our groups actually experienced a degree of social support that was largely absent in the rest of their lives, as they put increasing amounts of energy into helping each other explore the relationship between personal life and the larger social issues. Thus, they began to get a picture of how a political movement could affect personal life. And it did. We found that most people were able to use this information to gain a sense of empowerment that led them to take a greater interest in their unions, in the women's movement, or other political empowerment movements and to become more effective at strengthening their primary love relationships.

So it is simply not true that a social change movement can't promise to help people deal with personal life, or can't promise a more loving society. On the contrary, politics will only mobilize people when it provides them with a means to envision their personal goals and illumines the social arrangements that impede those goals. The power of the Right was not its ability to address the issue of family life and the psychological pain that people experience through alienation, loneliness, mutual estrangement, and lack of recognition from others. Their tack—to blame all this on feminists, Blacks, gays, Jews, or liberal social mores—while deeply misguided and disgusting, was a clever strategy. They succeeded in reducing self-blame by helping people recognize that these were not merely personal problems. People are not motivated by the abstract idea that it is morally more appropriate to be part of a community; it must be directly linked to a very concrete experience of the feeling of alienation, loneliness, estrangement, etc. Hence, the psychological level is fundamental.

The desire to escape the feeling level, to label this "merely" psychologistic, is based on two things: First, the fear that we have of our own feelings, the sense that they will get out of control and be messy if they are dealt with, the fear that feelings will make us look less scholarly or professorial or professional, the fear that some men have that they will become "too feminine," or the fear that everything will get out of control once feelings are given too much legitimation. And second, the belief that what is real and hard is that which is publicly observable, repeatable, and subject to external scrutiny, whereas feelings are soft because they can't stand up to this kind of scrutiny. This second point, however, also leads us to discount anything that is stated in ethical or religious language.

Sandel: I have no quarrel with the family support groups and occupational stress groups you describe. No doubt they do a great deal of good. My point is that they do not form an appropriate model for a national political program. It is one thing to suggest that the civic responsibility and common purposes forged in smaller communities—whether union locals or neighborhood groups or school boards or social movements or religious communities—equip and dispose men and women to engage in the larger public life of the nation. Figuring out how, under present circumstances, to cultivate national citizenship through more particular forms of association and identity is an essential part of any attempt to revitalize our civic life.

But it is something else to suggest that the intimacy of the support group can somehow be writ large in a national political ethic of love and caring. This is a mistake whose consequences can be seen, for example, in those proposals in the politics of meaning program that call for a federal Department of Families (TIKKUN, July/August 1993, p.17).

A public ethic need not, in fact should not, abstract from all of the particular identities and local communities that situate us in the world. It should not bracket, or set aside for political purposes the moral and religious convictions that inspire us in our personal lives. This is the mistake of much contemporary liberalism. But neither can a public ethic be founded on generalizing, or translating into national political terms the feelings and sentiments of family life. The national government is not, and shouldn't try to be, a loving, caring family.

TIKKUN: Of course not. What the government can do is two things: first, it can level the playing field so that economic and social policies no long reward selfishness and disadvantage caring or socially responsible behavior. An economy that rewarded those who raise children, for example, or rewarded those corporations that were environmentally responsible, would foster a very different kind of "common sense" about what kinds of activities are valued. Second, the government can provide families with educational resources, fund training in parenting skills, encourage neighborhood family-support groups—while insisting that no *one* model of family be sanctified or imposed, but instead encourage local communities to provide resources for the variety of different forms that families may choose for themselves. This is a long way from Sandel's claim that we seek to make the government itself become a loving family, with all the totalitarian possibilities inherent in that option.

Edsall: There is lurking in the background a moralistic, puritanical thrust to force people to stay committed in communities and families, based on the sense that there is often repressive or constricting aspect to requiring people not to abandon their families and children. Part of the liberal experiment of the past thirty years has been to subtly kick away from the coercive aspects of social control. What we've seen, however, is that in this experiment we've faced a substantial degree of social chaos and disintegrating families. The Left has not found a way to talk about this well or to suggest remedies because of the coercive aspects of those remedies.

What I am saying is that under modern, increasingly egalitarian conditions, it may be that family membership constitutes a de facto incursion on the autonomous, free-standing sovereign self—at least on the traditionally conceived male self. The dissolution of the nuclear family, on the other hand, generates a degree of harm—arguably a disproportionate share of which is borne by children and by women who have the care of the children. Measured by a harm standard, liberalism and the associated dismantling of structures of social control have created a sizeable portion of the pain which the politics of meaning now seeks to address.

Derber: At its best, a psychological language of communitarian politics will move citizens away from the purely psychologized understanding of daily experience, so evident among my introductory sociology students, who see life outcomes as scripted overwhelmingly by individual personality rather than social structure. The politics of meaning sees the deepening problems of our work and family life as shared social ills with systemic and politically remediable roots. The critics of the politics of meaning have confused a psychological terminology with a psychologized politics, for the politics of meaning is not proposing therapeutic solutions but changes in the economy and the polity such as greater employee participation in the workplace and parental participation in schools and neighborhoods which are institutional (not psychological) remedies to disempowerment, isolation, and erosion of the moral and social fabric.

Rosen: Recent news reports about the increase in the number of unwed women too frequently lead to blaming the women. There's little blame directed toward men. Women are having children on their own at least in part because too many men don't want to

take responsibility for family life.

Edsall: And the politics of meaning raises the hope in people that this kind of issue can and ought to be addressed through community. One thing we need to address also is the advantage of raising children with fathers—a taboo topic on the Left.

Rosen: But it's not usually women who don't want men in the picture, it's the men themselves that are often the problem.

Derber: There's enormous ambiguity on the Left about community responsibility and how much people on the Left are willing to make tradeoffs limiting individual freedom in the name of familial or civic obligations. The whole historical meaning of community has been associated with patriarchal constraints which the Left has been seeking to challenge...and we need a more disciplined discussion of the tradeoff.

TIKKUN: And part of the problem here is that the Left has been understood to be the force that validates putting people's personal desires, whatever feels good, above any sense of social obligation. And that is one taunt that the Right has a point in when it says, "Look who is suddenly talking about moral obligation," though if they were principled they'd be welcoming this development and seeing it as an advance.

Rosen: But it depends on what place you have in society ... it's easier for an entitled man to feel that he can make this decision about what freedoms to give up, whereas a welfare mother who has less may feel less ready to be engaged in a conversation about what she is supposed to be giving up for the common good.

TIKKUN: But since the Left construes itself as an alliance of all sorts of groups that are oppressed in some way or other, it can always use this kind of argument to deflect any insistence that we articulate a program that goes beyond what we want and includes some element of what we are willing to give up. The Left thus always appears opportunistic and self-indulgent and playing by different rules than everyone else.

Rosen: And now, with the Hyde Amendment, we have continued restraints on poor women and the growing impoverishment of many other women.

TIKKUN: But women are doing worse in this situation than they would if there were some kind of ethos of commitment to others and social responsibility.

Rosen: But it's very important who makes these rules.

Gabel: Leon Wieseltier's critique of the politics of meaning in The *New Republic* makes a good point when he raises the specter of how corporations can use notions about mutual responsibility and caring in a coercive way to legitimate corporate domination of the individual. He wants to defend individual space against these kind of totalitarian movements—so he links total quality management or TQM with communitarianism and with the politics of meaning.

Our answer to this should be that we can only develop the confidence to be truly autonomous by having our individuality elicited and validated by others in an egalitarian, respectful context. A community of mutual recognition is a prerequisite to true individual freedom. And corporate domination inherently contradicts the creation of such a community, no matter how much the new personnel managers use the language of caring. They're not talking about what we're talking about even if they use our words.

TIKKUN: Wieseltier knows full well, however, that the politics of meaning is up-front in its commitment to democratic control of the workplace by the workers—the exact opposite of what the corporate controllers have in mind. The claim that corporate managers can use the language of community to further their domination, or that they can use the language of psychology for this same purpose, should shock no one—every liberatory language can be used in exactly opposite ways to the intentions of its champions. But this is no less true of the language of individualism which Wieseltier hails. In fact, for the past two hundred years it has been this language of individual rights that has been most appropriated by corporations to defend their own power over individuals. Particularly once the Supreme Court interpreted the Fourteenth Amendment to defend the rights of corporations (because they were supposedly individuals, too!), we had a legal tradition which conferred on corporations the right to exploit their workers and not be interfered with by the legal system.

Moreover, Wieseltier talks about a neutral individual which makes no sense.

Derber: Wieseltier fails to acknowledge the core sociological truth—so apparent among broken inner

(Continued on p. 87)

The Coming New Debate On Abortion

Paul Savoy

While abortion rights advocates may have thought the election of Bill Clinton had made America safe for the right of a woman to terminate a pregnancy, the debate about the question Justice Harry Blackmun described in 1989 as "the most politically divisive domestic legal issue of our time" has erupted again. In Blackmun's prescient words, "the signs are evident and very ominous and a chill wind blows."

The ability of abortion opponents earlier this year to win re-enactment by the House of the Hyde Amendment's ban on federal financing of abortions for poor women except in cases of rape, incest, or risk to the life of the woman is the first chilling sign of a season of dashed expectations. The coming struggle of pro-choice groups to achieve victory on the two most important battle fronts of the nineties—public financing of abortion for poor women and the inclusion of abortion coverage in the national health-care plan to be announced by the White House task force headed by Hillary Rodham Clinton—cannot succeed if conducted as a civil liberties campaign for individual privacy. A legal right cast from the Supreme Court's ruling that abortion cannot be banned before viability because it is essentially a private decision is on a collision course with any effort to make access to abortion a matter of public policy financed by public money. While 80 percent of those surveyed in a 1992 *New York Times*/CBS poll said they supported the personal right to choose abortion, 52 percent opposed using tax dollars to pay for abortions, as compared to 42 percent in favor. This emerging distinction between abortion as private choice and abortion as public policy confirms the prediction of Rosalind Petchesky, director of women's studies at Hunter College, in the 1990 introduction to her book, *Abortion and Woman's Choice*, that the concept of "choice" will have to be redefined in terms of social justice rather than personal privacy and connected to "the social changes and affirmative public efforts needed to make such choice real for all women."

The confirmation hearings for Supreme Court appointee Ruth Bader Ginsburg already have indicated one new direction in which this second-generation abortion debate is headed. In several speeches since 1984, she has suggested that it might have been better in the long run if the right to terminate a pregnancy had been based on the Constitution's guarantee of equal protection as well as the right to privacy. Judge Ginsburg told the Senate Judiciary Committee in July that she never thought of a woman's right to choose "as an either-or, one-pocket-or-the-other" question, "but I did think about it first and foremost as differential treatment of the woman, based on her sex."

Redefining abortion as an issue of equality and social justice means the underlying moral issues can no longer be avoided. Not since the Civil War has a conflict of moral values so radically transformed the social role of an entire class of Americans or so dramatically shifted the tectonic plates of national politics. Unlike the issues of slavery or segregation, however, the abortion dilemma has acquired all the attributes of a spiritual enigma. It is as if the morality of abortion ultimately depended on answers to the most baffling and perhaps unanswerable questions about "the concept of existence, of meaning, of the universe, and of the mystery of human life," as Justices Sandra Day O'Connor, Anthony Kennedy, and David Souter put it last year in a joint opinion announcing a 5-to-4 decision that reaffirmed *Roe v. Wade*, while sidestepping "the profound moral and spiritual implications of terminating a pregnancy."

Confronting these moral and spiritual issues will pose the most serious challenge yet to the new politics of meaning articulated by the First Lady in a speech at the University of Texas in which she summoned the nation to embrace what is "morally and ethically and spiritually correct" as a basis for public policy. If a woman's right to terminate a pregnancy is to be based on widely shared notions of morality and social justice, as it must if universal access to abortion services is to

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become public policy, abortion rights advocates will have to rethink the most basic assumptions about what it means for a woman to claim such a right.



Contrary to the prevailing orthodoxy of abortion rights doctrine, the right to terminate a pregnancy actually has very little to do with a right of procreation or reproductive freedom, or what the Supreme Court has broadly characterized as "the right of the individual, married or single, to be free from unwarranted governmental intrusion into matters so fundamentally affecting a person as the decision whether to bear or beget a child." Except in cases of coercive sex, women in America did not need a ruling from the Supreme Court to establish a right to decide "whether to bear or beget a child." Women were always free to decide not to have children by not having sex. Indeed, the feminists who preceded Margaret Sanger advocated reproductive freedom primarily through sexual abstinence, although given the extent to which women have long been subjected to unwanted sex, abstinence all too often has been an unrealistic alternative.

What the Supreme Court, in effect, has recognized over the last quarter of a century in its rulings on birth control and abortion is a constitutional right of women to have sex for pleasure rather than procreation as part of a more general freedom from sexual subjugation. To be sure, no lawyer was about to get up before the Supreme Court and argue that what the Constitution protects is a fundamental right of women to a more liberated sex life, if the Court pleases. But sexual equality for women is exactly what legal access to the Pill was all about. (Condoms had always been available to men as a means of preventing sexually transmitted diseases.) And, aside from cases of rape and other kinds of coercive sex, or when a pregnancy threatens a woman's life or health, what else is abortion but a bloody and messy means of insuring a woman's right to have sex without having any more children than she wants?

Since there is no fail-safe method of contraception (43 percent of unintended pregnancies occur in women using birth control, according to the Alan Guttmacher Institute), the only way, other than abortion, that women could participate equally with men in the economic life of the nation would be to submit to sterilization or to live as secular nuns. How, in the wake of the sexual revolution of the sixties, state bans on birth control and abortion could have escaped scrutiny as a discriminatory restraint on the erotic life of American women would be incomprehensible without the benefit of insight into the ability of the legal mind to contemplate two inextricably linked ideas without ever relating one to the other. Within a period of less than ten years—between 1965, when the Supreme Court handed down its first birth control decision, and 1973, when *Roe* was decided—the Court had legalized the sexual revolution without so much as a nod of acknowledgment that its rulings had anything to do with the liberation of women as sexual beings.

Talk about a right to "procreate," or a right to "bear" or "beget" a child, or a right of women to "control their reproductive systems" gives an aura of respectability to the underlying right to sexual pleasure and autonomy by wrapping arguments about birth control and abortion in the sanitized language of a standard medical text on gynecology and obstetrics. But it is all beside the point. However artfully the justices may have packaged the right to abortion as an aspect of privacy under the Fourteenth Amendment, the real meaning of *Roe* and its reaffirmation last year in *Planned Parenthood v. Casey* is inescapable: Life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness must include—as Freud argued so convincingly in *Civilization and its Discontents*—the right to *sexual* happiness.

The extent to which the issue of female sexuality has been obscured over the last twenty years in legal and political debates about "privacy" and "choice" attests to our continuing inability as a society to talk openly about sexual behavior, particularly the sexual behavior of women. But most of all, the suppression of the sexual issue suggests that for all the energy both sides have spent on debating the right to an abortion, we will simply not talk about it honestly, at least not in public, and certainly not in court. Finding a new and

more honest way of thinking and talking about the abortion issue is important for reasons beyond the legal scholar's demand for intellectual candor. If the country is ever to find a common moral ground for resolving the abortion issue, the people will have to take back the conversation from the lawyers and the professional advocates, and start talking about sex and murder.

Is abortion murder? It is generally assumed, even by pro-choice advocates, that if the fetus is a person with an individual right to life, then abortion is murder. Justice Blackmun, in his opinion for the Court in *Roe*, had no doubt about the validity of this assumption. "If this suggestion of personhood is established," Blackmun wrote, "the [pro-choice] case collapses, for the fetus' right to life is then guaranteed specifically by the [Fourteenth] Amendment." Yet it is not exactly clear how one gets from the premise that a fetus is a person to the conclusion that abortion is murder. Perhaps the step appears so simple and obvious those on both sides of the debate assume that no explanation is required. The step is neither easy nor obvious, however. And if we subject it to closer moral scrutiny, we shall find that we are not only inclined to reject it, but that treating the unborn child as a person with an individual right to life, far from conceding victory to the pro-life lobby, actually exposes the abortion-is-murder argument as a radical failure of moral reasoning. Indeed, it is the unwillingness of abortion rights advocates to face up to the issue of abortion in the moral terms that pro-lifers have posed it that has substantially contributed to the moral vulnerability of the pro-choice position.

More than twenty years ago, before the Supreme Court decided *Roe v. Wade*, Judith Jarvis Thomson, a philosophy professor at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, offered an analogy to counter the image of woman as Terminator. In an article in *Philosophy and Public Affairs*, Thomson asked the reader to imagine waking up one morning and finding oneself in bed with a famous and unconscious violinist suffering from a fatal kidney ailment.

You discover, to your dismay, that the circulatory system of the unconscious violinist has been connected to your healthy kidneys by means of a tube, a feat accomplished while you slept so that you had in no way consented to the procedure. You had simply been selected by the Society of Music Lovers, because of your blood type and other favorable conditions, to serve as a kind of human dialysis machine. If you were then to demand that you be immediately disconnected from the violinist, the attending physician might reply with an argument that is familiar to participants in the abortion debate: The violinist is a *person*, and since disconnecting his circulatory system from your kidneys would result in his death, it cannot be permitted. Moreover, you cannot plead self-defense since the violinist is unconscious and not personally guilty of any aggression against you. Unplugging him would therefore constitute murder.

A new conversation about abortion, if it is to focus on equal rights for women, must also address the rights of men, who must be afforded rights with respect to some aspects of choice.

Such an argument, Professor Thomson suggested, would strike most readers as ridiculous. Yet it is, in principle, indistinguishable from the abortion-is-murder argument. Whatever the imperfections in Thomson's lucid analogy—some might argue that a woman who voluntarily engages in intercourse is responsible for the life she conceives—the metaphor of pregnant woman as human dialysis machine succeeds in making one point perfectly clear: An abortion is closer to the refusal to allow one's body to be used as a life support system than it is to an ax murder by the local butcher.

Another metaphor that counters the devaluation of women by anti-abortion forces can be found in *Alien*, that ultimate sci-fi horror story of the reproductive cycle. In the film, the offspring of an unwanted pregnancy is portrayed as an intruder into the last frontier of inner space, resembling a penis with teeth bursting out of the chest cavity in a kind of equal-opportunity Caesarean. Has there ever been a more graphic statement of the unspoken facts of fertility? "Many women, good mothers, who become unwillingly pregnant, speak of the fetus they carry as an invader, a tumor, a thing to be removed," Sallie Tisdale wrote in a sobering meditation in *Vogue* on the reproductive experience as an act of invasion as much as love. Whatever moral status may be ascribed to an unborn child—alien invader, innocent human being, or a person with a right to life—no one has the right to use another's body as a life support system without her consent. It is time to recognize the murder case against abortion for what it is: a stupendous vaudeville of moral folly.

But are pro-choice advocates, in their strenuous defense of the right not to sustain unborn life, committing another kind of moral folly? Those of us who oppose legal restrictions on abortion but wish to address the issue as a moral question, as a decision made in the context of a morally lived life, must ask ourselves whether failing to nurture the life of an unborn child simply perpetuates the pervasive ethos of selfishness in our society. How can communities of care and mutual aid treat the refusal of aid to unborn life as a choice worthy of moral respect?

One answer is that the question mistakenly assumes that acting selfishly is always immoral. To deny the ailing violinist the benefit of my kidneys is no doubt a selfish act. It would be a marvelous act of caring, if not saintliness, were I to spend the next nine months keeping the violinist alive by letting him remain hooked up to my body. But should I decide to unplug the violinist, my decision could hardly be characterized as immoral, even though disconnecting him resulted in his death.

This is not to deny the value of nurturing human life. It is merely to say that the debate about the morality of abortion must undergo a change of venue: from the ethical framework that governs the duty to refrain from killing, to the community of values that informs the duty of self-sacrifice. If the kind of self-sacrifice that pro-life ethics would impose on a pregnant woman were enforced in a nondiscriminatory manner by a Uniform Code of Altruism, we would have to construct a barbed-wire fence around the United States and declare it a federal penitentiary.

Defending abortion as a moral choice means understanding a woman's right to terminate a pregnancy not merely as a "negative" freedom from involuntary servitude, but also as an affirmative right to the doctor a pregnant woman needs to make her choice real. The objection to denying public funding for abortion or excluding abortion coverage from national health care is not only that it discriminates against indigent women. The more glaring objection is that it involves an unprecedented perversion of public health policy. No rational legislator would seriously consider denying public funding for the medical treatment of injuries resulting from a failure to use seat belts as a means of promoting highway safety, or denying smokers treatment for lung cancer as a way of discouraging the use of tobacco. Yet Congress and state legislatures, with the approval of the Supreme Court, continue to use public health policy as a means of promoting childbirth over abortion by funding the former but not the latter.

This depraved use of health policy escapes moral scrutiny because the prevailing model of rights theory treats abortion as a "private" decision, or a matter of conscience, like choosing prayer over surgery. The penchant for privatizing reproductive choice has rendered the right to abortion virtually meaningless for women who are poor, or who live in communities where abortion services are simply unavailable. If abortion is to become accessible to all women without regard to economic status or geographic location, the abortion debate must become part of the larger national conversation about the right to guaranteed health care. The argument for abortion coverage as part of a national health plan is unlikely to prevail, however, until a convincing case can be made for abortion as a moral choice. And this will not happen until moral discourse moves from the metaphor of abortion as physician-assisted killing to the idea of abortion as medical emancipation from forced labor.

The overarching issue, as then-Judge Ginsburg noted in a 1984 speech at the University of North Carolina Law School, is not only coercion of a woman's body for a span of nine months. "Also in the balance is a woman's autonomous charge of her full life's course ... her ability to stand in relation to man, society, and the state as an independent, self-sustaining, equal citizen." Addressing the issue of public funding and the Supreme Court's failure to require public financing of abortions for poor women, Judge Ginsburg said, "If the Court had acknowledged a woman's equality aspect ... to the abortion issue, a majority might have seen the public assistance cases as instances in which, borrowing a phrase from Justice Stevens, the sovereign had violated its 'duty to govern impartially.'"

A new conversation about abortion, if it is to focus on equal rights for women, must also address the rights of men. Reframing the right to an abortion in terms that make explicit the issues of sexual pleasure and personal responsibility—as a right to choose whether to assume responsibility for a human life conceived out of sexual desire without the desire for children—makes clear that men too must be afforded rights with respect to some aspects of choice.

The most neglected matter of choice for men—perhaps the only major crisis men go through today without receiving any support—is the dilemma a man faces when his sexual partner decides to continue an unplanned pregnancy to term and he does not wish to become a father. The idea that a man should have the right to refuse to support a child he did not choose to bring into the world has not only been rejected by the courts; it is a notion that is regarded as morally incorrect on both sides of the political aisle. When it

comes to defending voluntary motherhood and the right to an abortion, thoughtful men and women reach for the Bill of Rights and Justice Blackmun's scholarly opinion in *Roe*. When the principle at stake is one of voluntary fatherhood, a man who chooses not to support a child resulting from an unplanned pregnancy which a woman decides to carry to term is indicted as a member of the class of "deadbeat dads" and remanded to that rogue's gallery of sexual stereotypes and cultural prejudice that includes the unborn-baby killer and the murderous mom.

To be sure, as the Supreme Court has noted, "it is the woman who physically bears the child and who is the more directly and immediately affected by the pregnancy." Because men and women are not similarly situated with respect to pregnancy, the Court has correctly concluded that a husband has no right to veto or even receive notice of his wife's decision to abort a pregnancy. When what is at stake is not a woman's choice regarding motherhood, but a man's choice not to become a father, however, control of the woman's body is not at issue.

The considerations that militate against allowing a man power over his partner's decision whether to become a parent, therefore, do not provide a justification for denying a man the power to control his own destiny as a parent and to choose whether he will support the child his partner unilaterally decides to bear. What makes the issue of prenatal choice problematical for men is whether society's strong interest in assuring adequate financial support for dependent children is sufficient to outweigh a man's claim to an equal voice in the decision to become a father.

However defensible the system of child-support laws may be for divorced men who married with the intention of having children, the system is frequently discriminatory and unjust when unmarried men are involved. Although there are substantial numbers of unmarried males—including adolescents—who engage in sex with the intention of impregnating women as a source of male pride, with little or no consideration for the consequences, there are many single males who have sex for pleasure, without procreative intent. Requiring child support from these men is unfair, and for those who can hardly command more than the minimum wage and face going to jail whether working or not, the penalty for sexual liberation is excessively harsh. While there are no perfect answers to the question of how and when during the course of his partner's unplanned pregnancy a man can effectively manifest a choice not to become a parent, the prevailing model of fatherhood gives too much power to women over men's procreation, just as the old model gave too much power to men over women's procreation.

The entire debate about reproductive freedom needs to be recast in terms of duties and mutual responsibilities, a language that is closer to the way ordinary people think about this issue than the strident rhetoric of rights and clashes of rights crafted by lawyers and judges. It is one of the inherent deficiencies of traditional rights theory that it makes reproductive freedom sound like a right of women to murder and men to abandon innocent children rather than freedom from a duty of compulsory parenthood. As Harvard law professor Mary Ann Glendon has suggested in her book, *Rights Talk*, and elsewhere, we need a well-developed public language of responsibility to match our language of rights.

The prevailing model of fatherhood gives too much power to women over men's procreation, just as the old model gave too much power to men over women's procreation.

Indeed, it is far more common and natural today to talk about responsibilities rather than rights in the bedroom. We have gone beyond the idea of a right to contraceptives introduced by the Supreme Court in 1965 and come to think of contraception as more of a duty than a right. What we mean now by a "right" to contraception actually refers to the duty of government to provide access to birth control so that men and women can make responsible decisions about sex.

With respect to the "right" to an abortion, it makes far more sense to ask whether a woman is willing and prepared to assume responsibility for another human being, with all that implies for a lifetime of being a parent, then it does to ask whether a woman has the right to terminate an unwanted pregnancy, as if she were seeking a license for fetal assassination. If there is a "right" to choose, it is the right of access not only to abortion services as part of a comprehensive national health-care plan, but to a broad spectrum of social supports including child care, paid parental leave, family allowances, and other benefits for parents and children that are essential to making the choice about

motherhood—and fatherhood—real. In place of the existing adversarial framework of legal theory that pits the rights of the fetus against the rights of the woman, the rights of women against the rights of men, in isolated spheres of privacy, we need to start a new conversation about our responsibilities to one another and how as a society we can build communities of care and concern capable of sustaining the idea of parenthood—for both men and women—as a voluntary relationship based on bonds of love, not biology.

The debate over abortion will continue, not because its resolution depends upon the answers to some spiritual mystery about when life begins, but because abortion has become the Gettysburg of sexual politics. It is the battlefield for establishing sex as a basic human need and a human right without regard to gender, for redefining the nature of parenthood, and ultimately for rethinking the limits of individual and collective responsibility for nurturing human life. It is easy for Americans to talk about rights. It is harder to talk about responsibilities, and most difficult to talk about them in a way that frees the moral imagination from the prejudices and illusions that affect our thinking about sex and parenthood, about gender and equality, about the giving and taking of human life. □

Laurie Zoloth-Dorfman responds to Paul Savoy:

The reason that the debate about abortion is so bitterly divisive and painfully difficult to resolve is that it touches on the deepest moral issues of our time, which are not, as Paul Savoy would argue, sex and murder, but the meaning of the responsibility of one to another, the problem of whom we will include in the community, and the persistent issues of power. The narrative that surrounds any abortion is not "like" the narrative of any other human gesture. This is why, in part, the question resists the brilliantly clever analogies of philosophy. And this is why the new language of responsibility and meaning that Savoy calls for in his creative but ultimately failed position on abortion must be rooted in the actual journey that women take each time we come to terms with this crisis.

Abortion is a tragic crisis, a failure of the public and the private ability to create a future that is safe enough, loving enough, and generous enough for a child. This language, which the Right was able to articulate and use to create a movement, was experienced with enough passion to ground an entire social agenda. The loss, the grief, and the ambivalence that even staunchly pro-choice women acknowledge, exists because abortion is a death and not a birth. The pro-choice forces can no more easily avoid this facticity than any woman can avoid the facticity of the first weeks of pregnancy, the way the body tumbles headlong in the powerful terrain of gestation. The relief that so many women feel after an abortion is not happiness; it is the deep breath after a call so close that it threatens survival. Thinking about meaning and policymaking will mean beginning with the fragility of this necessity.

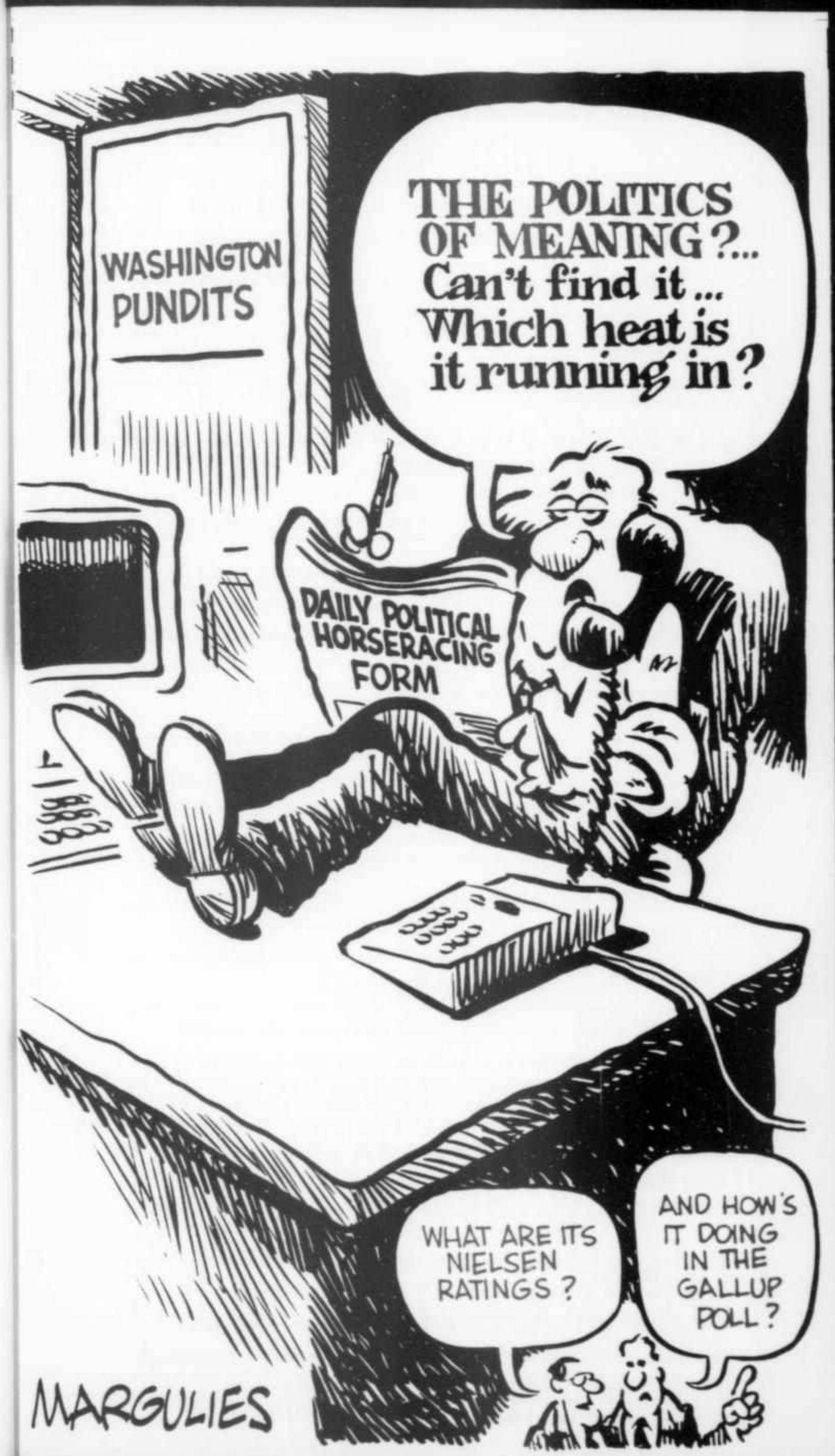
I am pro-choice, since one needs to say, and by this I mean that I marched in the streets in the 1970s to make sure the state would never criminalize a woman or her doctor for any medical intervention in the process of reproduction. I, like most women of my generation, have my own stories to tell of birth and loss. Why tell you this in a simple critique of an article? Because the context for the argument is all. It is the apprehension of the context of women's situation that Savoy most clearly misses. Most women are without real power in the sexual encounter most of the time. In an ideal world of parity, women and men would couple, women would conceive, some babies would be born well and some be born ill, and the biological problem would be how to support enough of them to copulate and conceive again. But all things are not equal. The power of men over sexual encounter, the widely differing value that is given by society to the children of some, the relative ability of men to leave rests on the social knowing, far beyond the biological detail, that a woman must remain to feed and clean and care for the baby. It is not true that there is no other way than abstinence or sterilization or abortion to equalize this social imbalance. There is the relatively simple choice to provide terrific child care and robust maternity/paternity leaves. There is also the choice to research birth control that actually works.

Is abortion selfish?

Judith Jarvis Thompson's article is a classic in the early debate about abortion. It is the best philosophical defense of the pro-choice position. But it is important to distinguish a defensible argument from a moral vision. This is the anti-abortion movement's whole point: "Abortion is wrong," one anti-abortion activist said to me, "not un-understandable."

(Continued on p.94)

Laurie Zoloth-Dorfman is a consulting ethicist for a national HMO and other hospitals and health-care institutions.


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Jews, Money, and Social Responsibility

Lawrence Bush and Jeffrey Dekro

Rabbi Yishmael said:

One who wishes to acquire wisdom should study the way money works, for there is no greater area of Torah-study than this. It is like an everflowing stream...

(Talmud, *Bava Batra* 175b)

The way money works is that everybody has problems with it. Everybody. This has become clear at each of the annual retreats for progressive Jewish funders hosted by The Shefa Fund, a Philadelphia-based public foundation that has, since 1989, been involved in grant-making and organizing money on behalf of Jewish spiritual and political causes. Pain abounds and tears invariably flow at these gatherings, at which people of wealth have an opportunity to interact in a supportive, intimate atmosphere. For those with inherited wealth, especially, money seems often undermining to their ambition and self-esteem, a constant source of political tension, and deeply commingled with their angriest or most mournful family memories. Adding insult to injury are the eat-the-rich prejudices and adore-the-rich objectifications in which most non-wealthy people indulge, creating obstacles to cross-class intimacy.

Why all this emotion about a mere tool of exchange? One answer, offered by Martha Ackelsberg, a professor of political science at Smith College, at The Shefa Fund's first retreat in 1989, is that money is obviously not merely a tool of exchange, but a measurement of power and status used to create rankings in society. These rankings are propped up by two myths: the myth of personal merit (that we "deserve what we have"), and the myth of individualism (that we succeed or fail exclusively on our own—indeed, that success is a process of differentiating ourselves from others). These myths are given substance and reinforcement by the class system's unequal opportunities and privileges, class-bound cultural identities, and cross-class prejudices, all of which ultimately serves, in Ackelsberg's words, to "legitimize vast inequalities of income, wealth and respect," while "generating feelings of isolation, powerlessness and inadequacy."

For The Shefa Fund conferees, such feelings of isolation are compounded by Jewish memory: memory of the classic anti-Semitic stereotypes that link us to greed and ill-begotten affluence, and memory of persecution and displacement, particularly in Europe, against which Jewish wealth (bribery) and professionalism (indispensability) were often our only available, though far from infallible, defenses. For Jews, money has been a tool not merely of status and power but of survival. (" 'Choose life'—this refers to a craft or trade," says the Jerusalem Talmud, quoting the same, very practical-minded Rabbi Yishmael cited at the opening of this essay.) Anxiety therefore usually triumphs over pride as we contemplate our relative economic success in America, for we know, as Jews, that we have good reason to worry about visibly thriving within a system that is marred by inequity.

Estimates, for example, by Steven M. Cohen, a leading demographer of American Jewish life, that one third of American multimillionaires are Jews, as are 40-50 percent of elites in professions such as medicine, law, and the media, are apt to make most Jewish Americans nervous; these data appear to give credence to the rich Jew stereotype. On the other hand, a 1976 *Harvard Business Review* study of 444 top executives of major U.S. corporations that found only 5 percent were Jewish (although we make up a significantly higher percentage of college graduates), may relieve some of our anxiety—while leaving us vaguely alarmed about anti-Semitism in corporate life.

Given money's anxiety-provoking power, why would a Talmudic sage assert that "there is no greater area of Torah-study" than "the way money works"—a statement that itself provokes Jewish fears, because of its potential for feeding anti-Semitic perceptions of Jews and Judaism?

Lawrence Bush and Jeffrey Dekro are authors of Jews, Money and Social Responsibility: Developing a "Torah of Money" for Contemporary Life *(1993, Shefa Fund, Philadelphia). Dekro is the president of The Shefa Fund, a public foundation involved in transformational Jewish political and spiritual activities.*

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We believe that Rabbi Yishmael's assertion about money is profoundly spiritual, and potentially far more empowering than the usual religious preachments that avoid confronting the complexities of wealth and poverty by simply dismissing money as "filthy lucre" and urging various degrees of asceticism. In fact, Judaism does very much concern itself with the way money works, as it concerns itself with the holiness potential of nearly every aspect of daily living. Within Jewish thought, the challenge to human beings is either to actualize this holiness, and thus bring blessings, or to ignore it, and thus cause suffering. Either way — whether we render our economic life into a Torah of Money or into an idolatrous worship of the Almighty Dollar—Rabbi Yishmael is affirming that our choices will have consequences, from which a faithful observer can glean wisdom.

Our extreme sensitivity to anti-Semitism makes Jews particularly guarded about publicly and forthrightly using money as a tool of political influence.

What are the kernels of holiness that can render blessings rather than torments from our economic involvements? Central to the Torah of Money are teachings that reinforce human awareness of interdependence and mutual responsibility—an awareness that directly contradicts the preachments about personal merit and individualism that make the class system so painful. While Jewish covenantal history originates with a handful of individuals (Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, Rebekah, Jacob, Leah, Rachel), "it finds its fulfillment," writes Judith Plaskow in her Jewish feminist theology, *Standing Again at Sinai*, "only at Sinai when the whole congregation answers together, 'All that the Lord has spoken we will do' " (Exodus 19:8). Plaskow sees a link between feminism and Judaism in their shared, central assumption "that personhood is shaped, nourished and sustained in community..."

In the economic sphere, this assumption is underlined by Judaism's emphasis on stewardship, rather than ownership, of wealth. "The Divine origin of wealth," writes Meir Tamari, former chief economist in the Office of the Governor of the Bank of Israel, "is the central principle of Jewish economic philosophy. Since Judaism is a community-oriented rather than an individual-oriented religion, this means that the group at all levels...is thereby made a partner in each individual's wealth."

Reinforcing this sense of stewardship are the Jewish cycles of work/acquisition and rest/restoration: the weekly sabbath, the sabbatical year, and the half-century Jubilee Release that are detailed in Leviticus 25:1-13. Stewardship is also the principle underlying the Jewish tradition of *tzedakah*, obligatory alms-giving, which acknowledges charity in its highest forms to be a process of social investment that redounds to the benefit of the donor, the recipient, and the whole community.

The Jewish holiday, prayer, and study cycles likewise contain sources for the development of a Torah of Money:

- The Sh'ma, for example, the best-known prayer of the Jewish liturgy, with its declaration of the unity of God and the cosmic significance of our deeds, can easily be extrapolated into a treatise on communally aware, environmentally responsible economics.
- The concepts of *beracha* and *kedusha* that before eating and performing other deeds we must consciously affirm a sense of being blessed ("Whoever enjoys the goods of this world without reciting a blessing is like a thief," declares the Talmud)—offers valuable guidance about limiting wasteful consumption.
- The concept of *s'yag l'Torah*, making "a fence for the Torah"—that is, establishing practices that would keep us from violating Torah teachings even accidentally, unwittingly, or under duress—can easily be taken as a basis for a ban on nuclear weaponry and nuclear power, the sheer toxicity and dangers of which threaten the very fabric of Creation.

There is no shortage of building blocks for the Torah of Money, since more than 100 of the 613 commandments of Jewish law deal with economic issues. Yet while Judaism has in modern history been idealized and appropriated as a paradigm by proponents of both capitalism and socialism, few modern Jews have in fact tried to develop a Jewish economic philosophy that is not an apologetic for either system, but a genuine alternative to both. Orthodox communities, as guardians of the Halacha, have generally been too inward-looking and hostile to modern textual interpretation to propose a Torah of Money that might be broadly relevant to our socio-economic lives; the liberal religious Jewish community has generally been unwilling to burden itself with Judaism's obligations and has contented itself with Louis Brandeis's famous claim that "The twentieth-century ideals of America have been the ideals of the Jew for more than twenty centuries"; the secular Jewish community has rejected, and eventually become

ignorant of, Judaic wisdom because it seems dependent upon deity for its authority.

Today, however, the collapse of communism and the increasing human and environmental toll of capitalism has created a pressing need for alternative economic models. Activists are renewing Martin Buber's search for what he called, in 1943, "a genuine third alternative. . .leading beyond individualism and collectivism, for the life decision of future generations." Such crises of our species as mass starvation, AIDS, unrestrained violence, and the degradation of our biosphere—crises that transcend economic systems, political dogmas and national boundaries—are bringing us face-to-face with questions about self-preservation and self-restraint, personal and communal responsibility, moral authority and political power, questions that are at the very core of the Jewish religious tradition. If divine authority offends contemporary sensibilities, the environmental imperatives of Creation carry implications of covenant that are as demanding as any divine commandments. In short, the "market value" of Judaism is at an all-time high in the ongoing enterprise of human liberation.

Of course, Judaism by no means has a patent on designs for a genuine third alternative in economic life. Among many other religious and secular voices for economic justice, there has been in the United States for well over twenty years a socially responsible money movement that has sought to make social change by using marketplace mechanisms that can reform corporate behavior, such as shareholder initiatives, socially screened investments, consumer boycotts, and selective shopping. Many Jews have been among the pioneers of this movement, including:

• Alice Tepper Marlin, founder of the Council on Economic Priorities, whose best-selling *Shopping for a Better World* has brought the notion of socially responsible money activism into nearly a million American households. Tepper Marlin began on this path when she was asked in 1968 to design an investment portfolio for a Boston synagogue seeking to exclude companies manufacturing weapons for use in Vietnam.

• Robert Zevin, manager of the Calvert Social Investment Fund at U.S Trust, whose research helped establish that South Africa-free portfolios—comprising the major part of the $600 billion presently counted as socially screened investments—can be as profitable as the Standard & Poor's 500;

• Ben Cohen and Jerry Greenfield of the Ben & Jerry's Ice Cream Co., who give 9 percent of their profits to socially progressive causes, maintain a 7:1 salary ratio within the company, and have succeeded at making one of out of every 100 Vermonters a shareholder in their company. ("The community allows you to exist," Cohen has written. "People in the community buy your product. They provide the infrastructure; they provide all the resources that you use; they provide everything except the idea.")

• Arnold Hiatt, chief executive officer for twenty-four years of the Stride Rite Corp. (maker of Keds, Sperry, and Stride Rite shoes), a company that gives away 5 percent of its profits. "We look at public service as an investment," he told *Newsweek* on May 4, 1992, after he gave up his CEO status to head the Stride Rite Foundation. "We believe that the well-being of a company cannot be separated from the well-being of the community. If we're not providing the community with access to day care and elder care, if we're not providing proper funding for education, then we're not investing properly in our business."

For these and many other notable Jewish activists within the social responsibility movement, however, political judgments seem rooted more consciously in the American peace, feminist, and civil rights movements of the past three decades than in any religious tradition. Although some individual activists may feel influenced by their Jewish values and tradition, few of them publicly bring to bear Jewish concepts or affirm their Jewish identities in the course of their work. Indeed, despite what we see as an exciting overlap between the goals and ideals of the social responsibility movement and the Torah of Money, the organized Jewish community and its articulated values and interests have been invisible within, or conspicuously absent from, the social responsibility movement, for reasons that we will explore.

For example, while nuclear power has been universally avoided by socially responsible investors, the National Jewish Community Relations Advisory Council (NJCRAC), representing the broadest coalition of national and local Jewish organizations, has consistently endorsed the development of nuclear energy, for fear of the influence of oil-producing (mostly Arab) nations. Only the National Council of Jewish Women and, most recently, the Reform movement, have stood for a moratorium on nuclear development.

Similarly, while the Council on Economic Priorities gives negative citations in its ratings books to companies that are deeply involved in weapons-related work (among them Bayer, Eastman Kodak, General Electric, and Ralston Purina, all with consumer products on the supermarket shelves), Jewish organizations, in contrast, have remained mostly mute about the sharp conventional arms buildup of the Carter-Reagan-Bush years in order to protect the steady flow of military aid to Israel.

Nor have industries with a significant Jewish presence been subjected to the pressures that the organized Jewish community could bring to bear on behalf of social responsibility. The $3-billion toy industry, for example, includes a strong Jewish presence in Mattel, Hasbro, Ideal, and other major companies. This Jewish presence, in combination with the Jewish influence within the film and television industries, lends a particular opportunity to Jewish activists and organizations to act upon concerns about violence-linked toys and entertainment. That opportunity has not been pursued—perhaps, in part, because companies such as Hasbro, the makers of G.I. Joe, have been generous donors to Jewish Federation drives and communal organizations.

The most glaring Jewish absence, however, is in the realm of community development corporations and socially responsible banks, institutions that are *reinvesting* dollars in the name of social justice, rather than merely *divesting* or withholding dollars from socially irresponsible corporations. The National Association of Community Development Loan Funds (NACDLF), for example, has since 1985 gained more than forty member funds with approximately $80 million under management—dollars that have created at least 14,000 affordable housing units and 3,700 jobs, according to NACDLF, in communities that were red-lined and denied credit by mainstream banks. Religious institutions have provided nearly $18 million of this investment capital—with less than $100,000 coming from Jewish institutional sources.

Similarly, when Brooklyn's Community Capital Bank, modelled on the notably successful South Shore Bank of Chicago, needed to raise $6 million in start-up capital, only five Jewishly identified investments were forthcoming—this in the city with the largest Jewish population of any in the world, and despite an outreach effort involving meetings, letters, personal briefings, and solicitations.

Nationwide, approximately 5,000 Jewish family foundations have assets totalling billions of dollars. Many of these foundations were endowed from the fortunes of urban-based businesses, real estate developers, attorneys, etc. These monies should represent an abundant source of potential investment capital for community development activities in cities across the country. Moreover, the Jewish historical experience of exclusion from credit, which was compensated for by more than 500 Jewish credit unions and more than 2,000 fraternal organizations in the 1920s and 1930s, should serve to sensitize Jews to the plight of credit-starved minority communities.

Why has the organized Jewish community shied away from the socially responsible money movement? We believe there are a number of explanations, which we will briefly outline.

First, despite the scope of American Jewish wealth, few Jewish organizations have historically had substantial monies available at the national level for investment. Most operate on cash-flow budgets, and the building of endowment funds is a relatively new development in Jewish organizational life.

Second, the community is highly decentralized. Within each organization, and from one locale to the next, diverse interests compete for the allegiance and resources of individual donors. Few opportunities exist to explore and develop policy, including philanthropic and investment policy, on issues other than those of direct and exclusive Jewish communal concern. These "direct and exclusive" Jewish concerns, moreover, are daunting. They include protection of Jews worldwide from anti-Semitism and physical threat; economic and political support for Israel; Jewish immigration and social welfare needs in the United States; promotion of Jewish education and culture; and maintenance of Jewish institutional networks, all this on the shoulders of fewer than six million people, a large plurality of whom are not even organizationally affiliated with the Jewish community.

Third, for all its vaunted clout, the Jewish community has a cautious and wary mind-set. Agitating loudly for reform in a corporate world that only recently has been cleared of charges of board room anti-Semitism would not be a natural course of action for most Jewish organizations. Our extreme sensitivity to anti-Semitism makes Jews particularly guarded, in fact, about publicly and forthrightly using money as a tool of political influence.

Fourth, Israel's historical alliance with the U.S. military-industrial complex has muted Jewish opposition to the bloated U.S. industry, whereas the social responsibility movement has deep roots in the opposition to that industry that arose during the Vietnam War. Although many Jews and some Jewish organizations (notably the Reform movement) actively opposed that war, there remains a Jewish fear that disinvestment in military-related corporations may threaten Israel's security. Thus, a certain distance persists between the Jewish community and the social responsibility community.

Finally, alienation between Jews and African Americans, fed by harsh Black anti-Semitism, has driven Jews away from many of the community development activities with which the social responsibility movement is directly involved. Jewish migration from cities to the suburbs, and into the

(Continued on p. 92)

Confessions of a Raving, Unconfined Nut

Misadventures in the Counterculture

Paul Krassner

Howard Rasmussen was not his real name. Actually, he was an FBI agent working in their New York office. One day in October 1968, he was reading *Life* magazine. He saw those photos of me playing basketball in my loft laying on the floor of an airport—accompanying a rather complimentary profile. Then he sat down at his typewriter, creatively trying to choose every word so carefully that it would reek of credibility, as he composed the following letter to the editor of *Life* on plain stationery:

> Sirs:
>
> Your recent issue (October 4th), which devoted three pages to the aggrandizement of underground editor (?) Paul Krassner, was too, too much. You must be hard up for material. Am I asking the impossible by requesting that Krassner and his ilk be left in the sewers where they belong? That a national magazine of your fine reputation (till now that is) would waste time and effort on the cuckoo editor of an unimportant, smutty little rag is incomprehensible to me. Gentlemen, you must be aware that *The Realist* is nothing more than blatant obscenity. Your feature editor would do well to read a few back issues of *The Realist.* Try the article in 1963 [sic] following the assassination of President Kennedy which describes disgusting necrophilism on the part of LBJ. To classify Krassner as some sort of "social rebel" is far too cute. He's a nut, a raving, unconfined nut. As for any possible intellectual rewards to be gleaned from *The Realist*—much better prose may be found on lavatory walls. If this article is a portent of things to come in *Life,* count me out, gentlemen, count me out.
>
> Howard Rasmussen
> Brooklyn College
> School of General Studies

Before he could be permitted to mail the letter to *Life,* he was required to send a copy of it to FBI headquarters in Washington, along with this memorandum:

> The 10/4/68 issue of *Life* magazine contained a three page feature on Paul Krassner, editor of *The Realist* and self-styled "hippie." Krassner is carried on the RI of the NYO.
>
> Bureau authority is requested to send the following letter to the editors of *Life* on an anonymous basis. It is noted that the *Life* article was favorable to Krassner.

Howard Rasmussen was merely doing his job, writing that poison pen letter, but is *that* how taxpayers' money was supposed to be spent? I had broken no law. The return memo—approved by J. Edgar Hoover's top two assistants, Kartha DeLoach and William Sullivan—was addressed to Mr. Floyd and Mr. Shackelford at the New York office, and stated:

> Authority is granted to send a letter, signed with a fictitious name, to the editors of *Life* magazine. Furnish the Bureau the results of your action.
>
> NOTE: Krassner is the Editor of *The Realist* and is one of the moving forces behind the Youth International Party, commonly known as the Yippies. Krassner is a spokesman for the New Left. *Life* magazine recently ran an article favorable to him. New York's proposed letter takes issue with the publishing of this article and points out that *The Realist* is obscene and that Krassner is a nut. This letter could, if printed by *Life*, call attention to the unsavory character of Krassner.

Life magazine never published Howard Rasmussen's letter to the editor. However, they did publish *this* letter:

> Regarding your article on that filthy-mouthed, dope-taking, pinko-anarchist, Pope-baiting

---

This is excerpted from Paul Krassner's autobiography, Confessions of a Raving, Unconfined Nut: Misadventures in the Counterculture, *just published by Simon and Schuster. Paul Krassner is publisher of* The Realist *and an award-winning social satirist.*

Yippie-lover: cancel my subscription immediately!
Paul Krassner
The Realist

There were Howard Rasmussens all over the place. One FBI memo tried to smear Tom Hayden with the worst possible label they could invoke—FBI informer. The FBI distributed a caricature depicting Black Panther leader Huey Newton "as a homosexual," and ran a fake "Pick the Fag" contest, referring to Dave McReynolds as "Chief White Fag of the lily-white War Resisters League" and "the usual Queer Cats—like Sweet Dave Dellinger and Fruity Rennie Davis." They always took pains to "Insure mailing material utilized and paper on which leaflet is prepared cannot be traced to the Bureau." In that context, "Bureau authority was received for New York to prepare and mail anonymously a letter regarding [an individual's] sexual liaison with his step-daughter (age 13) to educational authorities in New Jersey" where he was a teacher.

In 1969, the FBI's previous attempt to assassinate my character escalated to a slightly more literal approach. This was not included in my own Co-Intel-Pro (counterintelligence program) files but, rather, discovered elsewhere by Sam Leff. At the Chicago convention, he had erased the line between anthropology and activism. Later, as a Yippie archivist, he investigated a separate FBI project calculated to cause fights between the black and Jewish communities. He found this: Julius Lester had allowed a black teacher to read an anti-Semitic poem on his program over WBAI in order to showcase an artistic expression of the outrage behind that point of view. As a result, the station was picketed. The FBI reprinted the poem on a flyer with the photo of a picketer holding a placard reading "Do Not Use Jews for Scapegoats." This leaflet was "aimed at individuals of Jewish background active in the New Left and who, until recently, gave open sympathy to Lester's revolutionary ideas." Then the FBI produced a WANTED poster featuring a large swastika. In the four square spaces of the swastika were photos of Jerry Rubin, Abbie Hoffman, Mark Rudd (of SDS), and myself. Underneath the swastika was this copy:

LAMPSHADES! LAMPSHADES!
LAMPSHADES! LAMPSHADES!

New York radio station WBAI recently featured programs under the tutelage of black revolutionary Julius Lester of the *Guardian* and Leslie R. Campbell, sometime teacher at JHS 271, from which it appeared that the only solution to Negro problems in America would be the *elimination* of the Jews. May we suggest the following order of elimination? (After all, we've been this way before.)

- All Jews connected with the Establishment.
- All Jews connected with Jews connected with the Establishment.
- All Jews connected with those immediately above.
- All Jews except those in the Movement.
- All Jews in the Movement except those who dye their skins black.
- All Jews. (Look out, Jerry, Abbie, Mark, and Paul!)

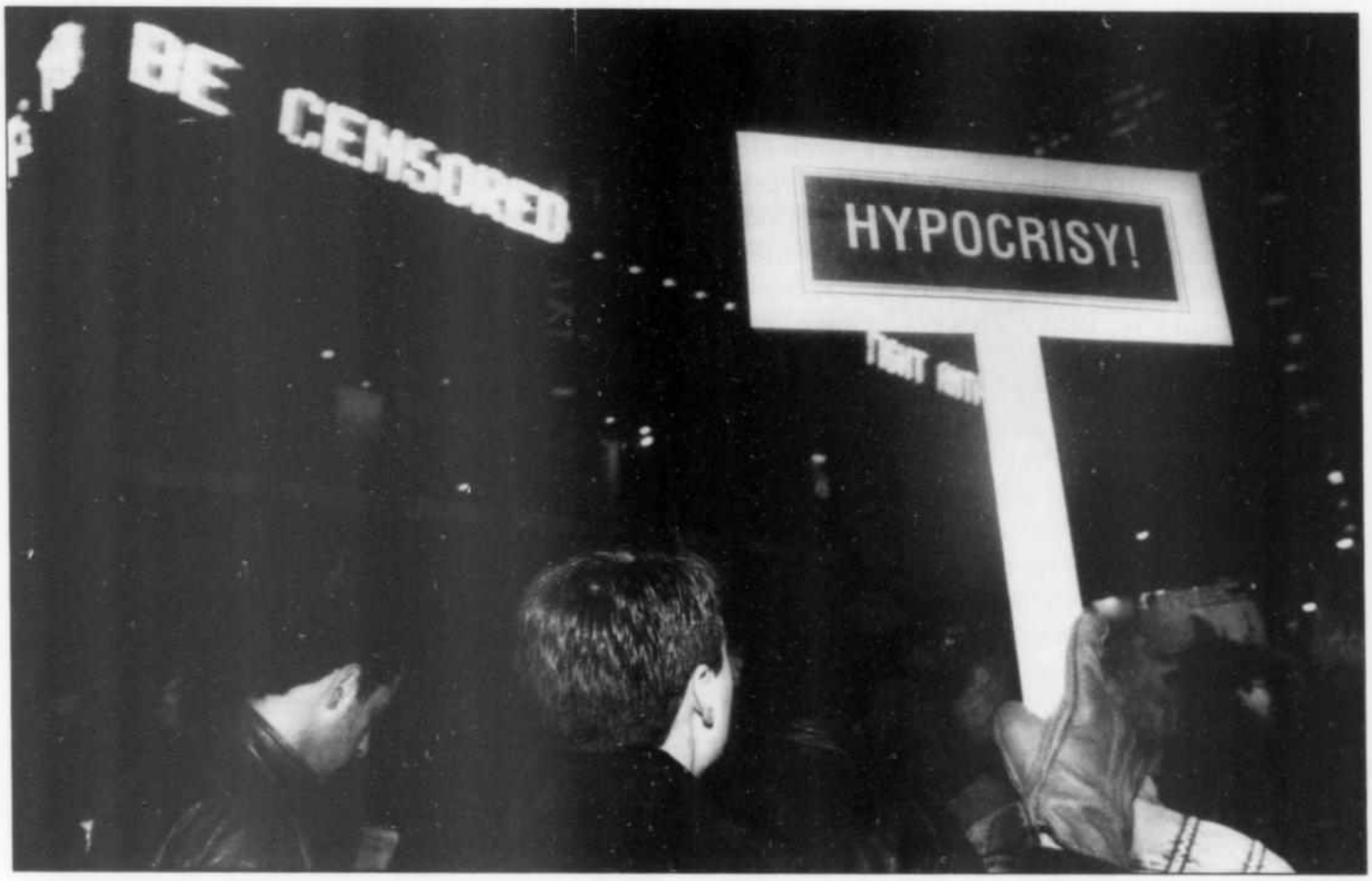
Once again, this flyer was approved by the FBI director's top aides:

> Authority is granted to prepare and distribute on an anonymous basis to selected individuals and organizations in the New Left the leaflet submitted ... Assure that all necessary precautions are taken to protect the Bureau as the source of these leaflets.
>
> NOTE: NY advised that Julius Lester, a revolutionary Negro writer for the *Guardian*, had recently featured one Leslie Campbell, a teacher at a Brooklyn high school, during one of his regular broadcasts over radio station WBAI. During the broadcast, Campbell read a poem which contained anti-Semitic statements. This and other broadcasts by Lester have resulted in organized picketing at WBAI and much comment in the press. NY suggested a leaflet be prepared captioned "Wanted: by Julius Lester" and containing pictures of several New Left leaders who are Jewish. This leaflet would refer to this broadcast and suggests facetiously the elimination of these leaders. Station WBAI is an ultra-liberal organization which has attacked the Bureau, as well as other Government agencies in the past. NY's proposal would lend fire to this controversy surrounding WBAI and also create further ill feeling between the New Left and the black nationalist movement as Lester is a spokesman of this latter group.

And, of course, if some overly militant black had obtained that flyer and "eliminated" one of those "New Left leaders who are Jewish," the FBI's bureaucratic ass would be covered: "We *said* it was a facetious suggestion, didn't we?" □

Cultural Elites, Closet Values

Philip Berroll



"I think [there] is an unavoidable civil war culturally about where this country is going."
- Newt Gingrich

Liberals who thought that the issues of morality and offensiveness in American popular culture had been buried—along with the Republicans who raised them—in the 1992 election had an unpleasant surprise last May when a Senate Judiciary subcommittee held hearings on the issue of violence on television. After tongue-lashing network executives for excessively violent programming, the lawmakers—including such liberals as Howard Metzenbaum and Paul Simon—threatened greater restrictions on the broadcasting business. "If you do nothing," Metzenbaum predicted, "we are going to come down harder on you than you would like ... the Senate giveth, and the Senate can take away." Duly chastened, the top officials of CBS, NBC, ABC, and the Fox Network announced plans for an industry-wide summit in Los Angeles (taking place as we go to press) to further discuss the issue; fall programming schedules which emphasized "family-oriented" programming; and most loudly trumpeted, a formal agreement to include parental advisory messages before and during particularly violent programming, suggesting that what was being broadcast was unsuitable for children.

But such warnings as "the program you are about to see may contain content objectionable to certain viewers ... " already appear at the beginning of many "adult" (i.e. sexually) oriented TV shows, and they are generally regarded as little more than a fig-leaf, face-saving gesture by which broadcasters can demonstrate "responsibility" while avoiding the really tough decisions about what to broadcast. The new advisory messages would appear to have little more effect; furthermore, independent local

Philip Berroll is a New York-based playwright.

stations and cable networks are not even party to the agreement. Meanwhile, the larger questions—what constitutes "offensive" art and entertainment, and whether it should be censored or restricted in any way—remain unanswered.

The "offensiveness issue" has clearly outlasted the change of administrations and the end of the conservative, Republican hegemony. Shortly after his presidential victory, Bill Clinton was quoted in *TV Guide* as being "mortified" by many current films and television programs, calling for the entertainment industry to start "deglamorizing mindless sex and violence." And a recent American Psychological Association report, "Big World, Small Screen," building on the results of earlier studies, concluded that "accumulated research clearly demonstrates a correlation between viewing violence and aggressive behavior—that is, heavy viewers behave more aggressively than light viewers."

In truth, the persistence of this issue in the national consciousness should not surprise anyone. In June of 1992—at the time of then-Vice President Dan Quayle's attack on Murphy Brown and "the cultural elite"—Kenneth L. Woodward wrote in *Newsweek* that "in fixing national attention on the dubious products of the popular media, Quayle has chosen the one aspect of American culture about which everyone has a gripe"; he cited a poll taken by the magazine in which 49 percent of the respondents believed that television entertainment had a negative effect on children, and 80 percent felt that movies contained too much violence and sex. Woodward was one of several commentators who suggested that much as we might want to dismiss the messenger, the message was worth noting: that there really *was* something to the charge that those who produce the popular art of America (be they located in Hollywood, Rockefeller Center, or the lofts and galleries of Soho) are out of touch with the sensibilities of the average citizen and often go out of their way to offend those sensibilities.

The debate over freedom of expression and censorship of material deemed offensive has special significance for American progressives, for whom it represents another fault line with many people who might otherwise share their perspective on economic and other quality-of-life questions. Many Americans continue to believe that liberals do not share or are actively hostile toward their concerns about what comes out of their radios and across their TV and movie screens. In the words of conservative political analyst Kevin Phillips, "...there are (non-economic) aspects of ordinary Americans' frustration ... that liberals and Democrats ignore or sidestep. This is the frequent dishonesty of left-wing populism"; and one such aspect, clearly, is the state of American popular culture. Why is this so? Because with few exceptions, the thought and action of many progressives in these matters has been self-righteously dogmatic and, at the same time, riddled with inconsistencies (which they continually fail to acknowledge). And if we are to have any hope of removing the culture weapon from the Right's political arsenal, this has to change. For a start, we must take a long, hard look at some of our most cherished beliefs in this area.

The basic liberal position on the subject begins with the premise that censorship is bad—dangerous to creativity, imagination, and the free exchange of ideas. Although they will, unless they are First Amendment absolutists, allow for occasional exceptions (e.g., libel laws, or the Supreme Court decision allowing localities to restrict pornography based on "community standards"), liberals otherwise believe that the right to free expression is an absolute good.

But this philosophy took root in the days when there was real censorship in this country being applied to the likes of Lenny Bruce or the Smothers Brothers (or earlier, to literary figures such as James Joyce and Henry Miller). The defenders of free expression perhaps could not have anticipated the sleazy depths of current television programming, the misogyny and violence of the lyrics and personae of certain pop music performers, or the cinematic blood-fests of Stallone and Schwarzenegger—that is, cultural phenomena that might offend *liberals*. Liberals nevertheless are still uncomfortable with the ideas of "offensiveness," or "tastefulness," or "redeeming social value," believing that acknowledging the validity of these concerns might serve the agenda of repressive conservatives. So the good liberal will not admit to being personally offended by anything (even when that is clearly the case), or will insist, "that's not the issue."

But this "censorship is the only question" mentality on the part of most liberals has led to at least three sorts of intellectual dishonesty: First, the labelling as "pro-censorship" of those who raise legitimate objections to various forms of pop culture; second, the refusal even to entertain those objections (such people are dismissed as judgmental, inhibited, "trying to impose their values on others"); and third, the unwillingness to acknowledge their own advocacy of what they would call "regulation" of art and entertainment which they find objectionable. These hypocrisies feed the conservative's caricature of the elitist, double-standard liberal, out of touch with mainstream America.

When "Second Lady" Tipper Gore launched her Parents' Music Resource Center (PMRC) in 1988, she became a villain to the arts community, pilloried in the alternative press as an ally of Jesse Helms, parodied on "Saturday Night Live"(in a sketch in which Satan was a congressional witness). But her actual proposal—the labeling of certain recordings as potentially offensive—was no more restrictive than the movie ratings system or TV's warnings of "adult" content. Even record producer Danny Goldberg, who organized a group to combat the PMRC, has since conceded that Tipper Gore "kept her word" about not favoring actual censorship. (Indeed, after her return to the national spotlight, Mrs. Gore pointedly refused to jump on last year's rap-censorship bandwagon, even though one of the songs on Ice-T's "Body Count" album referred to forcible sex with two of her nieces.)

Yet these realities have gone largely unacknowledged by Tipper Gore's critics, and some have continued to lampoon her. (Recently, Oliver Stone was quoted as quipping, "Is Tipper Gore going to be our cultural commissar?") Her original motivation—her fears as a parent, rather than her threats as a potential censor—are rarely if ever taken into account. The title of her 1988 book, *Raising PG Kids in an X-Rated Society*, may sound hyperbolic, but it expresses her basic concern: How does an involved parent monitor the media stimuli with which her children, whose critical faculties are yet undeveloped, are bombarded every day? As Nicholas Von Hoffman has written: "Corporate mass media [asserts that] parents ... should police the TV, they should make sure the children are preserved from the subversion sold in the movie theaters and at the record store. That's fine in an era where both parents work, isn't it?" (Indeed, this is another reason why parental advisories about TV violence could have only a limited effect: If the parents aren't home to see the advisories, what difference would they make?)

Similar worries were voiced by Terry Rakolta, a Michigan mother who was so incensed at the vulgarity of the Fox sitcom "Married ... with Children" that she attempted to organize a boycott of the show's sponsors. Again, the initial reaction among liberals was to condemn her as a narrow-minded, intolerant prig—there was even a "Murphy Brown" episode featuring a Rakolta caricature.

But while we can argue that it would have been preferable for her to exercise "the censorship of the wrist" by changing channels or turning off her TV, the fact remains that in a capitalist democracy, a boycott is both a legitimate and a very effective form of political expression. (To accuse Rakolta of trying to censor free speech is as unfair as attacking Martin Luther King, Jr. and other civil rights leaders who used the boycott weapon for interfering with "free enterprise.") Those who disagree with such boycotts can either exert counter-pressure on sponsors or networks, or open a dialogue with the boycotters to address their concerns.

How many liberals, I wonder, have actually examined the offending material? "Married ... with Children" features a husband who prefers masturbation to marital sex; his wife, a trampy, lacquer-haired slob; and their weasely son and school-slut daughter, all of whom spend most of each episode insulting or scheming against each other. The show's creators have defended the program as a healthy antidote to the phony harmony of traditional family comedies on TV. I have news for them—"Ozzie and Harriet" has been off the air for a quarter-century; and in any event, when it comes to shows about imperfect families, there is more insight and wit in ten minutes of "Roseanne" or even "The Simpsons" than in a month's worth of "Married ... with Children" (see "TV's Anti-Families," TIKKUN, January/February 1991). The dominant qualities of "Married ... with Children" are its sheer stupidity (when all else fails, throw in a witticism from a talking dog) and hypocrisy (in this supposedly vulgarian household, absolutely no one ever says "fuck" either in the literal sense or as punctuation).

Lest readers respond with "That's not the issue," let me reiterate: My point in both these cases is that while low quality in itself is certainly not an excuse for censorship, people who object to low quality (or, if you will, trash and sleaze) need not be automatically condemned as would-be censors, nor should their objections be rejected out of hand—sometimes, they could be valid. But many liberals will not acknowledge this possibility; they will insist on smearing all those who disagree with the same "totalitarian" brush, as if there is no distinction between a Tipper Gore and a Donald Wildmon.

A similar blinkered mentality—and again, exaggerated accusations of censorship—was evident in the brouhaha during the Bush administration over the choice of grant recipients by the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA). Certainly, it was proper and necessary to resist the Right's campaign to turn the endowment into a political football. But one does not have to be an ally of Jesse Helms and his cohorts to be skeptical about their opponents' arguments.

Many if not all of the NEA's critics repeatedly emphasized that money, not censorship, was the issue; they were not advocating that the work of Robert Mapplethorpe be obliterated or that performers such

as Karen Finley be silenced, only that tax dollars not be used to subsidize their art. The liberal response was first, to point out that virtually all Americans can find something toward which they do not want their taxes to go (if I can pay for nuclear warheads, you can pay for a crucifix immersed in urine), which is true enough, but amounts to a "two wrongs make a right" defense; and second, to insist that artists have a *right* to governmental support—the denial of that support, therefore, would be tantamount to censorship.

The challenge for the Left is to readjust its way of thinking—first, by acknowledging its own "closet values" and dropping the pretense of moral neutrality.

But is the loss of a potential sum of several thousand dollars (before taxes, I presume) really the equivalent of being thrown in jail, having your work burned, or living under an international death sentence? And what about all the artists who draw financial support from teaching, working in a factory, driving a cab—are they somehow less free to express themselves? The critic Eric Bentley, a long-time champion of the avant-garde, put it in perspective: "Many people came forward to say, 'nothing but the merits, purely aesthetic qualities should be considered,' which I didn't think was so. I think it's absolutely valid for anyone involved in any way, such as a senator, to express a moral objection when he considers himself morally offended ... It's not so surprising that the officers of the government wouldn't like what the younger generation is doing and don't want to put money into it. What's all the bother about? Make a living some other way. I don't think we should become dependent on government subsidy."

The liberal defense of Mapplethorpe, in particular, went beyond the insistence that his offensiveness was not the issue; his advocates would not even acknowledge such offensiveness—they tried to characterize his photographs as positively uplifting, praising the "beauty" of his images, or portraying him as a champion of sexual minorities. Even one of his most passionate defenders, Camille Paglia, rejected that idea ("The Beautiful Decadence of Robert Mapplethorpe," TIKKUN, November/December 1991). In her view, Mapplethorpe's work is worth defending for what it is—grim, ugly, corrosive—and to pretend otherwise is ridiculous; she decried "the intrusion of strident liberal politics into the assessment of Mapplethorpe. ... It injures Mapplethorpe to whitewash him, to deny his cunningly perverse motives, to turn him into a gay Norman Rockwell." Apologists for Mapplethorpe who took this tack persuaded no one; their opponents felt patronized, their allies uncomfortable.

But perhaps the clearest demonstration of liberal "bad faith" thinking on censorship is the denial that they, too, have advocated restrictions on media that they have found offensive, or that they could ever conceive of doing so. Yet how else could one characterize the efforts of Peggy Charren and Action for Children's Television? Mrs. Charren's decades-long campaign, pressuring Congress and the Federal Communications Commission to limit the violent content and commercial messages of Saturday-morning cartoons on TV, was deemed admirable by most progressives, myself included. But let's be clear: In the literal sense, what she was advocating was a limitation on the "free speech" of the producers, networks, and sponsors involved—unlike Terry Rakolta, who never suggested that the government clamp down on Fox. (Mrs. Charren, by the way, has dismissed the networks' parental-advisory plan as "a benign solution, but ... inadequate.") So there is some justification to the anti-regulation argument voiced in this case by free-market conservatives (although not, of course, by their allies on the religious Right, who have no great qualms about censorship). One could respond with the Marxist assertion that free speech, in a capitalist society, is an illusion—what is produced by Von Hoffman's "corporate mass media" is bought and paid for by the ruling economic interests. But even if this were true, I would reject it on the grounds that it opens up a Pandora's box of potential counter-censorship. (A leftist regime could muzzle anyone on the grounds of being "a stooge of the ruling class"—as often happened back in the USSR). More to the point, few liberals these days are Marxists. Their failing is that they do not take the free-speech argument seriously in this case simply because this is speech that they do not like. (To take another hypothetical example: What do you think would be the reaction if Fox's "In Living Color," already notorious for its caricatures of Black homosexuals, started going after Jews?)

So is it a contradiction for liberals to acknowledge exceptions to the rule of across-the-board free speech? I don't believe so—not when the exceptions I mentioned earlier already exist. In any case, in the current situation, it is usually not a matter of calling for restrictions, but to recognize the distinction between objecting to popular art forms—even attacking them—

and advocating that they be silenced. We have to remember that the first does not imply the second.

The challenge for the Left, then, is to readjust its way of thinking—first, by acknowledging its own "closet values" and dropping the pretense of moral neutrality. While we have the right, even the duty, to oppose the imposition of a single set of values on American popular culture, that does not mean that the discussion of values in general is a bad thing; and if we believe that some values (tolerance, non-violence, equality, etc.) *are* better than others, we should not be reluctant to see them expressed.

A few possible ways of putting this into practice come to mind. We can organize "counter-NEAs"—non-governmental funding groups for unconventional artists, which would remove them from the realm of political pressure; we can help schools and religious and community groups to develop "How to Talk Back to Your TV" workshops, showing students how to be discriminating, skeptical viewers of all forms of programming—news, entertainment, and commercials; and we can support the establishment of grant programs similar to that of the American Film Institute for independent filmmakers, enabling them to work outside of Hollywood and its mass-appeal bias.

In response to the Marxists, all of this could be a counterweight to the influence of entrenched economic interests in popular culture. In response to the free-marketeers who claim that the media are simply giving people what they want, I would argue that in truth, they are actively shaping their audience's tastes (if you feed someone an exclusive diet of Spam for years, then Spam is what they will come to prefer), and thus it is worthwhile to give that audience some healthy alternatives from which to choose. (And as for those who argue that this is unnecessary because there is already plenty of "diversity" in our culture, let me remind them that not everyone lives in cities with "art house" movie theaters or gets two dozen channels on TV.)

Most of all, we should be unafraid to engage in moral criticism of some of our supposed allies—particularly the Hollywood "creative community," and not just the easily disdainable network and studio bigwigs but also the writers, actors, and directors who do the actual creating. The affinity felt by many progressives toward this group (even when they turn up their noses at its products) is understandable, because its members seem like "our kind of people" in so many ways: They give buckets of money to the "right" causes and candidates, and they are nonjudgmental about individual behavior. But much of this reflects their lifestyle, not their ideology. (According to the *Village Voice*, "Murphy Brown"

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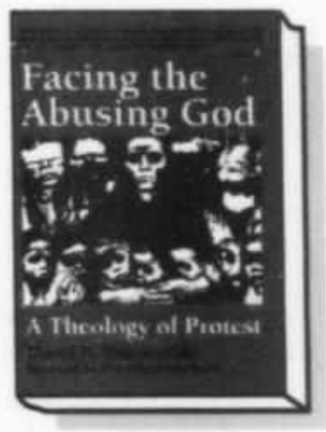
SELECTIONS



A Guest in the House of Israel

Post-Holocaust Church Theology
Clark M. Williamson Paper $19.99

In this thought-provoking book,Williamson challenges churches and theologians to become aware of the inherited ideology of anti-Judaism that has distorted their teaching, even on key matters as Jesus, the Scriptures, the church, and God. "This scholarly and humane work is the best historical, critical, and reconstructive exposition to date of a post-*Shoah* church theology...."
—A. Roy Eckardt,Centre for Postgraduate Hebrew Studies, University of Oxford



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David R. Blumenthal
Foreword by Rita Nakashima Brock **Paper $22.99**

Blumenthal maintains that having faith in a post-Holocaust world means that one must admit that God is often benevolent but is also capable of acts so unjust that they can only be described as abusive. "Few commentators and thinkers have written about what weso poorly call the Holocaust with such passion, erudition, and understanding."—*Elie Wiesel*

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creator Diane English "runs a production company that is nonunion and offers no health care benefits to most of its employees.") And it has almost nothing to do with what they produce—so much of which is driven by the traditional lowest-common-denominator mentality of American showbiz. Thus the emphasis on gratuitous violence, sex without emotional commitment, a disdain for education and the intellect, quick and painless solutions to complex problems, and the "values" (looks, money, celebrity) of *People* and "Entertainment Tonight."

We should have no reluctance about calling our Hollywood "friends" to account for this gap between their professed ideals and their actual creative output. "We all know they're good citizens," says former network boss Grant Tinker, "(but) on the lot, they make creative decisions for the wrong reason(s) ... They are schizophrenics." The actor Ron Silver, for example, has compiled an admirable record of political activism over the years; but I would like to hear him defend *Blue Steel*, in which he played a crazed yuppie who runs around Manhattan shooting people, for no other reason than that he enjoys it, until female cop Jamie Lee Curtis guns him down. It is not enough to call such a film—or *Basic Instinct*, or *Lethal Weapon*—"escapist entertainment," with no connection to the society in which it takes place. As Alan Dershowitz put it last year in an interview, one can favor absolute free speech "and still be appalled at the content of the speech that is freely being presented today."

Finally, when future controversies arise, we can also reject appeals for sanctions from politically correct dogmatists on the Left—while still refusing to be silent in the name of "free expression." I would agree, for instance, with the position of Roger Rosenblatt regarding Bret Ellis's violent, misogynistic novel *American Psycho*. Writing in The *New York Times Book Review* in December 1990, he did not endorse using the boycott weapon (which had been called for by some feminist groups) against Ellis's publishers, but he did ridicule the book and urge readers—pre-publication—not to buy it. This put him at odds with John Irving, who argued in a later *Book Review* that "if you slam a book when it's published, that's called book reviewing, (but) three months in advance ... your intentions are more censorial than critical"—even though Irving himself admitted that "I may identify with Mr. Rosenblatt's literary taste." Rosenblatt responded, "(H)e chooses to interpret my harshness as censorship, while I assume he deems his opinion taste because it is tepidly expressed."

It would appear that Senator Simon and Massachusetts Congressman Joseph Marey, the chief brokers of the television networks' parental-warning agreement, were thinking along those lines—trying to find a happy medium between censorship and the current situation of blood-soaked anarchy. And I think they have succeeded—but only in the most narrowly legalistic sense. The underlying issue has hardly been settled, and perhaps it can never be. Not when the next "hot" young filmmaker, with or without sincere artistic ambitions, will be encouraged to pour on the carnage and vulgarity in his work; when that work will be championed by serious critics, do well at the box office, and eventually be broadcast either on network (with minimal cuts) or cable TV (without any); and when it will then be available to innumerable future audiences through reruns or on cassette. The argument will go on.

Our intellectual dishonesty about censorship feeds conservatives' caricature of the elitist, double-standard liberal, out of touch with mainstream America.

What progressives have to do is to refuse to join the herd mentality of either side—to reject both supporters of censorship as the first and best option and the laissez-faire advocates of art for art's—or money's—sake. Let us raise a loud voice in defense of free expression and equally for all other humanistic values; and when the former is used to negate the latter, let us not be afraid to object.

I realize that for the Phyllis Schlaflys and Donald Wildmons of the world, that will not be enough. Some people will see "perversion" in a picture of two men holding hands, or "blasphemy" in Scorsese's *The Last Temptation of Christ*—just as a sizable number of voters in 1992 apparently believed that Bush and Quayle were doing a fine job. But for everyone else, the efforts I have outlined could be the beginning of a much-needed, and mutually beneficial, outreach effort and perhaps, of a movement to make some positive changes in American mass culture.

If we can disagree with fellow leftists—those feminists who condemned *American Psycho* and others who wish to ban pornography—while acknowledging the very real pain that motivates them, then surely we can do the same, with citizens of other political stripes, in this area. By refusing to caricature or demonize those with whom we disagree, and admitting that we hold no monopoly on truth or tolerance, we can begin

to formulate a more positive response to the offensive art question. If not, then we will face the prospect of our continual alienation from those with whom, otherwise, we would have good reason to make common cause.

Kevin Phillips draws a historical parallel: "(Right-wing) politics … could not have succeeded if liberalism—first in Weimar, then in the United States since the late 1960's—had not in some respects been a politics of avant-garde cabaret values, mockery of patriotism and enthusiastic trespass on bourgeois culture."

I am not suggesting that Dan Quayle, Newt Gingrich, and their friends share the Nazis' sweeping definition of "degenerate art," but their basic attitudes are disturbingly similar. However, if our only response is "if you've got a problem with this, you must be an uptight prude," then we will be adding to their stockpile of political ammunition for decades to come. □

Less Noblesse Oblige, Please
A Response to Philip Berroll

Danny Goldberg

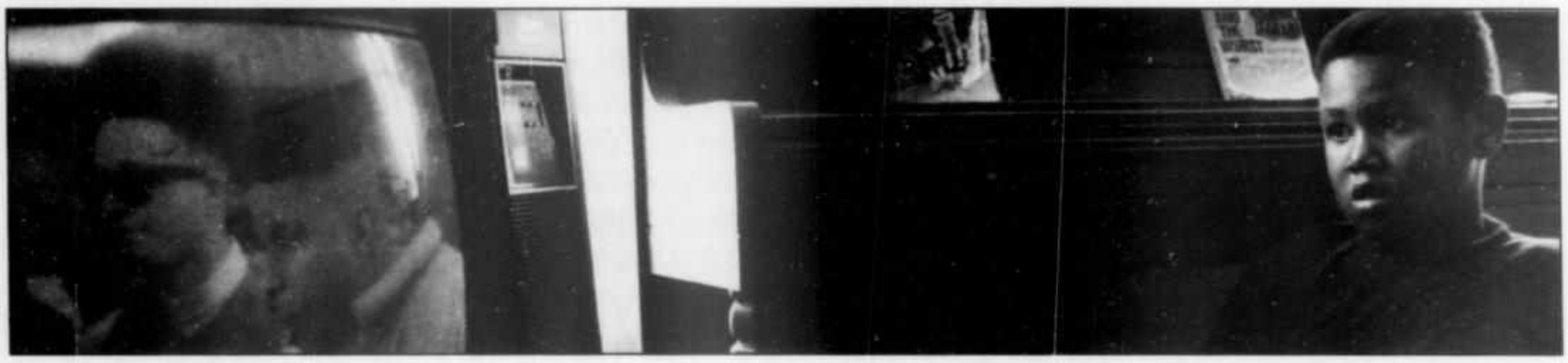
The latest vogue in attacks on the entertainment business is ill conceived both from a moral and from a political perspective. Perhaps the senators who saw fit to moralize to TV executives about violent entertainment are pure and sincere in their motivation. In terms of real life consequences, however, attempts to limit the natural flow of art and entertainment relate to America's moral dilemmas the way that medieval healers helped sick patients. Not only did their use of leeches to suck out "sick blood" fail to cure disease, the well-intentioned process sapped the body of energy and made the patient sicker.

The "evidence" of a causal relationship between violent behavior and exposure to particular forms of entertainment is not even remotely scientific. On the surface, it is easy to assert glibly that violent entertainment makes for violent people. This is of approximately the same level of logic as the widely held belief that white middle-class unemployment was "caused" by the civil rights movement.

Viewers in European countries and Japan are exposed to precisely the same products of Hollywood—Schwarzenegger movies, etc.—as are American audiences. Yet these countries have only a tiny fraction of the violent crime that takes place in the United States. (Far more plausible "causes" of violent crime in modern America are the easy availability of guns and poor education for most of our children.) Furthermore, those countries with the most atrocious levels of violence, for example, Cambodia and the former Yugoslavia, have had repressive governments which banned precisely the kinds of TV programs and films by which Senator Simon and Mr. Berroll seem most offended. In every court case where criminal behavior has been blamed on exposure to certain forms of entertainment, the argument has been discredited. Republican and Democratic judges alike have resoundingly rejected this crackpot notion. Indeed, the conservative ideal of "personal responsibility" for actions is seriously undermined by humoring the idea that "the cassette made me do it."

Unable to demonstrate any connection between social ills and entertainment, critics often challenge showbiz to prove the negative. How can we be sure that there is no effect? Why do corporations spend millions on advertising products if visual images have no behavioral effect? These points dangerously oversimplify the human spirit. TV advertising is either aimed at motivating small purchasing (a new toy) or pushing brand identification of larger purchases (a Lexus instead of a BMW). This aims at a far shallower part of the brain and soul than the place from which people make moral decisions. Besides that, although "positive thinking" is a virtue, we can't pretend that negative ideas and thoughts can be eliminated without causing repression and psychological disorder. Artists throughout the ages, including Shakespeare and the Greek tragedians, have depicted evil and violent

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behavior in order to illuminate the complexity of life.

We can and should be absolute in our definitions and codifications of moral behavior such as the Ten Commandments or the Golden Rule. To be absolutists in our analysis of the causes of immoral behavior is to veer into fanaticism. Rabbis have been arguing about such matters for thousands of years, and not because they were "value neutral."

Of course there's a difference between Shakespeare and *Friday the 13th*. But the difference is more subtle than generally acknowledged. Kenneth Branaugh's rightfully acclaimed version of *Henry V* was littered with just as many dead bodies as any Stallone epic. On one level, the differences are aesthetic. And aesthetic values are real and critics exist to point them out. But it's dangerously arrogant to presume that aesthetic standards equate to moral judgments. Lenny Bruce used to laugh at the hypocrisy of intellectuals who fought for the right of D.H. Lawrence to publish but condemned ordinary pornography. Why, he asked, are the sex lives of the European aristocracy considered art but that of truck drivers considered immoral?

Berroll echoes other cultural critics when he accuses those of us who raise these questions as "good liberal(s) ... who will not admit to being offended by anything," but he's set up a straw man. I am offended by many movies, television shows, and records, and I do not hesitate to criticize them on moral grounds. I do not, however, delude myself that my opinions of entertainment are in the same moral universe as the Ten Commandments. Mr. Berroll dislikes "Married ... With Children" and thinks it is immoral. I think it is funny. Does God really have a better place in heaven for Mr. Berroll because Peg Bundy makes me laugh and makes him frown?

Another fallacy in this debate is the suggestion that the only categories that exist in responding to entertainment are criticism (which I wholeheartedly support) and censorship. It so happens that I do not like either *The Last Temptation of Christ* or *Satanic Verses*, and if I were a critic, I would give them bad reviews and include some moral concerns.

There is no question that pressure groups that pushed video chains not to carry *Last Temptation of Christ* were operating in a legal and constitutional manner. The result, however, of the picketing of theaters and intimidation of video chains is that in the foreseeable future, no Hollywood studio is likely to risk telling a version of the story of Jesus that deviates from a fundamentalist perspective. The Iranian death sentence passed on Rushdie and some of those who helped him goes far beyond a critique of his book. It insures that no publisher or film studio will be interested in releasing an unorthodox rumination on the life of the Prophet Mohammed. Pressure groups, both American and foreign, have succeeded for the time being in eliminating from mass culture creative discussion of the lives of two of the most charismatic spiritual leaders in recorded history. How does this advance consciousness or moral behavior?

There is a name for pressure that results in blocking entertainment from reaching the public—pressure which is not the (censorious) result of legislation or policemen, but which achieves a similar goal. It is blacklisting, and blacklisting is tangibly different from criticism. Criticism seeks to persuade the public not to consume a product. Blacklisting seeks to make sure that they don't have the choice. Fighting communism was morally correct. Destroying the free speech opportunities of artists who were communists, or who were falsely accused of being communists was immoral and destructive, no less so because the repression came from private pressure groups rather than from policemen. Oliver Stone, Martin Scorsese, Bruce Springsteen, Norman Mailer, and countless other creative people whose work includes an exploration of the dark side of human beings could not function if their works were subject to approval by a morals squad, be it liberal or conservative.

These examples are commonly attacked by social neoconservatives as being overstated and irrelevant to the modern entertainment culture of gangsta rap and slasher movies. But it is hard to avoid the perception that most entertainment criticism is based on class or education or is generational rather than being truly

moral in nature. I grew up in the fifties in a TV environment saturated with Westerns—"Have Gun, Will Travel," "The Rifleman," "Roy Rogers," "Gene Autry," "Maverick," "Hoppalong Cassidy," "Wyatt Earp"—in which guns were fired in every episode. Today's television, on average, has less violence than the shows we watched forty years ago. The only difference is that with modern TV, kids learn that gunshots cause people to bleed. I'm not sure this is such a bad thing for them to learn. The sixties cultural rebellion was primarily a rejection of phony, unrealistic depictions of life. It is unhealthy for a society to aspire to a culture which ignores real life. Some people say that too much blood desensitizes people to violence. Others say it makes violence more horrifying. This is a legitimate debate, but one without black or white answers. The fact is that each depiction of violence must be judged in a complex context. Glib categories such as a "V" for violence ignore the vast variety of ways of dealing with the subject and the variety of human responses to it.

I did not personally like Scorsese's film *Goodfellas*, while many of my best friends, equally moral in their philosophy, loved it. This doesn't mean that we are moral relativists who don't give a damn about right and wrong. It means that we don't view opinions of movies as being moral or immoral actions. They're just opinions of movies. Some movies provoke moral discussions. Whether one likes the movie or not, such discussions are good.

My argument with Tipper Gore arose not because I disagreed with her about every album. I never have hesitated to tell people that I personally don't like 2 Live Crew or WASP. I simply never understood what possible criteria could be used to label song lyrics in a way that addressed her concerns. Although I think it's silly, there is no big problem labelling products, be they movies, books, or albums, that have the word "fuck" in them. The problem arises when you go beyond the "seven dirty words." Many rock artists have had anti-drug songs wrongly accused of promoting drug use. Many critics said that Clint Eastwood's Oscar-winning film *Unforgiven* was a powerful statement against the culture of violence and yet all of the criticisms of the elements of other violent entertainment could be made of *Unforgiven*: blood, murder, and brutality. Who is wise enough to label the thousands of variations on the ancient themes of sex, violence, religion, morality? Once again, criticism is good whether it takes place in erudite journals or around the kitchen table. But when simplistic nostrums are imposed on a society instead of allowing a true free marketplace of ideas, the result is not a more moral community but a blander and more mediocre culture.

Frequently, arguments are focused on the exposure of children to "controversial" entertainment. Teenagers are particularly interested in grappling with these issues and relate to them most readily in modern styles and language. My three-year-old daughter, Katie, thinks the funniest thing in the world is to make jokes about "poo-poo" and "pee-pees"; she also loves to pretend to shoot people. Maybe other parents blame Madonna or rap music when their kids talk or act this way. I, on the other hand, am convinced that kids have always been interested in the subjects of sex and death. I know I was.

If liberals are foolish enough to go along with conservative attacks on popular entertainment, they will simply convince average people that all political "philosophies" are elitist and snobbish.

I am not relying on entertainers to teach my kids morals. I know it's my responsibility. Now I can control what they are exposed to. As they get older, I will lose that control, but I hope my values guide them as my parents' values guided me. If many children in America spend no time with their parents, their pain and rudderlessness will not be helped even a little because the TV networks exchange cop shows for sitcoms in order to mollify the guilt of Washington pundits who have been unable to build a consensus to mandate parental leave or other social changes that would actually encourage families to spend more time together.

In the thirties and forties, the movie studios had a production code that was designed to insure moral lessons from films: Bad guys had to die in the end, adultery had to result in disaster. Yet audiences made "villains" played by Jimmy Cagney, Edward G. Robinson, and Humphrey Bogart so legendary that their posters still define America half a century later. No one remembers the names of the "good guys." So what was the moral result of the production codes? There is a natural human fascination with evil, and one of the roles of art and entertainment is to explore good and evil. Entertainment, as the ancient Greeks knew, is not designed simplistically to give literal instruction. It

can provide catharsis, release, and all sorts of nonlinear benefits. Can any of the sanctimonious senators really explain why a blues song makes people feel better, or why a pratfall makes people laugh?

Ostensibly pragmatic political arguments for liberal chastisement of Hollywood are also bogus. One of the most absurd elements in this debate is the posturing of cultural critics like Dan Quayle or Berroll as being "populists" while the people who produce entertainment are by comparison "cultural elitists." This is the exact opposite of the truth. Hollywood entertainment, by definition, is populist. People don't like *Jurassic Park* because of some conspiracy in Hollywood. They like it because they like it. Notwithstanding any contrived poll numbers, about 90 percent of Americans consume some sort of Hollywood entertainment every week, far more than the number who vote, and infinitely more than those who follow the views of political pundits. Attacking Hollywood is simply a convenient way for a socially conservative elite to attack the taste and sensibilities of their fellow citizens. The fault, dear Berroll, is not in the stars but in ourselves.

If liberals are foolish enough to go along with conservative attacks on popular entertainment, they will simply convince average people that all political "philosophies" are elitist and snobbish, and they will be more disengaged from political discourse. There is nothing new about Democrats joining with Republicans in bashing Hollywood in order to appear more moderate to some tantalizing segment of swing voters that appear in focus groups or make their views known in letter campaigns. Such attacks insure headlines and air-time, and they appear to have few political consequences. Like gays and lesbians and African Americans, entertainers are assumed by political consultants to have "nowhere else to go" other than the Democratic Party. But Democrats who think they will touch the elusive "center" by attacking Hollywood will wind up dissipating their base without attracting real cultural conservatives who are far more comfortable with the unequivocal rhetoric of Pat Buchanan and Newt Gingrich than the social science gobbledygook of Paul Simon. The truth is that most Americans of all political stripes like Hollywood, whether they admit it in the polls or not.

TIKKUN has long had a valuable role as a critic of certain outmoded liberal and left ideas and styles and as a voice of compassion for average people in the context of a modern progressive vision. Berroll tries to co-opt TIKKUN's rhetoric to make his points. The reality is that if one has compassion for average people, one must respect their taste in culture and entertainment. If we are disturbed by the violence or darkness of some popular entertainment, we should be asking what in the lives of the fans makes them attracted to it. How can we help heal or understand their pain? Such discussions might not have the short-term, shallow satisfaction of an attack on Hollywood, but the result would be far more morally relevant to prodding our community in the right direction. Free speech is painful because it reveals the pain in people's hearts and lives. But only through confronting this pain do we have a chance of improving things.

If one is to criticize the Left in this area, it should be for a retreat from a commitment to free speech. In Nat Hentoff's brilliant book, *Free Speech For Me But Not For Thee*, he outlines dozens of examples of anti-free speech attitudes on the Left in recent years. Leftists who believe in limiting offensive speech are deluded in the belief that people "like us" will ever get to set the standards of offensiveness. It will not be feminists or gay activists or African studies majors who set the standards—it will be the common denominator of centrist politics, mostly white, mostly male, mostly rich, mostly straight, mostly Christian, mostly conservative.

Finally, Berroll erroneously suggests that liberals are hesitant to attack Hollywood and should be "unafraid to engage in moral criticism" of the entertainment community. This is exactly wrong. The problem is that liberals have been afraid to defend entertainers, perhaps because they are well paid and have the perks of fame. As Berroll notes, self-proclaimed liberals like Senator Metzenbaum and Jesse Jackson are all too happy to bash show business. As someone who regularly defends against attacks from both the far Right from the likes of Oliver North, and from the condescending center from the likes of Leon Wieseltier, I can assure TIKKUN's readers: With the exception of elected officials from Southern California, not a single political liberal has ever come to the defense of Hollywood, whether it was Quayle's attacks on "Murphy Brown," Wildmon's attacks on "Saturday Night Live," The *New York Times* page-one story on President Clinton's mythological "closeness" to Hollywood stars, or the Senate hearings on violent TV.

Like any other group of human beings, celebrities are sometimes foolish and selfish. But the "war" on culture trumpeted by Pat Buchanan and his ilk is an ugly (and often anti-Semitic) political attempt to exploit the pain and confusion of millions of Americans. To be seduced by simple answers to complex problems is naive. Compromising with demagoguery is not progressive, it is not healing—it is cultural politics as usual. □

The ten days starting with Rosh HaShanah and ending with Yom Kippur can be a most powerful experience of change if you experience it within a community that is willing to approach it seriously. During these Days of Awe, meet several times in small groups to review each person's plans for change in the coming year, explore the obstacles to those changes, and support each other to follow through. The groups' members should remain in contact—perhaps once a month for the rest of the year—to provide support in continuing the momentum toward significant personal change. The High Holidays need not be just a series of rituals limited to a finite number of days each fall; they can be an impetus to realizing your personal goals. Toward that end, we present this supplement.

We invite you to use it along with the traditional confessional prayer, "Al Cheyt," recited on Yom Kippur. Members of your community might spend time together before or during the services to discuss this supplement and add to it your own ideas and concerns. The "sins" need not be those of you or your friends—the idea of a collective confessional is that we are inextricably linked and hence must take responsibility for the entire community and our entire people. But the motivation in asking you to get your community involved either in discussing this version of the Al Cheyt, or writing your own, is to assist those who want to ensure that the spiritually powerful experience of the High Holidays does not get lost in a rote recitation of prayers that feel remote, expressing the sensibilities of another time and place.

עַל חֵטְא FOR OUR SINS

On the Jewish High Holy Days we take collective responsibility for our lives and for the activities of the community of which we are a part.

Although we realize that we did not create the world into which we are born, we nevertheless have responsibility for what it is like as long as we participate in it.

While the struggle to change ourselves and our world may be long and painful, it is our struggle. No one else can do it for us. To the extent that we have failed to do all that we could to make ourselves or our community all that we ought to be, we ask God and each other for forgiveness—and we now commit ourselves to acting differently this coming year.

וְעַל כּוּלָּם אֱלוֹהַּ סְלִיחוֹת, סְלַח לָנוּ, מְחַל לָנוּ, כַּפֵּר לָנוּ.

Ve-al kulam, Eloha selichot, selach lanu, mechal lanu, kaper lanu.

For all our sins, may the force that makes forgiveness possible forgive us, pardon us, and make atonement possible.

For the sins we have committed before you and in our communities by being so preoccupied with ourselves that we ignored the larger problems of the world in which we live;

And for the sins we have committed by being so directed toward outward realities that we have ignored our spiritual development;

For the sins of accepting the current distribution of wealth and power as unchangeable;

And for the sins of giving up on social change and focusing exclusively on personal advancement and success;

For the sins of feeling so powerless when we hear about oppression that we finally close our ears;

And for the sins of dulling our outrage at the continuation of poverty, oppression, and violence in this world, most notably this year in Bosnia, Somalia, the Sudan, Iraq, and in our own nation;

For the sins of participating in a racist society and not dedicating more energy to fighting racism;

And for the sins we have committed by allowing our food and our air to be poisoned;

For the sins of not doing enough to save the environment;

And for the sins of not doing enough to challenge sexist institutions and practices;

For the sins of turning our backs on—or participating in—the oppression of gays and lesbians;

And for the sins of passing moral judgments on people infected with HIV;

For the sins of not providing the care and support needed by those with HIV;

And for the sins of not doing enough to alleviate homelessness, poverty, and world hunger;

For the sins of cynicism and passivity about social change;

And for the sins of expecting that our leaders and activists must be perfect or far more together than the rest of us;

For these sins we ask God and each other to give us the strength to forgive ourselves and each other.

For the sins we have committed by not forgiving our parents for the wrongs they committed when we were children;

And for the sins of having too little compassion or too little respect for our parents or for our children;

For the sins of cooperating with self-destructive behavior in others or in ourselves;

And for the sins of not supporting each other as we attempt to change;

For the sins of not seeing the spark of divinity within each person we encounter or within ourselves;

And for the sins of not learning from and giving adequate respect and care to our elders and to our teachers;

For the sins of being jealous and trying to possess and control those whom we love;

And for the sins of being judgmental of others and ourselves;

For the sins of withholding love and support;

And for the sins of doubting our ability to love and to get love from others;

For the sins of fearing commitment to another person or to a cause;

And for the sins of insisting that everything we do have a payoff;

For the sins of not recognizing the beauty within ourselves;

And for the sins of not recognizing the beauty that surrounds us;

For the sins of not allowing ourselves to play;

And for the sins of being manipulative or hurting others to protect our own egos;

וְעַל כּוּלָם אֱלוֹהַּ סְלִיחוֹת, סְלַח לָנוּ, מְחַל לָנוּ, כַּפֵּר לָנוּ.

Ve-al kulam, Eloha selichot, selach lanu, mechal lanu, kaper lanu.

For the sins we have committed by not publicly supporting the Jewish people and Israel when they are being treated or criticized unfairly;

And for the sins we have committed by not publicly criticizing Israel or the Jewish people when they are acting in opposition to the highest principles of the Jewish tradition;

For the sins of not recognizing the humanity and suffering of the Palestinian people and the injustice they face living under the unwanted Occupation;

And for the sins of not recognizing the humanity and pain of the Israeli people, or for blaming the conflict with the Palestinian people entirely on the Jewish people or Israelis or Zionism;

For the sins of allowing conservative or insensitive leaders to speak on behalf of all American Jews;

And for the sins of not supporting those institutions and leaders that have attempted to provide an alternative voice;

For the sins of being critical of Jewish life from a distance rather than from a personal involvement or commitment;

And for the sins of not spending more time engaged in learning the Jewish tradition and studying Jewish history, literature, and holy texts;

For the sins of not giving enough time to building the kind of Jewish community we desire but instead expecting things to happen without contributing to make things happen;

And for the sins of being insensitive or insulting to non-Jews;

For the sins of not having compassion for each other;

And for the sins of not taking care of each other;

For the sins of not sharing responsibility for child-bearing;

And for the sins of self-absorption, allowing us to be insulated from the loneliness and need of people around us;

For the sins of focusing only on our sins and not on our strengths and beauties;

And for the sins of not adequately rejoicing and celebrating the beauty and grandeur of God's creation.

וְעַל כּוּלָם אֱלוֹהַּ סְלִיחוֹת, סְלַח לָנוּ, מְחַל לָנוּ, כַּפֵּר לָנוּ.

Ve-al kulam, Eloha selichot, selach lanu, mechal lanu, kaper lanu.

For all these, Lord of Forgiveness, forgive us, pardon us, grant us atonement.

In some congregations the service stops after this is read, and people divide into small groups of four to five and discuss what particular aspects of this prayer make most sense to them; what they are going to do differently in the coming year; what support they need from others to help make changes in their lives; and what they are going to do to secure that support.

Composed by Michael Lerner, editor, TIKKUN *magazine, for Yom Kippur, 5754; September 1993.*

On Communitarianism and Its Inclusive Agenda

Amitai Etzioni

In his discussion of the communitarian movement, Charles Derber (TIKKUN, July/August 1993) raised several important issues that deserve serious examination. They are best examined against the background Derber himself provides. He is right-on when he states that communitarianism is a politics of meaning, concerned about social attachments and moral values; that by providing a constructive and inclusive response to the core angst of our time, it drains swamps where fascism might otherwise fester.

He is also correct that communitarians, for whom I speak here, are not willing to cede core concepts such as family, community, moral values, and public safety to the Pat Robertsons of the world. Like Betty Friedan (one of the many leading liberals who endorsed the communitarian platform), in her book, *The Second Stage*, we seek new social institutions, new arrangements that are based on an open and consensus-building dialogue rather than on imposed traditional definitions foisted by religious fanatics or anybody else.

We further hold that we must make room for public spaces, be involved in public life, to provide the civic energy that will propel society to change deeply, while sustaining civility rather than turning into a Bosnia or even a Los Angeles. We do not seek to blend the varied and rich American sub-cultures into one homogenized United States; we do call for *a community of communities*, one that will embrace all the various tribes into one overarching just community.

Derber is equally on the mark when he points out that we avoid class politics, have transcended the old Left-Right divisions, and that ours is the new politics of the common ground. But, he asks, whose common ground? Does not following the voice of the majority entail authoritarianism? He gives a telling example. Communitarians favor drug testing of drivers of school buses, cops, pilots, and others who have the lives of others in their hands (as long as they have been notified of this requirement as they take on these jobs). But, he says, a *minority* of Americans are opposed to the "war against drugs." Who should we follow? Leaving aside the narrow question (one can oppose the war against drugs and still favor the indicated tests), the deeper issue stands: How can we follow the tenets of a community and not be subject to majoritarianism?

One answer is Navajo democracy, in which we talk with one another until everybody is aboard. This, however, turns out to be excruciatingly difficult for small groups and simply unattainable for larger ones. Note that Derber never tells us what he would do in the case at hand: follow the minority and ignore the majority (because *he* feels that the minority is "right" about drugs? or because ... ?). I suggest that constitutional democracy, with all its numerous and well-known flaws, has developed two compelling answers to this question. First, it does not allow a local community to violate society-wide, shared values. Thus a local community cannot be allowed to burn books, redline, lynch, etc. The values are largely captured in the Constitution, and other values (e.g., those embedded in the Equal Rights Amendment) must be added to that framework or otherwise shared on the societal level. It may seem attractive for a moment to suggest that it is acceptable for a local community, or minority, to foist its values on the more encompassing society; but that seems appealing only as long as you can rest assured that these will be values of which you approve. Imagine for a moment that the imposing minority is a bunch of Skin Heads, or the followers of David Duke.

The constitutional framework aims at protecting one and all. While its *implementation* is often flawed, the basic concept is sound: *Certain matters are not subject to majorities or minorities but are taboo, period.*

All other matters are divided into two categories: those about which the majority *ought* to have the final say (after a proper free debate) and those on which it ought to have no say at all. The amount of taxes we owe, the side of the road we drive on, and scores of other matters are properly left to the majority. We cannot leave those to individual discretion, and there seems no reason to allow the minority to dictate rules we all must follow. On the other hand, whom we vote for, what we say, write, or join are all up to the individual.

True, the majority may be subject to false consciousness. When that occurs, it is our task to raise the

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consciousness of those involved and change their perspectives. I do not believe, however, that any TIKKUN reader or anybody else will want to live in a society in which one can simply set aside whatever someone declares a "false" majority's view and replace it by the particular ideology of one group or person, for example, Ross Perot. On that sub-set of issues upon which consensus is required—excluding those safeguarded by the Constitution, enshrined as minority or individual rights—the majority must lead, until it is changed. This is not creeping authoritarianism but the essence of constitutional democracy, a flawed system and yet the best there is.

I am particularly concerned about Derber's romanticization of the workers as the social base for a new economy and society. I grew up in Israel, where this view was very widely held. Working with your hands was purifying to your soul (as well as purgative of the indignities of Jewish history). I transferred to a vocational high school, for which I was particularly unqualified, to live up to this ideal. But I learned a few things in the decades that followed. I found that while there are some fine and forward-looking workers, most American (and many Israeli) workers are less progressive than Ronald Reagan. They tend to vote for George Wallace and his ilk; they are full of prejudices of one kind or another, including, of course, a considerable measure of anti-Semitism; and they are only a bit more ready for communitarian economics than the Chamber of Commerce.

I would much rather cast my lot, in searching for the leaders and water carriers of a major societal transformation, with school teachers, social workers, therapists, nurses, even college professors—than with lumberjacks, teamsters, or longshoremen. The notion that if the workers owned an Avis it would readily be a more humane, decent, or communitarian corporation unfortunately has little to support itself.

I do believe that we should follow an inclusive politics, that we should assume that there are potentially good people in all of us, in all social groups. While of course it is true that the socio-economic structure makes it easier for some people than others to follow a communitarian course, nobody should be written off just because they are in the wrong structural position, just as we should not presume that merely because someone has the "correct" societal position, color, or gender, they are going to be more progressive. Ours is a politics of meaning and commitments, not of genes nor of inherited societal statuses.

Derber refers to this inclusive approach at one point as middle-class based, and at another as a top-down or elite approach. This is not the way I see it. There will

be no transformation of American society unless millions of Americans transform their own personal projects and actively participate in the transformation of our shared conditions. One group or another may be more likely to trigger and facilitate the process, but this is of limited meaning if these leaders will not be able to involve people of all social backgrounds throughout America. This is the reason the communitarian movement began, as of mid-1993, to form local chapters and projects rather than merely being a nationwide organization.

Derber is correct that the young communitarian movement has not developed a position concerning what should be done about the troubling multinational corporations. I am, however, unclear as to what his recommended treatment is—I mean not when the Left Messiah will descend upon us (or will she ascend?) but in the foreseeable future, the only one we have to live and work in.

I take strong exception to one point Derber makes. I suggest that the evidence strongly indicates that character formation of infants is deeply affected by their opportunities to bond with their parents. Derber cites one source to refute this view, *Mother-Infant Bonding* by Diane E. Eyer. I cannot do justice to Eyer's book here, but the careful reader will note quickly that it is an irresponsible work, full of sophistry, with no new findings to its name. Moreover, Derber's statement that in other societies children were brought up by extended families, while true, ignores two facts: first, that these extended families exist in those societies in addition to, not instead of, the nuclear family;. second, that for millions of our children this distinction poses a cruel choice—*neither* kind of family is available to them.

We should have the fortitude to face the fact that we made a terrible mistake when we believed, from the 1960s onward, that infants can bond with a changing troop of hired hands at child-care centers, who very often stick around less than a year and are some of the lowest paid and least qualified personnel you can find. We should then ask what can be done to grant equal rights fully to mothers and fathers, but also to ensure equal responsibility to children. We need to enable parents—both parents—to be parents and not follow the comforting but highly damaging notion that when it comes to bringing up infants, anything goes.

If you have any lingering doubt about this matter—don't listen to me or to Derber; listen to the suffering children. Sure the surfeit of TV, obsession with consumer goods, exploitation of sex, and sea of violence in our society diminishes their lives. But, they will tell you, so does the parenting deficit.

Charles Derber responds to Amitai Etzioni:

Amitai Etzioni raises some important issues here about such charged issues as parent-child bonding and communitarian authoritarianism but he does not directly address my central critique: that his communitarian movement, which ignores issues of economic transformation, speaks largely to the needs of the elite professional middle class (PMC). Etzioni appears to confirm that class bias when he says that he would "much rather cast his lot" with professors and therapists than with "lumberjacks, teamsters, or longshoremen." I raise this theme in the spirit of joining with Etzioni in the building of a truly inclusive movement, since I believe that an economic communitarianism—necessarily involving deep changes in our market arrangements—is central to the communitarian project and to mobilizing a mass following.

Etzioni touches on this issue in only a few instances, for example where he argues that most American workers are "less progressive than Ronald Reagan" and "only a bit more ready for communitarian economics than the Chamber of Commerce." I am no romantic about the political culture of the working class (and agree about its conservatism on many cultural issues), but surveys uniformly show that the majority of workers are far more progressive on economic issues than Mr. Reagan, favoring government intervention to protect jobs, regulate flight, and empower stressed-out "temp" and permanent employees. These are core communitarian issues and can be addressed partly by communitarian workplace initiatives, such as worker participation and ownership, which unfortunately Etzioni seems to dismiss in his comment on ESOPs.

I remain genuinely perplexed by Etzioni's failure to confront the central role that the market plays in undermining morality, family, and community. Does he not believe that we need fundamental economic and political change—beyond changes in campaign finances—to address personal and corporate greed, disinvestment from and deterioration of neighborhoods, the explosion of violence in our inner cities, and the "parent deficit" that he so rightly highlights? Does he not see deep conflicts between rich and poor, and between local communities and corporations on which a communitarian movement must ultimately "choose sides"? As a sociologist, does he believe that millions of Americans can "transform their own personal projects" before or without fundamental reforms in our social and economic institutions? I ask these questions not rhetorically but as an invitation to further debate on the basic assumptions of our communitarian movement. □

JEWISH FEMINISM

The Year of the Agunah

Judith Plaskow



Last March 9, on the Fast of Esther, the International Committee for Agunah Rights (ICAR) declared 5753-54 (1993-94) the "year of the *agunah*." (The Hebrew *agunah* literally means "woman in chains." Within the system of Jewish law, *agunot* are women whose marriages have ended, either through separation, or the disappearance or unattested death of the husband, but who are unable to remarry because they do not have a *get*, the religious bill of divorce.) The ICAR declaration was preceded and followed by a flurry of articles on Jewish divorce in both the secular and Jewish press. But because the intensified media attention has not led to any resolution of the terrible predicament of *agunot*, I want to take up the issue here, locating it in the context of women's situation in Judaism.

The existence of *agunot* is a crime against women, a disgrace to the Jewish community, and a violation of human rights that demands immediate remedy. It is also a symptom of the systemic exclusion of women from power and authority in traditional Judaism. It points to the far-reaching work that will have to be done before women can define Jewish practice and values on an equal footing with men.

While in the past, *agunot* were generally women whose husbands had disappeared—during war, or in the course of travel, for example—today the majority are victims of husbands who deliberately withhold a *get*, either for purposes of extortion, or to keep their wives in limbo. The very existence of *agunot* as a category of person within Judaism is an outcome of the fundamental power imbalance in Jewish marriage. According to Jewish law, when a man marries, he formally acquires rights to a woman's sexual function, and when he divorces, he relinquishes those rights so that the woman can marry another. Both these actions are nonreciprocal: a husband can acquire and divorce a wife, but a woman cannot acquire or divorce a husband.

While this basic inequality is the precondition for the existence of *agunot*, women's powerlessness is further magnified by a larger religious system that is also entirely under male control. The typical *agunah* is a right-wing Orthodox woman with a large family and no secular education, whose marriage has simply become too abusive to endure. In cases where a woman's husband refuses her a *get*, she can find herself in a nightmare realm, bargaining away her means of survival and occasionally even custody of her children.

To write and receive a *get*, spouses must appear before a *beit din* (rabbinical court), but the system of *batei din* is completely unregulated, with no procedures for appeal. It is not regarded as a conflict of interest for a rabbi on the *beit din* to have a personal relationship with one of the divorcing parties. Since men are far more likely than women to know the *beit din* system and have a strong personal relationship with a rabbi, women enter the proceedings at a distinct disadvantage. Some courts force a woman appearing for a *get* to sign a document agreeing to litigate all aspects of the divorce, even in cases that have already been decided in civil court.

When one compares civil court decisions with those of *batei din*, the latter are almost always less favorable to women. Civil courts, for example, will generally allow a divorcing woman with children to remain in the family home for some period, but it is the standard practice of rabbinical courts to force a woman to sell

Judith Plaskow is author of Standing Again at Sinai: Judaism from a Feminist Perspective.

her home immediately. In this and other ways, women are forced to give up important rights in order to gain their freedom. The result is that fear of becoming *agunot* keeps many Orthodox women in abusive relationships, enabling men to hold them hostage even before the issue of divorce arises.

In part, the existence of large numbers of *agunot* is the product of a failure of courage on the part of rabbinic authorities to implement the halachic solutions to the problem that a number of prominent Orthodox rabbis have proposed. But the persistent exploitation of the inequities of Jewish divorce law is also a more deliberate attempt to curtail women's power in a time of social change. In a period when even very sheltered women are beginning to see the possibility of taking control of their lives, elements within the Orthodox community are using the fundamental inequity of Jewish law to insure women's powerlessness and to reinforce the status quo. This motive is exemplified in posters that have appeared on trees and telephone poles around Borough Park and Flatbush (neighborhoods with large Orthodox and Hasidic populations in New York City) in response to the efforts of a number of organizations to help *agunot*. "*Agunah*?" they read, "or failure. To support feminism support *agunot*." *Agunot* are thus blamed for the breakdown of their marriages, and defense of their basic rights is equated with the dreaded force of "feminism."

The need to turn to the civil authorities to find a remedy for agunah is an embarrassment to the Orthodox community, constituting an acknowledgement on the part of halachic authorities that they have failed to deal with a burning social and ethical problem.

Moreover, it turns out that you don't have to be Orthodox to use Jewish law against women. As the press has focused greater attention on the issue of *agunah*, more men—including assimilated men who may not previously have known about *gittin* but whose wives happen to want a Jewish divorce—are demanding money in exchange for a *get*. Mary Daly, the Christian feminist theologian, once quipped that "one hundred percent of the bishops who oppose the repeal of anti-abortion laws are men and one hundred percent of the people who have abortions are women." One can offer a similarly irrefutable set of statistics in regard to *agunot*, one hundred percent of whom are women, while one hundred percent of the rabbis who could free them are men. Any situation in which power is so profoundly unbalanced invites the oppression of the powerless and allows the powerful to define the situation in terms that blame the victim.

But why should non-Orthodox Jews care about the issue of *agunah*, which, at least superficially, seems a purely Orthodox problem? I suggest that this issue affects all Jews in three ways.

First, questions of family status can touch the life of any Jew. Given the movement of American Jews across denominational boundaries, and given that in Israel, all matters of marriage and divorce are decided by Halacha, any Jewish woman can find herself unable to remarry because she has not received a *get*, or find that her children are declared *mamzerim* (bastards) because she remarried and had children without a valid *get*. Second, as an ethical issue, the existence of *agunot* should receive the attention of the whole Jewish community. Many individual Jews have devoted their thought and energy to aspects of the oppression of women in the larger society and in other cultures. The existence of *agunot* is Judaism's most profound crime against women and as such deserves to be a Jewish priority. Third, while the non-Orthodox movements have eliminated the problem of *agunot*, they have not systematically addressed the fundamental inequality of Jewish marriage which generates the problem in the first place. Thus the Conservative movement has added a clause to the marriage contract that provides a way to bring a recalcitrant husband before a *beit din*, but it has not sought a way to allow a woman to *give* a *get*. The Reform movement has done away with the need for a *get*, and the Reconstructionists are working on a reciprocal bill of divorce, but neither movement has created the new *ketuba* (marriage contract) and wedding ceremony that would establish Jewish marriage on an equal basis.

What can Jews do to ameliorate the dilemma of *agunot*? Individual women who are not yet married can protect themselves in advance to some extent by insisting on a prenuptial agreement specifying that, in the event of a civil divorce, the couple will submit to the arbitration of a *beit din*. For New York women who are already *agunot*, the state's Amendment to the Domestic Relations Law, passed in August 1992, allows a judge who is determining equitable distribution of

(Continued on p. 86)

Gayness and God
Wrestlings of an Othodox Rabbi

Rabbi Yaakov Levado

I am an Orthodox rabbi and I am gay. For a long while I denied, rejected, railed against this truth. The life story that I had wanted—wife, kids, and a family that modeled Torah and *hesed*—turned out to be an impossible fantasy. I have begun to shape a new life story. This essay is part of that life story, and thus remains unfinished, part of a stream of consciousness rather than a systematic treatise.

It is hard to say how or when I came to know myself as a gay man. In the beginning, it was just an array of bodily sensations; sweaty palms and that excited sort of nervousness you feel around certain people occurred without awareness. The arrival of the hormonal hurricane left me completely dumbfounded. Just when my body should have fulfilled social expectations, it began to transgress them. I had no physical response to girls. But I was physically pulled, eyes and body, toward guys. I remember my head turning sharply once in the locker room for an athletic boy whom I admired. At the time, I must have noticed my body's involuntary movement, but it meant nothing to me. I understood nothing. How could I? I had no idea what it meant to be homosexual. "Faggot" or "homo" were words reserved for the boys hounded for being passive, or unathletic. None of this said anything about sexual attraction. There were no categories for this experience, no way to explain the strange muscle spasms, the warm sensation on my face, or the flutter in my chest. Not until years later, after countless repetitions of such events, did it slowly, terrifyingly, break through to my consciousness.

When other boys were becoming enraptured by girls, I found my rapture in learning Torah. I was thrilled by the sprawling rabbinic arguments, the imaginative plays on words, and the demand for meaning everywhere. *Negiah*, the prohibition to embrace, kiss, or even touch girls until marriage was my saving grace. The premarital sexual restraint of the Halacha was a perfect mask, not only to the world, but to myself.

My years in yeshiva were spectacular, in some measure because they were so intensely fueled by a totally denied sexuality. There were many *bachurim* (students) in the yeshiva whose intense and passionate learning was energized with repressed sexual energy. For me, the environment deflected sexual energy and generated it as well. The male spirit and energy I felt in yeshiva was both nourishing and frustrating. I do not know if I was alone among my companions or not. From those early years, I remember no signs by which I could have clearly read my gayness or anyone else's. I only know that I was plagued with stomach aches almost every morning.

Later, on one desperate occasion, beset with an increased awareness of my attraction to a fellow yeshiva student, I visited a sage, Rav Eliashuv, who lives in one of the most secluded right-wing Orthodox communities in Jerusalem. He was old and in failing health, but still taking visitors who daily waited in an anteroom for hours for the privilege of speaking with him for a few minutes.

Speaking in Hebrew, I told him what, at the time, I felt was the truth. "Master, I am attracted to both men and women. What shall I do?" He responded, "My dear one, then you have twice the power of love. Use it carefully." I was stunned. I sat in silence for a moment, waiting for more. "Is that all?" I asked. He smiled and said, "That is all. There is nothing more to say."

Rav Eliashuv's words calmed me, permitting me to forget temporarily the awful tensions that would eventually overtake me. His trust and support buoyed me above my fears. I thought that as a bisexual I could have a wider and richer emotional life and perhaps even a deeper spiritual life than is common—and still marry and have a family. For a long while I felt a self-acceptance that carried me confidently into rabbinical school. I began rabbinical training with great excitement and a sense of promise. At the center of my motivations were those powerful rabbinic traditions that had bowled me over in my early

"Rabbi Yaakov Levado" is a pseudonym.

adolescence. I wanted more than anything else to learn and to teach Torah in its full depth and breadth. I finished rabbinical school, still dating and carefully avoiding any physical expression and took my first jobs as a rabbi. There were many failed relationships with wonderful women who could not understand why things just didn't work out. Only after knocking my shins countless times into the hard wood of this truth was I able fully to acknowledge that I am gay.

It has taken a number of years to sift through the wreckage of "my life as I wanted it" to discover "my life as it is." It has taken more time to exorcise the self-hatred that feeds on shattered hopes and ugly stereotypes. I am still engaged in that struggle. I have yet to receive the new tablets, the whole ones, that will take their place in the Ark beside the broken ones. Rav Nachman of Bratzlav teaches that there is nothing so whole as a broken heart. It is in his spirit that I continue to try to make sense of my life.

Although much has changed in the past few years as I have accepted my gayness, much remains the same. I am still a rabbi, and I am still deeply committed to God, Torah, and Israel. My religious life had always been directed by the desire to be a servant of the Lord. None of that has changed. The question is an old one, merely posed anew as I strive to integrate being gay into my life. Given that I am gay, what is it that the God of Israel wants of me?

Of course, many will hear this as an illegitimate question—fallacious in thinking that the God of Israel can somehow accept and move beyond my gayness. Leviticus 18:23 instructs: "Do not lie with a male as one lies with a woman, it is an abhorrence." I do not propose to reject this or any text. For the present, I have no plausible halachic method of interpreting this text in a manner that permits homosexual sex.

As a traditionalist, I hesitate to overturn cultural norms in a flurry of revolutionary zeal. I am committed to a slower and more cautious process of change, which must always begin internally. Halacha, as an activity, is not designed to effect social revolution. It is a society-building enterprise that maintains internal balance by reorganizing itself in response to changing social realities. When social conditions shift, we experience the halachic reapplication as the proper commitment to the Torah's original purposes. That shift in social consciousness in regard to homosexuality is a long way off.

If I have any argument, it is not to press for a resolution, but for a deeper understanding of homosexuality. Within the living Halacha are voices in tension, divergent strands in an imaginative legal tradition that are brought to bear on the real lives of Jews. In order to know how to shape a halachic response to any living question, what is most demanded of us is a deep understanding of the Torah and an attentive ear to the people who struggle with the living question. Confronting new questions can often tease out of the tradition a *hiddush*, a new balancing of the voices and values that have always been there. There is no conclusive *psak halacha* (halachic ruling) without the hearing of personal testimonies, and so far gay people have not been asked to testify to their experience.

How can halachists possibly rule responsibly on a matter so complex and so deeply foreign, without a sustained effort at understanding? Whatever the halachic argument will be, we will need to know much more about homosexuality to ensure that people are treated not merely as alien objects of a system but as persons within it. Halachists will need to include in their deliberations the testimony of gay people who wish to remain faithful to the Torah. Unimagined halachic strategies, I believe, will appear under different conditions. We cannot know in advance the outcome of such an investigation. Still, one wonders what the impact might be if Orthodox rabbis had to face the questions posed by traditional Jews, persons they respect and to whom they feel responsible, who are gay.

There is one quasi-halachic issue I must address—that of choice. One of the mitigating factors in halachic discourse is the presence of free will in matters of law. A command is only meaningful in the context of our freedom to obey or disobey. Thus the degree of choice involved in homosexuality is central to the shaping of a halachic response. There is indeed a certain percentage of gay people who claim to exercise some volition in their sexual choices. But for the vast majority of gay people, there is no "choice" in the ordinary sense of the word. Gay feelings are hardwired into our bodies, minds, and hearts. The strangeness and mystery of sexuality is universal. What we share, gay or straight, is the surprising "queerness" of all sexual desire. The experience of heterosexuals may seem less outlandish for its being more common, but all sexual feeling is deeply mysterious, beyond explanation or a simple notion of choice.

The Halacha addresses activities, however, not sexual identities; thus, in halachic Judaism there is no such thing as a gay identity—there are only sexual impulses to control. The tradition describes all sexual desire as *yetzer ha'ra* (evil impulse), rife with chaotic and destructive possibilities. Heterosexual desire is

redeemed and integrated back into the system through a series of prescriptions and prohibitions that channel sexuality and limit its range of expression. Confined within marriage, giving and receiving sexual pleasure, even in non-procreative ways, is raised to the level of *mitzvah*.

Homosexual desire, in contrast, is not seen as redeemable and thus remains an implacable *yetzer ha'ra* that needs to be defeated rather than channeled. In this argument, gay people are treated as people with a dangerous and destructive sexual desire which must be repressed. The spiritual task of a gay person is to overcome the *yetzer ha'ra* which prods one to have erotic relations with members of the same sex.

The unfairness of this argument begins with the recasting of homosexuals as heterosexuals with perverse desires. The Torah is employed to support the idea that there is only one sexuality, heterosexuality. God confirms heterosexual desire, giving heterosexuals the opportunity to enjoy love and companionship. With the impossibility of another sexuality comes the implicit assumption that gay people can "become" straight and marry and indeed should do so.

This has in fact been the ordinary state of affairs for many, if not most, gay men and women throughout history. I know a number of gay (or bisexual) men who have married and sustain relationships with their wives. Of those, most have had an affair at some point which did not end their marriage. Two gay rabbis I know were married and are now divorced, and a third remains happily married, surviving recurrent bouts of depression and emotional exhaustion. What disturbs me most in this sometimes heroic attempt at approximating the traditional ideal is the cost to the heterosexual spouse.

While in my first rabbinical post, I decided to come out to an older rabbi and seek his advice. He counseled me to find a woman and marry. I asked him if I was duty-bound to tell her about my attractions to men and my general sexual disinterest in women. He said no. I was shocked to hear that it was alright to deceive a woman who could very easily be damaged by such a marriage. It made no sense to me.

Surely some heterosexual women might be willing to marry a gay friend who could provide children and be a wonderful father.

There have been rare instances of gay women and men who have worked out marriages where the "disinterest" was mutual. I struggled for a number of years to find such a woman, gay or straight, with

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whom to begin a family. Sometimes I still torment myself to think that this is all possible—when it is not. I still feel ripped apart by these feelings—wanting a woman at the Shabbat table and a man in my bed. If I am judged for some failure, perhaps it will be that I could not choose the Shabbat table over the bed, either for myself, or for the forlorn woman, who, after dinner wants the comfort of a man who wants her back.

I have come to understand
my gayness as akin
to my Jewishness:
It is integral to my sense of self.
I did not chose it, but it is mine.
There is nothing left to do
but to celebrate it.

Having rejected this option, the standard Orthodox position is to require celibacy. Many recent articles and responsa regard gay sex as indistinguishable from adultery, incest, or bestiality. The heterosexual is asked to limit sexuality to the marital bed, to non-relatives, to human beings; the homosexual is asked to live a loveless life. I have lived portions of my adult life as a celibate clergyman.While it can have spiritual potency for a Moses or a Ben Azzai, who abandoned sexual life for God or Torah, it is not a Jewish way to live. Always sleeping alone, in a cold bed, without touch, without the daily physical interplay of lives morning and night—this celibate scenario is life-denying and, for me, has always led to a shrinking of spirit. What sort of Torah, what voice of God would demand celibacy from all gay people? Such a reading of divine intent is nothing short of cruel.

Many gay people now and in the past have been forced to purchase social acceptance and God's love through a denial of affection and comfort, and, worse, a denial of self. Today many simply leave Judaism behind in order to salvage a sense of dignity and to build a life. This understanding of homosexuality leaves no sanctified option for gay people, no possibility of *keddusha* or *keddushin*.

I have come to understand my gayness as akin to my Jewishness: It is integral to my sense of self. I did not choose it, but it is mine. To try to escape it would be self-defeating. There is nothing left to do but celebrate it. Whether in or out of the given halachic rubric, I affirm my desire for a full life, for love, and for sexual expression. Given that I am gay, and cannot be otherwise, and given that I do not believe that God would demand that I remain loveless and celibate, I have chosen to seek a committed love, a man with whom to share my life.

But so little of life is carried on in the bedroom. When I indeed find a partner, what sort of life do we build together? What is it that the God of Israel wants of me in regard to family and community?

Struggling with God and with Torah as a gay person was just the beginning. To be Jewish is to be grounded in the continuity of the Jewish people as a witness—a holy people, a light among the nations—a blessing to all the families of the earth. How does a gay person help to shape the continuity of the Jewish people? The carrying forth of the Jewish people is accomplished by marriage and procreation. It is both a tool of the Abrahamic covenant and its most profound meaning statement.

We are a people on the side of life—new life, more life, fuller life. The creation story invited the rabbis to read God's blessing of "be fruitful and multiply" as a command to have two children, a male and a female. Every Jewish child makes the possibility of the Torah's promise of a perfected world more real, more attainable. Abraham and Sarah transmit this vision by having children. Often the portrayal of blessing includes being surrounded with many children. Childlessness is a punishment and curse in the tradition, barrenness a calamity.

Gay life does not prevent the possibility of producing or raising Jewish children, but it makes those options very complicated. Being gay means that the ordinary relationship between making love and having children is severed. This is a deep challenge to the structure of Judaism, since its very transmission is dependent on both relationship and reproduction. For Jews who feel bound by *mitzvot*, bound by the duty to ensure that life conquers death, the infertility of our loving is at the core of our struggle to understand ourselves in light of the Torah.

This problem, among others, lies at the root of much of the Jewish community's discomfort with gay people. To a people that was nearly destroyed fifty years ago, gay love seems irresponsible. Jews see the work of their lives in light of the shaping of a world for their children. By contrast, gay people appear narcissistic and self-indulgent. Gay people's sexuality is thus a diversion from the tasks of Jewish family and the survival that it symbolizes, and is perceived as marginal to the Jewish community because we are

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shirkers of this most central and sacred of communal tasks.

This challenge also has a moral chord which strikes deep into the problems of gay subculture. The tradition understood parenting as one of the major moral crucibles for human development. No judge could serve without first being a parent for fear that without the experience of parenting one could grasp neither human vulnerability nor responsibility. Being heterosexual carries one down a path that demands years of selfless loving in the rearing of children. While not all straight couples have children, and some gay couples adopt them, the norm is shaped less by choice and more by biology. Yet if gay people do not ordinarily fall into monogamous coupling and childbearing, how do we find our place in the covenant? And what of the moral training that caring for children provides, how do we make up for that? Is there another job to be done that requires our service to God and to the Jewish people? Of all the problems entailed in gay sexuality, this one looms for me, both spiritually and emotionally.

Although there is no obvious biblical resource for this dilemma, there are biblical writers who struggled to address God's will in very new social circumstances. Isaiah was one such writer who bridged the worlds before and after the Exile. Some familiar passages have become charged for me with new meaning. In these verses Isaiah is speaking to his ancient Israelite community and trying to convince them that God's covenantal plan for Israel is larger than they think. The covenant begins with Abraham and Sarah but has become much more than a family affair. He speaks to two obvious outsider groups in chapter 56, the *b'nai ha'nechar*, the foreigners of non-Israelite birth, and the *sarisim*, the eunuchs:

> Let not the foreigner say,
> Who has attached himself to the Lord,
> "The Lord will keep me separate from His people";
> And let not the eunuch say,
> "I am a withered tree."

In the Talmud, a eunuch is not necessarily a castrated male, but a male who is not going to reproduce for various reasons (*Yevamot* 80b). Why does Isaiah turn his attention here to the foreigners and the eunuchs? In the chain of the covenantal family, the foreigner has no past and the eunuch no future. They both seem excluded from the covenantal frame of reference. It is this "exclusion" that the prophet addresses:

For thus said the Lord:
"As for the eunuchs who keep my sabbaths,
Who have chosen what I desire
And hold fast to My covenant—
I will give them, in My House
And within my walls,
A monument and a name
Better than sons or daughters.
I will give them an everlasting name
Which shall not perish.

The prophet comforts the pain of eunuchs with the claim that there are other ways in which to observe, fulfill, and sustain the covenant. There is something more permanent than the continuity of children provides. In God's House, the achievement of each individual soul has account. A name in the Bible is the path toward the essence, the heart of being. It is passed on to progeny. But there is another sort of a name, a name better than the one sons or daughters provide. The covenant is carried forward by those who live it out, in the present. Loyalty to the covenant is measured in God's House in such a way that even if one's name is not passed on through children an eternal name will nonetheless be etched into the walls. Isaiah offers a place to the placeless, an alternative service to the person who cannot be part of the family in other ways:

As for the foreigners
Who attach themselves to the Lord,
to be His servants —
All who keep the sabbath and do not profane it,
And who hold fast to my covenant —
I will bring them to my sacred mount
And let them rejoice in my house of prayer.
Their burnt offerings and sacrifices
Shall be welcome on My altar;
For My House shall be called
A House of prayer for all peoples."
Thus declares the Lord God,
Who gathers the dispersed of Israel:
"I will gather still more to those already gathered."

So inclusive is God's plan for the Israel in the world that any foreigner can join. The notion of conversion, so obvious to us now, was a striking innovation for the generation of Isaiah. Conversion is about rewriting the past. Like adoption, conversion redefines the meaning of parents and family. Birth and lineage are not discarded. The central metaphor for Israel is still family. But Isaiah and later tradition open up another avenue into the covenant. Those with no future are promised a future in the House of the Lord; those with no past are nevertheless included in Israel's destiny.

God can only require the doable. A foreigner cannot choose a different birth, or the eunuch a different procreative possibility. Gay people cannot be asked to be straight, but they can be asked to "hold fast to the covenant." God will work the story out and link the loose ends as long as we hold fast to the covenant.

Holding fast to the covenant demands that I fulfill the *mitzvot* that are in my power to fulfill. I cannot marry and bear children, but there are other ways to build a family. Adoption and surrogacy are options. If these prove infeasible, the tradition considers a teacher similar to a parent in life-giving and thus frames a way that the *mitzvah* of procreation can be symbolically fulfilled.

To the Jewish people,
who were nearly destroyed fifty
years ago, gay love, which severs
lovemaking from procreation,
seems irresponsible.

Holding fast to the covenant demands that I seek a path toward sanctity in gay sexual life. The Torah has much to say about the way people create *kedusha* in their sexual relationships. The values of marriage, monogamy, modesty, and faithfulness which are central to the tradition's view of holiness need to be applied in ways that shape choices and life styles.

Holding fast to the covenant means that being gay does not free one from the fulfillment of *mitzvot*. The complexities generated by a verse in Leviticus need not unravel my commitment to the whole of the Torah. There are myriad Jewish concerns, moral, social, intellectual, and spiritual, that I cannot abandon. Being gay need not overwhelm the rest of Jewish life. Single-issue communities are political rather than religious. Religious communities tend to be comprehensive of the human condition. The richness of Jewish living derives in part from its diversity of attention, its fullness.

For gay Orthodox Jews, this imagination of engagement between ourselves and the tradition is both terribly exciting and depressing. Regretfully, the communities that embrace us, both gay and Jewish, also reject us. The Jewish community wishes that we remain invisible. The gay community is largely

unsympathetic and often hostile to Judaism. There are some in the gay community who portray Judaism as the original cultural source of homophobia. More often, the lack of sympathy toward Jewish observance derives from the singlemindedness of gay activism. Liberation communities rarely have room for competing loyalties.

Gay synagogues have filled a void for many, providing a place of dignity in a Jewish community. This work is part of a movement toward a fuller integration in the larger Jewish community for which most gay Jews long. Gay-friendly synagogues may well point the way, modeling a community of families and singles, young and old, straight and gay that is in spirit much closer to my hopeful future imagination than anything yet.

Gay Jews who wish to be part of an Orthodox community will find very few synagogues in which there is some level of understanding and tolerance. Some gay Jews attend Orthodox services and remain closeted in their communities. It is crucial that Orthodox rabbis express a loving acceptance for known gays in their synagogues even if public legitimation is now impossible. Attacks on homosexuality from the pulpit are particularly painful to those who have remained connected to the traditional synagogue, despite the hardships.

I have hesitated until now to address the central halachic concerns of homosexuality. Real dialogue is necessary before such a process of responsa writing can begin. Still, it appears to many Orthodox Jews that in the case of homosexuality there is little use for dialogue in the face of such a clear biblical prohibition. A number of my colleagues and friends want very much to respond compassionately to gay people, but feel compelled to remain loyal to what they see as the unambiguous word of the Torah. Let me offer the possibility of an intermediate position to demonstrate that real listening may indeed give birth to new halachic strategies.

The Torah very specifically forbids anal intercourse between two men. If the Torah expressly forbids only this one form of sexual fulfillment, could we articulate a possible "halachic" form of gay loving that excludes anal intercourse but permits a loving physical and emotional relationship between two men or two women? After all, heterosexuality is not a free zone of activity for halachically committed Jews. For the sake of holiness, the Torah requires heterosexual couples to refrain from intercourse during menstruation. Why not offer such a sanctified option to gay men who wish to find acceptance in the halachic community?

For many gay men, this will not be a realistic choice. But until it becomes a real possibility, who knows who will agree to commit? Of course, this challenge to gay Jewish men will be sincere only if the halachic community then takes a lead in accepting the couples who commit in this covenantal fashion. (Lesbian women would be accepted without condition, because there is no Torah text that specifically prohibits their relationships.)

I offer this framework knowing that Orthodox Jews will protest that there are rabbinic prohibitions that invalidate it, and that many gay Jews will feel that it too severely limits the essence of gay lovemaking. Let it then simply demonstrate at least the beginnings of a language of discourse between the tradition as it now stands and the lives of gay people.

For the present, in regard to sexual behavior, I personally have chosen to accept a certain risk and violate the Halacha as it is presently articulated, in the hope of a subsequent, more accepting halachic expression. I realize that this is "civil disobedience." It is not the system itself which I challenge but its application to an issue that has particular meaning for me and for those like me. There is always the possibility that I am wrong. Ultimately, the halachic risks that I take are rooted in my personal relationship with God, Who I will face in the end. It is this faith that makes me both confident and suspicious of myself.

I have, admittedly, a rather privatized form of community. I am closeted and have chosen to write this essay in anonymity to preserve what is still most precious to me: the teaching of Torah and caring for my community of Jews. What concerns me most is neither rejection by the Orthodox community, nor the loss of my particular pulpit. Were I to come out, the controversy would collapse my life, my commitments, my identity as a teacher of Torah, into my gayness. Still, the secrecy and the shadowy existence of the closet are morally repugnant and emotionally draining. I cannot remain forever in darkness. I thank God that for the time being, the Torah still sheds ample light.

I have a small circle of friends, gay and straight, men and women with whom I share a sense of community. We are looking for other tradition-centered Jews who can help build a place that embraces both the Torah and gay people. Not a synagogue, not a building, but a place for all the dispersed who are in search of community with Israel and communion with God. In this place, this House of the Lord, now somewhat hypothetical and private, and soon, I pray, to be concrete and public, those of us who have withered in the darkness, or in the light of day have been banished, will discover our names etched upon the walls. □

ROUNDTABLE

A New Sexual Ethics For Judaism?

David Biale is a Jewish historian and author of Eros and the Jews. *Howard Eilberg-Schwartz is assistant professor of religious studies at Stanford and author of* The Savage in Judaism *and most recently the editor of* People of the Body: Jews and Judaism From an Embodied Perspective. *Judith Plaskow is professor of religious studies at Manhattan College. Reuven Kimelman is professor of Jewish studies at Brandeis University. Elliot Dorff, professor of philosophy and provost of the University of Judaism in Los Angeles, played a leading role in creating the Commission on Human Sexuality of the Conservative movement. Daniel Landes is rabbi of B'nai David-Judea Congregation and a professor of Jewish ethics at Yeshiva of Los Angeles. Rebecca Alpert is a rabbi and an assistant professor of women's studies at Temple University. Ellen Umansky, adjunct associate professor of modern Jewish history at Hebrew Union College/Jewish Institute of Religion, is co-editor of* Four Centuries of Jewish Women's Spirituality. *Tamar Frankiel, author of* The Voice of Sarah: Feminine Spirituality in Traditional Judaism, *lectures at the University of Judaism and Claremont School of Theology.*

TIKKUN: Since the sexual revolution there has been a dramatic change in Jewish sexual behavior or at least a change in the degree to which younger Jews now openly engage in and publicly espouse sexual behavior that would have been frowned upon by the Jewish community and Jewish religious practice in the past. Some Jewish theorists advocate a new approach to sexuality that emphasizes the positive values of erotic connections and deemphasizes some of the formal limits put on sexual expression in the past. David Biale has argued that at many points in Jewish history the Jewish people had a deep ambivalence about sexuality, with some tendencies emphasizing its positive and even blessed dimensions, others emphasizing the need for control and danger. Jewish feminists have questioned whether Jewish sexual ethics have been shaped to fit the needs of patriarchal authority rather than to recognize the sanctity of all human beings. In your opinion, does Judaism or the Jewish people have or need a new sexual ethics and a new approach to sexuality for the contemporary period and what are the dimensions of that approach?

David Biale: Contemporary Jews need to decouple sexuality from the rabbinic concept of "*yetzer ha-ra*" (the evil inclination). Regardless of the rabbis' original intention, two thousand years of associating sexuality with evil, and thus with aggression, have created problematic overtones. We need to think of sexuality as separate from aggression and the drive to power and to build a sexual ethic that recognizes that sexuality is not the same as aggression. In my view there is no one Judaism so there can't be one Jewish sexual ethic—there needs to be in all forms of Judaism an openness to pluralism and a variety of forms of expression to meet individual needs.

Daniel Landes: The principle guiding sexuality from a Torah perspective is "*Kedoshim tih'yu*" (You shall be sanctified), which is interpreted in the tradition in many ways. One is, "You should separate yourself from all behaviors that lead away from your ultimate Source," or, in a more positive way, this mandates a linkage of all sexual acts to its ultimate Transcendent Source. Sexuality in the tradition is linked, therefore, to blessing and to commandment; and in its abuse to the causes of sin. In this period in which contemporary culture is leading the Jewish community into the anarchic possibilities of a self-defining sexuality, "*kedoshim tih'yu*" becomes ever more important. *Yetzer ha'ra* is the concept of no boundaries, no limits—and this can be particularly played out in the realm of sexuality. Torah comes to provide a limit and to redirect sexuality to what should be its ultimate intent, namely a linkage to God.

Ellen Umansky: Though different in content, the Jewish sexual ethic as understood and articulated in both traditional and liberal Jewish movements has tended to idealize marriage and in so doing has led us to minimize or ignore domestic violence and abuse which have always

been part of Jewish family life (though I hope not part of the majority of Jewish families). This idealization has also led us to ignore the fact that sex within marriage is not always ethical. By idealizing marriage, we have not only closed our eyes to very real problems that have long existed within our communities but also have minimized, if not negated, the familial experiences of many Jews.

Elliot Dorff: The purpose of sexuality within our tradition is to try to make us holy, and this translates into two principles: 1. Be fruitful and multiply, and 2. You may not diminish her conjugal rights. I.e., the two Jewish goals for sexuality are procreation and the mutual bonding that comes through the pleasure of sexual union.

Though our tradition emphasizes sexuality inside marriage, it's important for us also to teach that Jewish ethics have important principles that would apply to sex outside a marital context: 1. Truth in advertising—if you're going to have sex outside of marriage, try to make clear to each other what this is. Is this a one-night stand, or a testing before marriage, or what exactly? 2. Non-abuse; 3. Modesty and privacy. 4. Safety. We should develop a sexual ethic that stresses that the ideal is sex within marriage, but if people fall short of the ideal that doesn't mean that the whole package disintegrates.

Judith Plaskow: Many Jews who take Judaism seriously in other areas of their life leave it completely aside when formulating their own sexual ethics. As a community we need to look at this very seriously, and need to ask the question, "Are people finding holiness in new places?" We shouldn't abandon the concept of holiness but rather redefine it to see where people are finding holiness within their lives. Holiness is found in relationships that are just and mutual.

We lack women's perspectives on sexuality. While the tradition recognized that women have sexual needs, men have defined them. Women have not been part of the process of defining what their sexual needs are.

Tamar Frankiel: The *yetzer ha'ra* is not the sexual drive, but the expansion of ego beyond acceptable bounds. We need the kinds of boundaries Judaism supplies for dealing with our ego and our desire for power—and this is facilitated by keeping sexuality within the bounds of monogamous marriage as sanctified by our tradition.

Howard Eilberg-Schwartz: The issue isn't just sex but a need for an expanded conception of sensuality in which there is no discontinuity between sex and religion. Sensuality, related to eroticism, ought to be connected to prayer and spirituality. Instead of thinking of sex as dammed up energy threatening to break loose, we need to think of sensuality and eroticism as pervading all kinds of relationships, sex being one form of it.

Reuven Kimelman: Many people talk about sexuality today as though it were the integrative aspect of their life that is central to their identity. The error here is that sex does not occur within the person but in the in-between, and sex should not be primarily a means of self-development but the mechanism for linkage between people. Genesis I tends to suggest that sexuality is about procreation, but in Genesis II the emphasis is on connection with an other: The creation of Eve is not for procreation, but because of the overwhelming loneliness of the single self. Sexuality is a training in commitment and giving love. The ability to give love is dependent on having had the experience of receiving unconditional love, and it is within the context of the family that one has the best chance of having that experience.

Contemporary discussions of sexuality are heavily influenced by women whose discussion of sexuality is appropriate to the feminine experience, and hence emphasizes mutuality but seems not to be cognizant of the dimension of aggression that is often part of the male experience. It is in the area of sexuality that men and women are most different, so it is a mistake to imagine that the female experience of sexuality can serve as the single dominant guide to what is or could be in sexuality—one must also incorporate the male experience. The phrase *yetzer ha'ra* is appropriate when discussing male sexuality, because in the context of male sexuality sex and aggression often do go together.

Rebecca Alpert: Ambivalence about sexuality, as David Biale has said, is the norm of our tradition. I think there is a link between sexuality and aggression that is suggested in the concept of *yetzer ha'ra*. What I find problematic about this is defining aggression as an exclusively male phenomenon. Women, too, are capable of aggressive sexuality, and aggression is neither exclusively bad nor good in the context of the sexual encounter.

What we may want to think about unlinking is the relationship between sexuality and procreation. Our tradition acknowledges the legitimacy of having sex without procreation, and in the contemporary world we now have procreation without sex. This will have important consequences for reconceptualizing or values around sexuality.

Kimelman: Andrea Dworkin suggested that all heterosexual intercourse is rape. From the male point of view, sexuality, aggression, and love are all linked. When men are not trained to channel their sexual aggression, young men in this society frequently use their ability to express

aggression against women through sexuality as a core method of bonding together in gangs. One of the functions of sexual constraints in our tradition is to get the man to become the protector of women against whom he might otherwise be committing aggression.

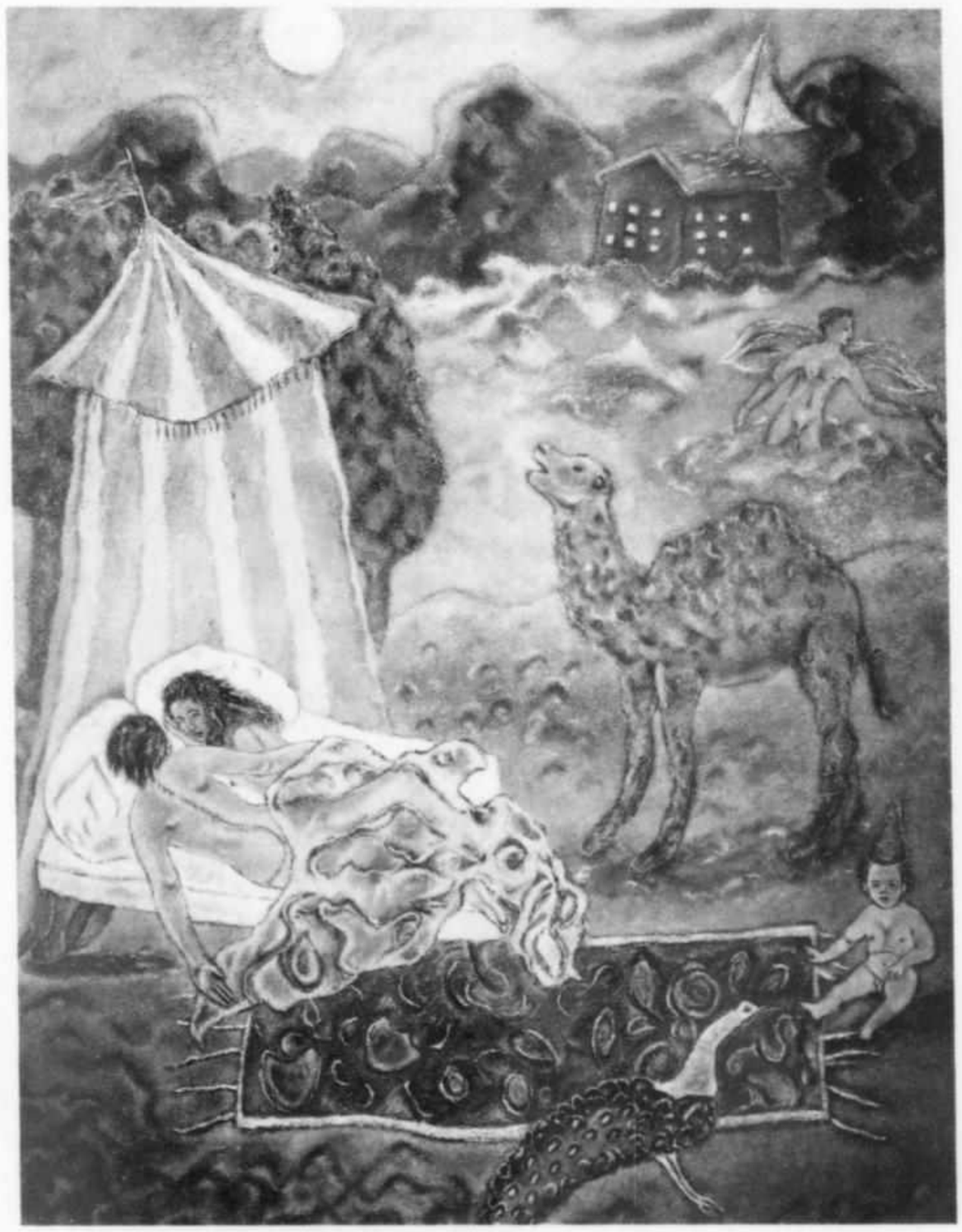
Dorff: Identifying heterosexual intercourse with rape is crazy. There is a wide range of relationships. It may be true that there is more violence in some families than we've been willing to acknowledge, but it is also true that on the other end of the spectrum there are many heterosexual relationships in which sex is an expression of love and caring and delight in each other. For the vast majority of both heterosexual and homosexual couples, sexuality is not a mechanism for dominance.

Biale: Kimelman seems to be suggesting that a patriarchal society is the best defense against male aggressiveness toward women. I think, to the contrary, that there is a link between patriarchal relationships and an aggressive society.

We should separate the desire for power and the desire for sex which is often part of the desire to express love. These two often get confused with one another. The drive for power can, of course, masquerade as sexual desire, but they are not essentially the same. Let's remember that rape is a crime of violence, not a crime of sexual desire. If we are not essentialists, if we believe that culture can affect how people behave, we can construct a sexuality that is less determined by violence and power.

Eilberg-Schwartz: The issue is: How are we going to change the relationships between men and women in general, and what kind of impact will that have on sexual relationships? Kimelman talks as if there is one male perspective, whereas in fact there are multiple male and female perspectives on sexuality. In the current period we are seeing a challenge to identifying masculinity with aggression or power. Part of the reason that homosexual relationships are so controversial today is because they are challenging established notions of male and female roles. Gay relationships are frowned upon in part because they are perceived as placing men in what has been considered the feminized position of being passive or powerless. But what we are seeing today is that an individual can move in or out of a position of power, that power can be shared; men and women can trade positions of power.

Umansky: The goal of harnessing male aggression seems to me to be a very different goal from that of achieving holiness. Holiness, I believe, is attained in a loving, mutual relationship. Certainly, that can be achieved in marriage, and in my own case it has been, but marriage doesn't guarantee that it will be, and it's certainly possible to achieve such relationships outside of marriage. I'm troubled by saying that heterosexual monogamous marriage in and of itself is the ideal. We might also distinguish between non-marital sex for teenagers and non-marital sex for adults.



TIKKUN: If holiness means "respectful mutuality," what exactly is added by using the word "holy?"

Plaskow: Holiness adds a dimension far greater than just the two individuals involved in the relationship. Relationships that are just and mutual are the most likely places from which one will experience a connection not just to the other but to the source of all existence—but that is another dimension to the relationship that is not exhausted by the words "justice" and "mutuality."

Landes: I protest the decoupling of sexuality from reproduction ("Be fruitful and multiply"). Procreation is the essential blessing. This essential celebration of holiness replicates God's creation through our own biological creation. Every sexual act is considered to have this latent possibility. A post-menopausal woman still has the same blessings of fecundity at the wedding ceremony as does a virgin, linking them to the creative and procreative force in the universe, which is God.

Kimelman: We have to look beyond surface realities and notice how often sexuality and power get intertwined in human activity. One of the faults of the liberal perspective is its incapacity or unwillingness to recognize the human capacity for evil. One of the most important effects of monogamous marriage has been the domestication of the male. My desire for community is triggered and sustained by my concern for my family. My concern for sustaining the future of the community comes through my deep concern for the future of my children.

I have to accept my children, regardless of how talented or untalented they are, because they are mine. It is this unconditional nature of the relationship that makes it holy, in that it imitates the special way that God relates to Israel. Being loved unconditionally allows me to love unconditionally. The motif of monogamy and covenantal relationship informs both marriage and our relationship to God.

Eilberg-Schwartz: The tradition is more ambivalent about procreation than we have been taught. There's an enormous tension between being made in the image of God and being obliged to procreate—because this god is a sexless male god who doesn't procreate, who can only have metaphorical sexuality with a feminized Israel. If you really want to be in the image of a sexless father god, then it's hard to believe that you really have to procreate. Even the Mishnah in *Yevamot* that says you have to have two children may be a minimalization of how much you have to procreate—the text doesn't say "have as many children as you can." So though it seems to be defining a minimum, it might be read also to say that if you have two children, just like God had Adam and Eve, then that's enough. If the rabbis had wanted to endorse unlimited procreation, they would have appealed to the image of Abraham who had unlimited children, rather than to the image of God who only had two. Procreation in the biblical period is connected to lineage, but by the time we get to the rabbis they are creating spiritual children (your real son is somebody whom you've taught) so lineage becomes less important.

Dorff: In our own times, after the Holocaust, with a reproduction rate of 1.6 per family (so we are cutting ourselves off as a people), even if the tradition was ambivalent in the past, we now have to affirm the value of procreation. You don't have a Jew just by being born Jewish, you need a lot of education, but we do have to have Jewish children with whom to do the educating.

Alpert: Decoupling sexuality and procreation doesn't mean devaluing procreation.

Frankiel: The exclusivity, and a sense of chosenness and commitment, creates a holy space. Mutuality and justice have to derive from holiness, not the other way around. And the relationship to God should come first—first we are related to God in holiness, learn to love God, and then reflect that in our human lives. If we go the other way, the play of ego gets involved in a very big way. If we are trying to look into our pleasurable experiences to find holiness we are going about it in a backward direction; we may only be seeking our own pleasure and trying to rationalize and sanctify it. Instead, we should be asking, "What is really the thing that God wants, what can we be doing to raise ourselves to the highest level in this situation?" Start from that and then work out the relationship in the framework of our commitment to God.

Biale: I don't think that legislation or preaching gets people to have children. In the first century, the Emperor Augustus passed his laws requiring people to get married and have children—and it didn't work. I feel very uncomfortable having Judaism preaching a particular value on this score.

On *kedusha*, holiness, I want to take a radical secularist position. From the Middle Ages onward, the notion of marital relationship expressing sanctity or holiness frequently meant denigration of the human body or the physical world. This reached its culmination in the Hasidic world where the Hasid was taught to overcome the physical sensation of intercourse entirely. This is a strand of thought which I find highly problematic. But the way the rabbis of the

Talmud use the word *kedusha* may point in a more productive direction. The rabbis use the term "*kedushin*" (from *kedusha*) to refer to an exclusive relationship between a man and a woman in a secular, contractual—non-sacramental—sense. In this way, they secularized marriage and, thus, created a secular space for sexuality. Although their concept of *yetzer ha-ra* made sexual desire problematic, the rabbinic view made it possible to consider the physical body as thoroughly positive.

Plaskow: It's ironic that the importance of procreation in the Jewish world is often coupled with a rejection of homosexuality and the marginalization of gay and lesbian Jews who want to become part of the Jewish community and who are, despite their homosexuality, having children and raising families. And then this is argued for in the name of preserving the community in the face of feeling that there aren't enough of us.

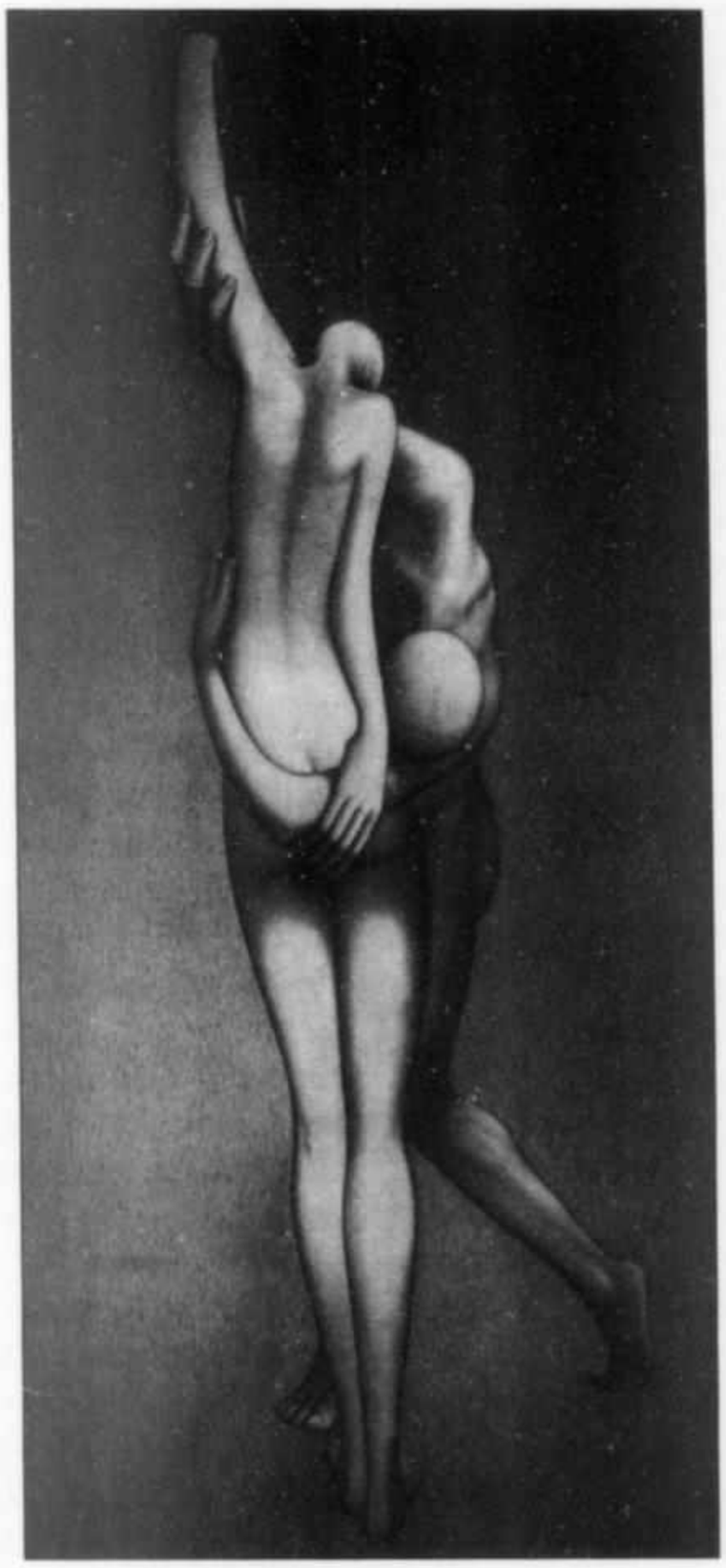
Dorff: The tradition makes it clear that if you are unable to do X you are not obligated to do X. So people who are infertile are under no obligation to procreate. But those who can, should.

TIKKUN: Some people here have taught that sexuality is fundamentally about deepening a mutual and loving relationship; but there has also been talk about sensuality as a new direction for expanding our conception of sexuality, but in these terms sensuality does not require a relationship with other human beings but might be viewed as an end in itself, quite apart from any relationship to others. Many people today would argue that pleasure is a good in itself, and need not require a deepening human relationship. Though not necessarily counterpoised, do we really want to affirm sensuality in this way?

Frankiel: Sexual pleasure should be encouraged but in the framework of giving pleasure to another person. We should encourage people to learn about the other person's body—something that hasn't been encouraged enough in traditional circles, but ought to be seen as part of what we do in the process of putting our egos in the service of caring for another human being. Sexuality has to be seen as one arena of many in which we learn to treat another human being in the way we wish to be treated ourselves. So sensuality should be developed together with sexuality.

Plaskow: Pleasure is a value, but an ambiguous value. In a society like ours that is based on domination, it is possible to take pleasure in dominating or being dominated.

Eilberg-Schwartz: We've created an American Judaism that is very hierarchical, where we don't use our bodies, where we don't use sexual imagery in our liturgy, where it's uncomfortable to touch in the synagogues. So the changes we need would have to include this kind of ability to extend sensuality in our holy space.



Biale: The tradition has often treated the erotic imagination as a dangerous thing. But imagination is critical to the erotic life. As to auto-eroticism, the tradition sometimes talks as though men have a certain amount of sexual energy, and if it is released in a masturbatory act it will not be available for a procreative act. This whole model of sexuality seems to me to be mistaken—we don't have to see our bodies as having a limited amount of sexual energy that must go to one place or another, so one doesn't have to see auto-eroticism as counterpoised to procreative energies.

Landes: Pornography is disembodied—it does focus on body parts separate from the person. In hard-core pornography sexuality often gets linked to torture and death. In soft-core pornography the person becomes only the genitalia. I see the direction of the tradition as aimed at encouraging the linking of sexuality to relationship—hence, it encourages us to concentrate on the other and not imagine someone else. The tradition sees pleasure as a fact that is a byproduct of the other good things

that take place in a relationship. The Rambam [Maimonides] says that one should be into pleasure with one's partner in a covenanted relationship, but the pleasure should not lapse into frivolity—and that means moving the mind away from the relationship and away from the ultimate relationship. I-Thou must be present in the relationship and the ultimate Thou must also be present as the source of blessing and holiness. The person who is just into auto-eroticism is self-referential, and becomes tragically truncated as a human being.

Landes: Frivolity is moving the person away from connection with others; to make one laugh (*letzachek)* is playful interaction with another.

Tikkun: So sexuality is to be valued primarily as a means of connection with others, and bodily pleasure must be understood primarily in this context? And does this imply in your conception that pleasure not aimed at connection with others is a less valuable goal?

Alpert: We have a set of interconnected values which incorporate both mutuality and pleasure. But the idea of interconnectedness does not mean that all values need to be expressed in every sexual act, or that a hierarchy of values should be constructed to judge the worth of every sexual act.

Umansky: I differentiate between sensuality and sexuality. I want to see sensuality as an affirmation of our embodiedness, and as a good in itself. We may need to work on the issue of how to strengthen our affirmation of our embodiedness—whether in prayer, in our sexual relationships, in the way we dress, in our relationship with others.

Kimelman: I take issue with Rabbi Landes. I think marriage should have more frivolity and playfulness. There's a danger that too much goal-orientation in sexuality—even if that goal is holiness—makes us miss the significance of the persons with whom we are having a sexual relationship. I can't understand how people can argue for monogamy and delayed marriages and then argue against masturbation. If masturbation is a replacement for marriage, we reject it; but for many teenagers who are delaying the time they get married so they can finish their studies, it doesn't interfere with their ability to make a lasting commitment.

Dorff: I agree with Dr. Kimelman. Teenagers are either going to masturbate or have non-marital sex. Though I'm very well aware of the texts against masturbation, in a contemporary Jewish sexual ethics, we ought to say to teenagers that masturbation is preferable to non-marital sex, because at least you're not through your body making commitments to the other person that you don't intend to fulfill. One of the real problems with non-marital sex is that it communicates with the body a commitment to the other which their mouths say they are not making to each other. Masturbation doesn't commit you to the lie implicit in non-committed sexual intercourse.

Tikkun: There are people in the Conservative movement who are aware that halachic rejection of homosexuality has cruel consequences for gays, but they believe that they cannot change the official stand on homosexuality because the Halacha is so clear about this issue. Is this really a halachic issue, or does homophobia effect how people in the Conservative movement read the Halacha? We know that Halacha has changed dramatically in regard to other issues—e.g., the Torah requirement to stone "a rebellious son" which was simply interpreted out of existence by some talmudic rabbis who dealt with it by saying that the kind of rebelliousness that the Torah is talking about simply never existed among any children and hence the injunction to stone them has no contemporary application (i.e., that the forms of rebelliousness that our own children engage in has nothing in common with what the Torah was talking about). This same kind of reading could just as easily be done today by a community that wanted to read the words of the Torah that have been thought to apply to homosexuals really don't apply to the kind of homosexuality that exists in the world today.

Landes: There have always been "changes" or "developments" or "new applications" in Halacha—but they have always been in ways that extend or develop possibilities already present in the existing Halacha. Homosexual acts are clearly marked as a sin in Torah and throughout talmudic and rabbinic responsa literature. "Commitment ceremonies" for gays—being advocated by some elements in the Conservative movement—would be a sanctification of something that is clearly delineated as a sin in Torah. This is not reinventing or reimagining but a clear break with the tradition. It's clear to me that a movement that has abandoned other forms of *kedusha*—the notion of holiness in the liturgy that is Temple-centered, the notion of family purity, restrictions on cohanim—has positioned itself toward this final abandonment. I predict that the Conservative movement will move in this direction—and I only ask that they admit that they are breaking with Halacha and not pretend to be doing this as a halachic movement.

Alpert: I don't want to label people within the halachic

tradition as homophobic, because I believe it is counterproductive to do so. TIKKUN is right to suggest that people in the halachic tradition often do come to terms with changes in the world—but they do it at their own speed, which may not be in my lifetime. But the way I see the trajectory, the changes eventually will take place.

When those of us who are gay and lesbian are told that the Torah explicitly forbids our sexuality, we respond by feeling that the chasm between us and the tradition has widened, that by dint of the necessity of our lives we are forced to say that the Halacha is an irrelevant system for us. We can be angry at it, but it's probably better for us to use the energy to transform the tradition in ways that we can use it to live both as Jews and as gays and lesbians.

Kimelman: By calling something homophobia, you are moving the issue from ethics to psychology, undermining the position by calling it a phobia. What if people started labeling those who are opposed to murder as "androphobia," would we think that we no longer had to consider the possible legitimacy of the position of those who oppose murder because it has now been referred to as a phobia, a fear that has no rational grounding?

The reason why the Talmud said that the rebellious son never existed was to avoid the punishment the Torah prescribed. I think we should stop criminalizing homosexuality. But non-condemnation should not lead to certification or sanctification. I believe that the establishment of procreative Jewish families is very difficult. One need only look at how hard it is in today's society to get Jewish males in their twenties and thirties to make a long-term commitment to a Jewish woman to understand why the community has a legitimate stake in trying to privilege heterosexual monogamous relationships. There is almost no social inducement or pressure for these young males to take on commitments that might lock them in for thirty or more years. Judaism can't continue without the centrality of families that are committed to raising the next generation.

TIKKUN: This seems to be a consequentialist argument: Homosexuality is to be rejected because it doesn't ensure Jewish continuity, not because it is bad in itself. And that consequentialist argument could then be undermined to the extent that it turns out in practice to be the case that lesbians are having children and raising them in lesbian families as Jews, or that gay men are adopting children and raising them in gay families as Jews.

Kimelman: The biblical prohibition privileges the heterosexual family by blocking the decoupling between sexuality, love, and Jewish continuity.

Eilberg-Schwartz: As someone trained as a Conservative rabbi, I find that one can reinterpret the tradition on this question in many different directions. One can read the texts as meaning that the tradition was worried about the non-committed sexual connections that may have been associated with homosexuality in its day, in which case one can argue that that is not necessarily the case with homosexuality today. One can read the texts as worrying about breaking normal categories (e.g., the man taking the female position), and then argue that today homosexuality does not mean that a man becomes feminized. There are a number of ways that one can read these rules without concluding that they in fact prohibit all forms of contemporary homosexual practice.

Dorff: I don't think it helps to talk about resistance to homosexuality in terms of homophobia. The issue is not whether Halacha can change—it clearly can and does—but whether it ought to change on this matter. I think it should because the Halacha assumed that homosexuality was a matter of voluntary choice, but that is not the case. We now know that many people simply discover that they are homosexual, and many of these people have even tried to fight against this discovery and to convince themselves that they really are heterosexual (an understandable effort in light of the repression of homosexuals in this society) but were unable to overcome their homosexuality. A Jewish community can't require that these people be celibate all their lives—celibacy is really a gnostic view of the body which sees the body as something whose energies and inclinations ought not to be expressed. Moreover, a demand for celibacy would be unnecessarily cruel—it would say to them that they can have no legitimate expression of sexuality throughout their lives, and that is a horror. All that the Jewish community would gain by saying something like that is that most homosexuals would look at the Jewish tradition as being anarchic and cruel and would simply abandon it. We need to sanctify those homosexual relationships which deserve sanctification and reject those kinds that do not deserve sanctification. This is what we do with heterosexual relations: oppressive heterosexual relationships are an abomination, cultic heterosexual relationships are an abomination, adulterous and incestuous heterosexual relationships are an abomination, and we should say the same thing about homosexual relationships of these sorts. But when you're talking about loving, monogamous, committed homosexual relationships, they ought to be sanctified—because the alternative is to say to homosexuals to be licentious, and with AIDS we have a medical reason as well as a

moral one to want to encourage homosexuals to form monogamous relationships.

Biale: What if it turns out that science determines that some percentage of homosexuals are not genetically forced to be homosexuals? I think there is a danger relying on that kind of argument.

As Eilberg-Schwartz points out, what the tradition had in mind when talking about homosexuality had absolutely nothing to do with homosexuality today as a form of sexual orientation. If you try to find serious discussion of homosexuality throughout Jewish history, it turns out that the tradition is almost entirely silent, as if the issue didn't exist. So, those who want to say that the halachic tradition has a definitive position on this are mistaken, since the tradition has barely addressed it—and certainly not in the terms that gays and lesbians understand themselves today.

Plaskow: The gay and lesbian community have used the biological determinism argument to make homosexuality seem less dangerous because not-contagious. But the evidence is almost entirely based on gay male experience. Lesbian experience is far more complex—over 80 percent of lesbians have had extensive heterosexual experience. In saying that homosexuality is simply innate (I don't want to make a sharp dichotomy between innateness and chosenness, because in my view there are probably elements of both) we are able to avoid larger questions of values. Let's say that a particular person is able to function in either a heterosexual or a homosexual relationship, but finds deeper pleasure, greater possibilities of mutuality and holiness and connection with the creative power in the universe—in this case, we want to ask what actual values a person is able to actualize in the actual relationships that that person may be choosing amongst. We need to ask, "What are the values that we want to actualize in our relationships?" and make the value choice determinative. We also need to place this discussion in the context of the critique of marriage—because *kedushin* in marriage has been about the exclusive possession of wives and women's sexuality by men, and that is not a model of sexuality I want to see continued in the tradition. But once we try to formulate new models of sexuality, the privileging of heterosexual marriage becomes questionable—why should we privilege heterosexual marriage when it has been about the control and possession of women?

Kimelman: The last comments underscore that we are at a great divide about values. One position believes that the inner depths of the self is the ultimate authority, and hence mutuality can undermine previously existing legal norms. Once we undermine the primacy of the heterosexual family, which I believe will happen by sanctifying loving homosexual relationships, we will end up legitimating loving adulterous or pedophiliac relationships as well. We are on a slippery slope here. If mutuality becomes the sole criterion of legitimate relationships, once you legitimate one you will have a very difficult time prohibiting others. Deviations from the norm come in clusters. So what do we say to people who have sexual feelings about one's own children, if the children are consenting and at an age where we allow them to make other kinds of consent agreements (twelve for the daughter, thirteen for the son)? If the criterion is merely mutuality and good feeling, without regard to previous legal prohibitions, then not only homosexuality but most forms of constraint on sexuality will be undermined.

Dorff: The domino theory doesn't work. If you are worried about one thing leading to another, you may not allow anything—certainly not eating, because we can only imagine what distortions that could lead to. Morality and Halacha amount to making distinctions.

Umansky: Norms are contextual. As Blu Greenberg has frequently pointed out, where there's a rabbinic will there's a halachic way. If the community decides that it wills to change the situation in regard to homosexuality it will certainly find a halachic way to do so. If there has not been a rabbinic will, the question is, "why not?" And here I think TIKKUN is right to suggest that some part of the answer for at least some of the rabbis involved has been homophobia. There is no such thing as a "pure" halachic discussion participated in by people who are outside the political, economic, and social context and assumptions of their age. Our judgments are always influenced by the historical times in which we live.

Kimelman: There are a set of rhetorical moves that people use in these arguments to delegitimate others, e.g., "my position is sophisticated whereas yours is fundamentalist," "my position is contextual while yours is essentialist," etc. Historical arguments are often made to delegitimate the opponent, rather than to deal with their position on their own terms.

Eilberg-Schwartz: Some of contemporary homophobia may also be about a more general fear of change. Sanctioning homosexuality is going to radically change how we think about gender, maybe even more than ordaining women. There is a certain kind of bonding between men that has rested upon homophobia, a certain construction of masculinity that is connected to the repression of ho-

(Continued on p. 89)

Purity and Power

Andrea Cohen-Kiener

Rachel Adler was a teacher of mine. As a young college student in the mid-seventies, just returned from a year in Israel, beginning a serious journey into Jewish living, I was thrilled to learn that she was moving to my home town, Minneapolis.

Rachel took her Yiddishkeit and her feminism very seriously. For a generation, she has struggled to find honesty and selfhood in the sharp and stormy intersections between feminism and Judaism. Her original work on mikveh (Jewish ritual cleansing) twenty years ago was seminal. She encouraged us to interact with, reframe, and revalue what mikveh can mean in our lives. She brought powerful feminist reasoning to bear on the rituals and categories of women's "impurity" cycle.

In her recent TIKKUN article ("In Your Blood, Live: Re-Visions of a Theology of Purity," January/February 1993), Adler essentially recants her former position. Arguing that ritual impurity is solely feminine, and the taboos solely sexual (i.e., not spiritual), she finds that women who accommodate themselves to *Taharat HaMishpacha* (the laws of family purity) are engaged in self-delusion; we are promoting a slave theology.

My sense is that Adler is trying to work out a problem in her mind that requires the heart and soul as well. Her conclusion—that women can use the language and ritual of mikveh to heal the wounds of incest and other forms of sexual abuse—argues more for her original position than her recantation. We *can* personalize and relate to mikveh in ways that are powerful, meaningful, and feminist. Whether or not we will have "Judaism" as we now know it on the other side of this reframing seems to me to be the operative question. To this I will answer something else that I learned from Adler: Truth and Judaism will not be parted. If I am honest about my own experience and sincere in my exploration of Yiddishkeit, I will be on the path of being a Jew. I will surely offend both liberals and conservatives on this quest. That really doesn't matter.

There can be little doubt that biblical and rabbinic Judaism were fashioned by and for men. My belief is that there is a God or Eternal One, there was a moment of contact between God and the people of Israel at Sinai, and that the Jewish enterprise since then has been about translating that contact into human codes of behavior, affect, philosophy, and spiritual development. I believe that the stuff of spirit is identical for males and females, and that "the shape of the vessel" differs according to such secondary characteristics as gender, physiological type, and intellectual ability.

Originally, menstrual impurity was part of a larger holiness code which governed many forms of eruptions and emissions, virtually any breach in the human body. The tradition regards these breaches as requiring various combinations of separation, inspection, cleansing, and sacrificial offerings. Several forms of female ritual impurity require a sin offering at the close of the cleansing cycle. A postpartum woman brings a sin offering, not because of any inherent taboo about birth, but because tradition holds that a woman in the throes of labor utters oaths that she will never have sex with her husband again. In addition to the standard period of separation and cleansing, a woman is required to give a sin offering after an unusually long or unexpected onset of vaginal bleeding, conditions that usually signal illness.

The Jewish holiness code rolls spiritual, emotional, and physical health into one. The high priest is both doctor and hierophant, counselor and epidemiologist. In the Torah, gestalt-disease is the result of dis-ease, distance from the divine intent. Thus, in the biblical perception, reproductive disorders require both physical and spiritual healing.

Normal menstruation necessitates a period of separation from one's mate, followed by ritual immersion. There is no sin offering. In fact, menstrual rituals are most similar to and are articulated in conjunction with strictures governing normal male emissions during intercourse. Males and females are both *tameh* (impure) and are both sources of impurity to others when they exude normal genital fluids.

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The group of laws dealing with eruptions and emissions ends with an admonition from God that the *tameh* individual be separated out, "lest they pollute my In-Dwelling Presence in their midst." (Leviticus 15:31) From this verse, the rabbis deduced that beyond the social separation engendered by impurity (husband from wife, leper from non-leper), an impure person may not enter the Temple precinct. There is no Temple today, no locus of sanctity from which an impure soul might be excluded. Thus, many classes of biblical impurity (i.e., contact with reptiles) have neither medical nor spiritual relevance today.

In stating her argument that in contemporary halachic Judaism the taboos surrounding menstruating women are *sui generis*, Adler misses two crucial points. The first has to do with the locus of holiness in Judaism. The reason that men's ritual taboos are no longer active categories (except for vestiges of the priestly code) is that the Temple is nonexistent. Men could be all pured up with no place to go. The fact that women's disability remains is actually cause for celebration. The only extant locus of holiness is the Jew's marital bed.

The symbolism is profound. The Temple was the place of contact between human and divine, a place where we finally overcame the inherent paradox of human separateness from our divine source. Again in the marital bed, we transcend the separation. Menstruation is bound up in humankind's deepest mystery: It is part of a cycle through which two, man and woman, become one. And this union makes two, mother and child, out of her singular body. It is a miracle. God created us as seeds containing seeds and therein gave us a future.

Adler argued in "*Tum'ah* and *Taharah*" that menstruation occurs at a life-death nexus. Some interpretations of the story of the fall of humankind in Genesis regard the whole reproductive cycle as punitive. But that is simply to state that all humans exist outside of a harmonious interrelationship with the divine thought; we struggle back toward it. The human condition bears equally on men and on women.

Adler chooses to ignore the images of Israel as bride, of God as midwife and wet-nurse, of the Shechina as tender mother. Her presentation is not wrong—it is simply incomplete. By reiterating the painful negative imagery and ignoring the ennobling feminine divine images, she perpetuates the wrong and delays the healing.

I teach Jewish sexual practice to teenagers a couple of times a year. I always drive them crazy. First, I tell the girls that half the time they are ritually impure—a man cannot touch them, or anything they use. Then I describe it differently: Do you know that for half the month you need consider no one else's sexual needs? In some communities, you could even cease your normal household chores. You would have been off in a menstrual hut with the other women. Having heard the argument stated this way, the young women are ready to lobby the Jewish Federation to support the construction of a menstrual hut at the edge of town—safe space for women!

I tell them about my friend whose elbows I have never seen, a lock of whose real hair I will never see. They think of her as quaint. Then we speak of movies, magazines, and MTV, and the violent images of women being tortured and titillated. How can we determine the shape and feel of a healthy sexual ethic with these kinds of images as backdrops? How can we find our way to a social code where women can feel beautiful *and* safe? After exploring all that MTV has to teach us, we go back to my modestly covered friend and I ask my students: If this is a continuum, where do you see yourself? Depending on how the story is told, and ultimately on who is telling the story, Judaism can be seen as at the cutting edge of feminist separatism within a heterosexual communal context.

That is precisely the primary disability of women in Judaism. As enlightened as Jewish men may be, as protected as women are by the marriage contract and inheritance laws, as respected as women are in Judaism, men have been the players and women the bystanders and objects of Jewish law. The system structurally disenfranchises women. They may be cherished objects, but they are objects nevertheless. But I believe that this is beginning to change. The fact that Rachel Adler and I can engage in this debate with a real range of possible outcomes (we may or may not use the mikveh, shake hands with most Jewish men, learn Torah, have an aliya in most *shuls*) is proof that the disability is beginning to be relieved. Women today can learn, teach, interpret, and create authentic Jewish expressions. The fact that some Jewish men (and women) will never grace this development is not cause for us to delegitimize our exploration from the start.

Feminism, too, is evolving. What Rachel Adler and I shared is sometimes called "first-stage feminism." We wanted to be *pareve*, we wanted to be equal. Our bodily cycles had been used against us so many times in the past that we had reason to ignore gender distinction, to make it invisible.

Second-stage feminism, our current outlook, teaches something else. Women's perspective *is* different; our society needs to incorporate that perspective. In the business world, first-stage feminism was about getting women into tight suits, the executive lavatory, and top-rung career paths. Second-stage feminism is about

getting maternity/paternity leave, about getting a sane and humane work ethic in such demanding careers as law and medicine and business. It's about getting an economic culture that values the long-range health of the Earth and the work force. Women can voice that perspective only if two conditions are met. First, we must have access to the halls of power (a first-stage feminist goal). Second, we must not sell out. We must not ignore what we know in our bodies and in our hearts in order to pass in an inherently abusive system.

Rachel Adler taught me how to be a spiritual archaeologist, how to dig deeply into the Torah of my people and the Torah of my body and life and to learn from it all. If women are to be empowered to learn, transform, and transmit Torah, we must be sincere in valuing all of these sources.

Rachel taught me how to put on *tallit* and *tefillin*. I still use my *tallit* but I have put *tefillin* down; they don't work for me now. She encouraged me to explore mikveh. I did, and I still use it. It works for me as a form of appetite control and distinction. I feel and mark the flow of life through my body. I enhance the practice by personal meditations and prayers on the days when the flow is heavy and thick in my middle. Let me recast Leviticus this way: When I am flowing with these juices, after birth, or after passing a seed, I am busy, I'm doing something. Even a call to the holy sanctuary can be postponed. At those times, I am doing God's work.

I have heard a Native American woman describe her practice of not going near the medicine men and musicians during menstruation. Her power would knock men off their center. If, in fact, the Torah is a universal impulse spoken into a moment in patriarchal history; and if the ritualization of our menstrual flow calls for a period of rest and renewal, Torah would speak it to men exactly as it did: Don't go near her; she's powerful now and dangerous to you. The underlying connotation of *tumah* (usually "impurity"), seems to me to mean unbridled, open. Adler gives away too much when she lets men translate these concepts for her.

Rachel Adler responds to Andrea Cohen-Kiener:

My favorite verse from Psalms runs, "faithfulness (*hesed*) and truth (*emet*) will meet; justice (*zedeq*) and peace (*shalom*) will kiss." (Psalms 85:11) In this psalmic vision of the mended world, all values are reconciled. One need not be violated so that another can be upheld. In the unmended world, unhappily, we must sometimes choose. This time, I chose truth, at the expense of faithfulness and peace. When I wrote, "In Your Blood, Live," I knew that people whose observance was nourished by my original mikveh piece would feel betrayed and bereft. People who trusted me, who were taught by me, have been hurt by this new article. I have made their chosen path more difficult by hacking down one of their theological supports. I understand this, and I do not take it lightly.

But as I asked in my article, "What is the responsibility of a theologian when she no longer believes what she taught to others as Torah? Merely to recant is insufficient, because theologians are not just theorists. They exemplify ways to live out Jewish commitments with integrity." Integrity demanded that I recount how I came to reject my earlier belief, what I now hold, what continues to be unresolved for me, because my task is not to transmit data but to model a way to live. I am not teaching a theology, but a theological process.

I know now, as I did not know twenty years ago, that all theologies are as imperfect and contingent as the human lives that bring them forth. And it is right that they should be. They address the questions people in specific times and places need to have answered in order to live with integrity. Historical contexts are imperfect, filled with blind spots and constraints. Yet within them, people are struggling to determine what is demanded of them. That is what theologies are for.

In our own context, we are perplexed about the meanings attached to sexuality and gender. How can we learn to perceive one another's differences without distortion and to respond to them without injustice? How ought we to live to reflect God's image in our male and female humanity? A difficult hermeneutical problem accompanies these questions: If we bring to our sacred texts and traditions the questions, insights, and experiences of *all* of the People Israel, how will we reread these texts to redeem them as Torah? Feminist theologians of many kinds address these questions.

As I demonstrated, the responses I offered twenty years ago contain serious flaws. I can acknowledge their inadequacy now, because I have learned that neither God nor God's Torah is fragile. Nothing truly holy can be destroyed by the likes of me. I do not have to absolve the Torah of moral responsibility for fear that it will fail. It will not fail. The worst that will happen is that I will not know a good enough answer to the questions I am asking. When that happens, I try to be truthful enough not to settle for an inadequate answer, hopeful enough to wait for a redemptive answer, and brave enough to relinquish an answer I had found redemptive when critical evaluation reveals it as inadequate. □

From The Annals of the Kabakoffs

Steven Stern

The following excerpt is the third movement of a novella detailing three generations of the Kabakoff family of North Main Street in Memphis, Tennessee. The first movement recounts the escapades of Itchy Kabakoff, the bastard offspring of his father's youthful indiscretion with a female demon. The second movement recounts the childhood and youth of Itchy's father Mose, including his seduction by a mythical maiden aunt on the eve of the Second World War. The section at hand, the farthest removed in time, chronicles the early adventures of Yankel Kabakoff, patriarch of the North Main Street clan, in the years before he came to America.

c. 1870

In his muddy market village of Shatsk on the River Dnestre in the Russian Ukraine, the young Yankel Kabakoff was a scholar of some renown. He was reading the weekly Torah portion by the age of four and at six was already fluent in Rashi's commentaries. By age eight he was so skillful at disputation that he could oppose with equal zeal the famous arguments of Rabbi Hillel against Rabbi Shammai or Shammai against Hillel. Sometimes he propounded arguments refuting them both. For his talents he was deemed by many a second Ben Sira, the prodigy conceived when Jeremiah's daughter bathed in a pool where the prophet had been forced to spill his seed. At twelve, on the eve of his bar mitzvah, Yankel was rumored to be composing a responsum to the *Tractate Berekhot*, its pages stacked to the height of Goliath's eye. It was reported (though there was as yet no evidence) that he studied mysterious books, such as Rabbi Cordovero's *Looking Glass*, and could conjure angels and demons, construct artificial men. Needless to say, he had long since outstripped the dour Rabbi Kirsky, who lorded it over the other boys in the ramshackle study house.

Steven Stern's novella, A Plague of Dreamers*, will be published in January. His 1987 collection of short stories,* Lazar Malkin Enters Heaven*, won the Edward Louis Wallant Award.*

By comparison with his fellows at Rabbi Kirsky's "academy"—a combined *cheder* and yeshiva where a motley assortment of ages was crammed into a single stuffy room—Yankel was sturdy and hale. The truth was that he had no business among them, having advanced far beyond the curriculum, but the nearest formal seminary was miles away in Kharkov, and Yankel wasn't ready to leave home. Besides, he was fond of what he liked to call "our local community of scholars," where he was not above showing off.

While the other boys had aged prematurely from the tedium of study, their bodies bent, eyes like dead embers, sidelocks spiraling like sprouts from their potato heads, Yankel thrived in the bookish atmosphere. He was straight-backed and clear-eyed, with a blush to his milk-fed cheeks, a thick shock of copper hair beneath his *kipah*. The others were full of involuntary spasms, flinching from the constant threat of the rabbi's cane; they struggled against letting their attention stray toward the window, trying not to look out past the crazy configuration of fish-reeking hovels and listing onion domes. Beyond them lay the river lined with birch groves and goldenrod, the hop fields sprinkled with scarlet poppies, which the boys tried hard not to imagine. But Yankel remained immersed in his studies, appearing to literally feast on the words of Torah. He read so intensely it was said that the pages faded under his perusal, this thoroughly did he absorb the essence of Holy Writ. Indeed, to those students who dared to suggest that the solution to their problems was not Torah but a flight from their wornout town, who proposed a wholesale return to Palestine, Yankel's answer was always the same:

"The text is our homeland."

For such remarks the Shatsker folk would point him out to visitors on market days, saying of him, "That one, he lives in the Book. He'll make a *tzadik*, wait and see." His proud parents, Malkeh and Shlomo the Scribe, spoiled and indulged him, providing their son with what meager luxuries they could afford. A ruddy-faced, sweet-dispositioned woman, Malkeh was forever

stuffing him with compotes and almond bread. As noted for her needlework as her kichel, which the baker arranged to buy from her, she quilted his yarmelkes in gay mosaics; she dyed the fringes of his prayer shawl with an ink the peddler insisted was secreted from sea monsters that surfaced only once every seventy years. In anticipation of his coming of age, his father Shlomo, with elaborate ceremony, had bestowed on Yankel his prized possession: the phylacteries that had belonged to his father's father's cousin twice removed, a not-so-distant relation of the Seer of Ostropol. He'd replaced the dead leaves of the verses inside them with new ones in his elegant hand.

It seldom occurred to either of them that their son had reached an age when other boys were apprenticed to blacksmiths or packed off to lumber mills and (God forbid) pigskin factories. What need had a genius like Yankel of learning a trade? He was after all considered such a catch, his praises sung so far and wide, that the matchmakers came from Kishinev and Odessa to make offers. They came as ambassadors from wealthy merchants whose daughters were veritable princesses, their dowries large enough to purchase kingdoms. But if his parents were in no hurry to see him married, Yankel himself was just as reluctant to enter an affiliation that might distract him from study. "After the wedding it's too late for regretting," he cited often, paraphrasing a proverb of Isaac the Blind. In time he would of course take a bride, if only to give him the ballast prescribed by Talmud for pursuing otherwise forbidden branches of learning.

This was in the years after the passing of the iron czar Nicholas, during the reign of Alexander called the Little Father, who freed the serfs and initiated benign policies toward the Jews. He authored legislation allowing Jews to attend universities and practice professions outside the Pale of Settlement. In some instances they were even permitted to buy land and give testimony on their own behalf in courts of law. Best of all, he reduced their term of military service from the virtual death sentence of thirty years to five. Gone were the days of juvenile conscription, of the *khapers* who'd come to replace the goblins and fiends of grandmothers' tales. These were Jewish thugs paid by Jewish councils to snatch Jewish children from their families (usually at night but sometimes in broad daylight on their way to school) and turn them over to the army of the Czar.

Not that all was schnapps and sponge cake in the world of the shtetl. There were still military quotas to be filled, boys torn from their lessons, their earlocks shorn, silk tallises exchanged for stiff uniforms. Many were said to have been baptized and were in any case never heard from again. Some Shatskers held that "a hidden hand" was operating behind the Czar's back, making sure that abuse of the Jews was kept alive, and it was furthermore rumored that certain *landsmen* collaborated. ("Our rabbis and bigshots are in cahoots, teaching our kids to be recruits," the song went.) The rich could still pay to have the poor sent in place of their own. As a consequence, if they weren't already damaged enough from poverty, families might further mutilate their sons; they might starve and dismember them, puncture their eardrums, expose them to the elements in the hope of their becoming consumptive and thus ineligible for the draft.

But Yankel, who spent his days resolving knotty legal questions and interpreting miraculous parables, was oblivious to it all. Ignoring anything that might interfere with his close scrutiny of sacred texts, he paid scant attention to the boys missing digits or coughing up blood. He likewise disregarded the ancient veterans of Fonya's army, kidnapped from their cradles and returned decades later like tongue-tied prophets. You'd see them sagging from the weight of rusty medals, hanging about the footbridge or the synagogue as if looking for their misplaced lives. Toward them, Yankel was as indifferent as he was to cherry blossoms or cornflowers or peasant girls in the flooded fields across the river, their skirts kilted to their thighs. To notice would anyway have been sinful, requiring as it must that he lift up his eyes from his books.

Of all those who paid homage to the prodigy, none was more lavish in his praise than Rabbi Kirsky himself. With fawning blandishments he held up Yankel to the other academy students as a young Akiva or Maimonides, a second Daniel. Over the years he'd welcomed the many occasions when the boy undertook to correct his teacher's discourse, a tribute to the success of the rabbi's instruction. He must have received, humbly, a multitude of such contradictions throughout the course of Yankel's illustrious career. Inevitably, however, there came an afternoon, just before the scholar's thirteenth birthday, when having swallowed a surfeit of assaults on his authority, the rabbi choked. A baggy-eyed compact little man, with an upturned beard like the toe of a harem slipper, Rabbi Kirsky discovered that he'd had all he could stand of the impertinent Kabakoff brat.

It happened in a balmy September near Rosh Hashanah, the season when reasonably healthy lads of military age were subject to immediate induction into the Imperial Army. (Yankel himself, when he thought of it, was confident he wouldn't be called up, concerned citizens having established a fund to buy his exemption.) In the study house, while his charges

squirmed on hard benches and picked splinters from their behinds, Rabbi Kirsky had launched into a long-winded disquisition. This one was in reference to a page of Mishnah, wherein Rabbis Nathan and Eliezer debated whether the mythical golem should be allowed to participate in a quorum of worhippers.

"In the end they concur," declared the teacher, pretending to gaze out the window, though the class was aware he had eyes in the back of his head, "that the corpus of a counterfeit being is second only in impurity to that of a woman immediately following childbirth. Therefore he may not join the minyan." To punctuate the point, he turned sharply and cracked his reinforced rod over the shoulder of Braineh's Hershie, who was snoring at the foot of the table.

Then Yankel Kabakoff begged to differ. He rose from the book-laden table, his coat adorned in velvet patches, an embroidered yarmelke riding the crest of his wavy hair. A fine figure of a boy, if a little pudgy, he stood a head taller than his teacher, his voice raised above the creaking chairs, the bleating and crowing from the market outside.

"Rabbi Gershon, Light of the Diaspora," he began, "clearly states in response to *Tractate Hagigah*, generally recognized to have authority over the *Semahot* which you quote, that by virtue of the divine breath vested in him, never mind the holy stamp on his forehead—this is the *emet* for 'truth,' though some sources mention the four-headed letter *shin*—the golem should be a welcome addition to any ritual gathering."

That was when Rabbi Kirsky decided enough was enough. The many bitter pills he'd so often ingested, along with the groats he'd had for breakfast, seemed finally to have backed up on him. They filled his craw and distended the pouches of his cheeks, so that the students braced themselves for an explosion. But instead the rabbi only swallowed, emitted a quiet belch, and turned a sickly shade of chartreuse. He thanked Yankel for enlightening them with his usual perspicacity and dismissed the class.

Later that evening, after having sought advice from on high, Rabbi Kirsky paid a visit to the home of Reb Bimko the salt merchant. Like every other dwelling in that narrow street, known as Needle's Eye Alley, Reb Bimko's had a modest facade. Pale azure paint blistered on roughcast walls; rotting roof shingles exposed the laths beneath them, the mossy eaves providing a purchase for barking dogs. But this was just a front to keep from antagonizing the gentiles. Ducking under a lintel, you were led by a servant into sumptuously appointed apartments with rich carpets and tapestries, brass lamps and gilt-framed paintings overhanging the cushioned divans. On a sideboard spice boxes clustered like a miniature city around a silver samovar. Then you were greeted by Reb Bimko, the householder, who dressed conservatively during business hours but decked himself out like a pasha in the privacy of his domain. "Like God in Odessa," as the townspeople were given to say.

On Rabbi Kirsky's mind was the subject of Reb Bimko's wastrel son Henich, who was due to report to the induction center at the end of the month. It would cost his father a small fortune to procure his freedom. Also in the rabbi's thoughts was the undying grudge the salt merchant held against the Kabakoff family. This had come about when Reb Bimko sent Zalman the matchmaker to Yankel's father with the offer of his daughter Shifra's hand in marriage. As aware as anyone of Shifra's reputation, the scribe had been undiplomatic. "My son should want the cheap local stuff when he can have his pick of expensive imports?" he said. Zalman dutifully reported his answer to the merchant, though not before confiding it to half the inhabitants of Shatsk along the way. Humiliated, Reb Bimko had never forgiven the Kabakoffs, and it was his continuing resentment that the rabbi counted on tonight.

As he sat at the oiled mahogany table taking some peppermint *kvass* with the salt merchant, Rabbi Kirsky wasted no time in raising the issue of the draft: how it was highway robbery, this business of buying your children out of armed service.

"A king's ransom," conceded Reb Bimko, heaving a sigh that made his belly ebb and flow beneath his watered silk caftan, "but what can one do?"

The rabbi nodded in sympathy then leaned a little closer, the tip of his beard like a beckoning finger. "Why give your hard-earned rubles to Haman," he said in accordance with the clerical tradition of answering questions with questions, "when you can do us all a mitzvah by keeping them here in Shatsk?"

At that moment Reb Bimko's wife, Feiga Tamara, a woman with a glued-on grin and a terraced wig like Madame Pompadour, entered with a tray of ginger pastries. Her husband waved her away impatiently then bit into one of the morsels, frosting his charcoal whiskers with powdered sugar. He shoved the tray toward Rabbi Kirsky as if to say, "Your deal."

The rabbi continued in a voice arch with implication. "Shmuel One-Eye the teamster, poor man, I'm told he's having a very slow season."

The merchant unfurrowed his brow as light dawned. Consolidating his various seamy operations, the notorious Shmuel had organized a syndicate of local *gonifs* and toughs. For a negotiable fee they would

seize the sons of poor families and turn them over as replacement conscripts for their betters. This had not been lately such a lucrative sideline, however, since there remained so few young paupers that the army hadn't already claimed for its own.

A nod being as good as a wink to a man of Reb Bimko's shrewdness, he'd taken the rabbi's hint to its irresistable conclusion: he might save his son and settle with his enemies at a single blow. Now it was the merchant's turn to lean forward conspiratorially.

"Nu, so you think Herr Shmuel could use my business?"

"I think," replied Rabbi Kirsky, "that he and his would bless your name, that we should see it inscribed in the Book of Life for a prosperous year."

Having reached an understanding, the two men clinked glasses and sipped in satisfied silence, interrupted only when Reb Bimko muttered, "That Kabakoff *k'nacher*, that bigmouth, he's too good for my daughter? So let him be the Czar's son-in-law."

No sooner were arrangements made than the deed was set in motion, though some weeks would pass before it was done. First the Days of Awe had to be gotten through, when even criminal activities were suspended. Then, Shmuel and his boys being strictly professional, there was the matter of learning Yankel's routine in order to determine the optimum moment to nab him. Of course his movements to and from the synagogue, the bathhouse, and the *bet hamidrash* couldn't have been more predictable. But while he usually walked alone with his nose in a book, his feet in Ukrainian mud and his head as it were in Jerusalem, he seldom frequented other than public places. En route he made his way through a tortured concatenation of alleys, but to snatch him from these would have meant lugging him some distance to a waiting wagon. He crossed the market *platz*, an unholy babble of hawkers, haggling women, and caged fowl, where a kidnap might not even be noticed. Though why take the risk when he could be spirited away after dark, on a Sabbath eve when all of Shatsk was indoors?

Every Friday at dusk Yankel accompanied his father to the bathhouse. There, after a dip in the warm green water, they would sit on warped bleachers toga'd in towels and thrash themselves with brooms. (During this exercise, much to the rabbi's chagrin if he were present, the other sitz-bathers might quiz the prodigy on obscure points of law.) They emerged from clouds of steam with erubescent faces, strolling toward the shul in identical black sateen. Following services Malkeh would meet them in her fancy sheitel, her pearls retrieved once again from the pawnbroker for the occasion. The house would be fragrant with challeh and potted meat, its few sticks of furniture spotless, Shlomo's scrolls-in-progress stored in a corner for the holiday. Lighting the candles, Malkeh would wave her arms above the flames, gathering smoke to fuel her generous tears. She thanked the Lord for a son who'd brought them such *naches*, whose merit had secured her husband a seat by the eastern wall.

When they sat down to dinner, it was often in the company of some vagabond peddler whom Shlomo suspected might be the prophet Elijah in disguise. (Once it had actually been the broken-nosed Leon Deathwatch, a crony of Shmuel's sent to spy.) After the meal the knives would be covered, the *zmiros* sung, the eyes daubed with wine for a providential week. Then the guest departed and Shlomo and Malkeh would draw the patched canvas curtain hiding their feather bed. With Shlomo stripped to his *talis koton* and beaver hat, Malkeh in her flannel gown, they would commence their ritual coupling—a duty which, if performed on Shabbos, was certain to bring the Almighty closer to his chosen people. Rolling in noisy abandon, they were confident that their son remained insensible to their frolic; he was tucked away in his loft above the wood stove, poring over a volume of Abulafia or Halevi by hurricane lamp.

Or maybe he'd paused in his reading to contemplate some midrashic brain-teaser, as he did on this particular night. He looked toward the moon, a broken saucer beyond the dirty skylight, and pondered what it meant to have an extra soul on the Sabbath. Could you, for instance, depart from this life with one soul while leaving the other behind?

"If I should be someone else," he asked, after Rabbi Hillel, "then who should be me?"

It was during this meditation that the gag was stuffed in his mouth. Before he could utter any of the formulae for dispersing the enema lady or Lilith's minions, they'd muffled him and thrown a sack over his head; they trussed his torso and legs then folded him wriggling over somebody's bony shoulder. Carried thus down the ladder, Yankel heard the impassioned groaning of his parents, who must have already begun to mourn him.

Outside Shmuel One-Eye sat grimly on the box of his wagon, his collar turned up, his cap pulled to the level of his eye patch which fluttered like black bunting in the October wind. When his boys had dumped their burden in the wagon bed, he spat once and lashed his brace of horses, driving them at a gallop over the stone bridge in the direction of Kiev.

c. 1870-1875

Throughout the long ordeal of his abduction Yankel told himself he must be dreaming. He'd fallen asleep in his loft over a page of *Sefer ha-Ma'asiyot*, that was it. He'd been reading about the nocturnal mischief of certain species of Jewish hobgoblins: *lantekh*, *shretelekh*, the infernal *sheydim* for whom kidnap was the least of their crimes; and must have dozed off. While it seemed he was blinkered and gagged, bouncing in the bed of a wagon in full career, in actuality he was only having a bad dream. Now if he could just fall asleep in his dream, Yankel reasoned, he would wake up again to a warm and familiar world.

To lull himself he tried meditating on the characters of the Hebrew alphabet, an exercise much favored by the circle of Rabbi Mendl of Vitebsk. But the rattling wheels and the cracking droshky whip hindered even Yankel's celebrated concentration. He tried the breathing techniques of Rabbi ibn Latif, who advised inhaling through the nostrils of the soul, then crooned to himself one of his mother's cradle songs:

My Yankele will study Law
The Law will my baby learn
Great books will my Yankele write
Much money will he earn...

But nothing about the nightmare he was having was conducive to slumber.

By the time the wagon halted and he was lifted out, Yankel had abandoned any thoughts of sleep. Dragged bumping up a flight of stairs, he was spilled from the sack onto a parqueted floor and unbound. Stood up, he was left to sway on his feet, dizzy with exhaustion, aching from the bruises he'd sustained during the journey, and further abashed at having peed himself in fear.

If they were at all surprised by the manner of Yankel's arrival, the fiends who'd taken charge of him never showed it. They shoved him perfunctorily into the ranks of other boys huddled at one end of the longest room Yankel had ever seen. Portraits of bearded men in ermine-trimmed crowns decked the walls; crossed sabers and banners bearing two-headed birds hung from a mezzanine. His fellow captives, mostly peasant youths in belted overblouses, their demeanors running from docile to defiant, moved away from the stench of Yankel's nightshirt. There were Jewish boys also, puny specimens who (unlike Yankel) had not grown fat on Torah, fingering fringes and desperately clutching tefillin bags. These were confiscated without ceremony in exchange for the numbers assigned them by a devil in a braided tunic. And while they blinked and rubbed their eyes raw, he wouldn't go away, the devil who called himself "Sergeant-major" with his face like a firebrick.

They were stripped naked and thrust into other rooms, hustled through a gauntlet of stethoscopes and cold metal prods, past committees who fired questions without waiting for answers, stamped documents without ever looking up. They were anointed in benzine, shorn of hair and sidelocks which the barbers then cut capers with, using them for false mustaches and pigs' tails. They were trousered in breeches that fell to their ankles, greatcoats that swept the floor, boots so tall they couldn't bend their knees, and told they were soldiers now; they belonged to the Czar. But skilled as he was in the logic of dreams, Yankel wasn't deceived. He understood that they'd been processed for devils themselves.

The sergeant-major cursed them—"Offscourings! Yids!"—and drove them under armed guard out into the teeming streets. Kiev was the city that conscripts from Shatsk were routinely taken to, but Yankel knew enough to recognize the sprawling necropolis of Gehinnom when he saw it. How else account for such diabolical beauty? The avenues of russet-leaved locusts, the stone facades with intricately carved finials; the cavernous, gold-domed cathedral with its interior lit by red candles, a worshipper on her belly before a graven image. Graven images perched on cornices and the parapets of bridges; they loomed above the forested hills across the river. And what would you call the population but leering icons come alive to stare at them from the windows of horse trolleys and lacquered broughams? They stepped out of flame-belching forges to laugh at them, from behind steaming vats in bloody aprons, in peaked caps, bast shoes, babushkas, and chimney pot hats; in cassocks, their beards parted like hammer claws around a crucifix.

The recruits marched until their heads swam and their feet swelled enough to fill their outsize boots. Some of the Jewish boys kept looking back as if in hopes that their mothers might be following close behind, an error for which they were punished with blows. The more anemic among them began to stagger and drop out, and Yankel wondered if this mightn't be the best policy. But when he saw how they were made to stand again and rejoin the ranks, in extremis though they appeared, he found the will to push on. By mid-afternoon they'd tottered into a barracks in some outlying district, no sooner arriving than they collapsed on hard berths. Instantly they were called back to attention. They were issued this and that—boot blacking, brass polish, a kit bag, a blanket, a rifle with bayonet. Those Jews with the strength to turn their heads glanced at one another and asked mutely,

"What, no kipah, no prayerbook?"

They were herded into a mess hall where tin bowls of cooked water, afloat with distinctly non-kosher matter, were set before them on rough-hewn trestles. The older boys—largely Poles, Balts, Ukrainians—attacked their portions of swill with gusto, but Yankel's stomach rose up at the prospect. He was not alone among the Jewish boys, most of whom shoved their bowls away, though one said a *brocha*, took a taste, and promptly heaved. Another, clearly delirious, prayed aloud for manna to fall, while an unsteady third pitched face-forward into his soup. No one bothered to lift his head in case he'd had the good fortune to drown.

After their light refreshment they were cursed at some more and made to march around the yard, this time in full battle gear. They were halted at dusk, propped up by their rifles like scarecrows, and interrogated as to their particular skills—a formality, though it might in fact result in their being assigned to an appropriate unit. As it turned out, some of the gentiles were already practicing wheelrights, journeyman carpenters, cooks. There were even a few ex-convicts who proudly declared a talent for cracking safes. But most of the runty Jewish lads were too young to have learned a trade; they knew only about what had no application in Fonya's army—the Torah, the violin—and were thus designated cannon fodder.

Some came from provinces so remote that they'd never heard Russian spoken, and for their speechlessness they were cuffed and labeled cannon fodder. Some were merely too debilitated to answer. Despite his own bone-weariness, Yankel realized he ought to lie, say he was perhaps a cobbler's apprentice. But having never borne false witness in his mother language, it wasn't likely he'd succeed in an alien tongue. Besides, why should he conceal his identity when there was every possibility that his legend had preceded him even here? So when it came his turn, he explained in a mixture of Yiddish and fractured Russian,

"If it please your honor, I'm Yankel Kabakoff, gaon of Shatsk."

"Cannon fodder!" barked the chronically enflamed sergeant-major, assigning him to an infantry detachment to be used for that purpose. He and his Christ-killing brethren were to be dispatched at dawn to an outpost at the ends of the earth, immediately following their baptism.

That night in his berth, amid a hybrid cacophony of whimpering and snores, Yankel tried to renew his faith in the unreality of his situation. He clung to the notion that, if he could sleep, he would wake to a cockcrow, Leibush Halbfunt the sexton calling all Jews to come already to shul. A huddle of tin roofs, a river, a market, a tumbledown wooden synagogue—that was the world, and its windows gave on to other worlds more real than the village itself. There was the portable world contained in the books of heroes and martyrs and wandering patriarchs; the books of the Covenant outlining its six hundred and thirteen mitzvot: the two hundred forty-eight positive commandments equivalent to the organs of the body, the three hundred sixty-five negative corresponding to the days of the year. You could count them until you began to drop off.

But Yankel had to admit that this present interminable hallucination was pretty convincing, compared to which the shtetl seemed more like the dream. A proverb occurred to him from a source he hadn't the energy to trace, "If the righteous so choose, they can make a world."

"Make a world," sighed Yankel. "I'm too tired to make water." Moreover, his fatigue and hunger were so absolute that they would not yield to sleep.

Morning came swiftly, announced by slaps and curses rather than daylight, but Yankel had no recollection of having dozed. Neither did he feel the least bit rested, his only solace that he was too spent to be afraid. Their "baptism" came when those who still refused to eat, Yankel among them, received benedictions from the sergeant-major as he dumped bowls of hot gruel on their heads.

They were made to don the heavy greatcoats inside of which they freely perspired despite the early morning chill. Further encumbered with duffle, kit, and shouldered rifle, they were paraded again through the streets, but the few citizens abroad at that hour weren't laughing. The walking corpses in their ranks, spirits yet anchored to earth by the weight of their gear, no longer inspired levity.

By now Yankel had started to feel a certain estrangement from his own body. He noted with interest that his gut was constricting after a fashion that must have meant he'd begun to starve. In a matter of days he'd be dead and, in death, he would perhaps wake up to his own lost world. Of course, you might hold out the hope that, at the moment of extremest suffering, the angel Raziel would carry you off to paradise alive, like Enoch and what's-his-name. There you'd sit in a court of celestial rabbis, engaged in *pilpul* discussions with the Rambam and Meyer of Rottenburg. But Yankel anticipated no such intervention. As they slouched down the steps of an embankment in garish sunlight, it seemed to him there was anyway not a *kopek*'s worth of difference between life and death.

At a landing stage along the river they were ordered aboard a rust-cankered steam packet and confined to the stokehold below decks. There they squatted on coal heaps in an oppressive closeness made more stifling by the heat from a throbbing castiron boiler. The firebox lit their faces, a misfit collection of gypsies, suspected anarchists and revolutionaries, Jewish children with enormous eyes. Most of them looked as if they would bolt at the least opportunity, which was doubtless why they were treated more like prisoners than recruits. But the boys Yankel's age, lacking his bloom to begin with, appeared to have a headstart on the prodigy with regard to dying. While Yankel might be shrinking to the condition of an ordinary yeshiva student, the other *bochers* were already several parts ghost. In this they heeded an unofficial imperial edict that went: The Jewish problem will be solved when one-third have emigrated, one-third converted, and one-third (here the government would provide needed assistance) died off. The last was apparently the present company's chosen alternative.

Bare-chested stokers fed the furnace and the packet was launched downstream to God knew where, upon which the boys began surrendering in earnest. Because there'd been conversation, furtive exchanges about a voyage from bad to worse, some of Yankel's fellows now had names. There was Shmulke of Uman, head like an onion bulb, who informed them between coughing up gobbets of his insides, "My mama put a note in the zayde's hand when he died." On reaching heaven his grandfather would pass the note on to the Lord who would then intercede on Shmulke's behalf. There was cross-eyed Munya from Pskov who couldn't stop shitting himself, his trumpeting bowels rivaling the racket of the pistons and the churning paddle wheel. Such a stink he made that those to the left and right of him gave up the breakfasts they hadn't had.

There was Dovid Blum, a curly-topped cantor's son from Tchernobol, for whose moaning you didn't need a doctor to diagnose that he was suffering from a broken heart. When they'd been under way for no more than an hour, he stood and called out to an absent father, "*Tateh, ich mach bar mitzvah far zich*—I make a bar mitzvah by myself!" Then he stumbled toward the roaring furnace grate and dove in.

When the stokers tugged at his protruding feet, the ample boots came off in their hands. The gallery of recruits were transfixed by Dovid's stockinged toes, which curled too close to the flames for the men to get hold of. The burlier of the two, rolls of fat at the back of his glistening neck, tore a grappling iron from a beam and swung it into the fire. For all his brawn, however, the man had to pull mightily on the hook, as if an equal had engaged him in a tug-of-war from the other end. Finally the burnt Dovid Blum was retrieved from the furnace. The second stoker covered him with a tarpaulin, extinguishing the crackling torch of his hair; but not before Yankel and company had had a look at his face dripping tallow, bubble eyes drooling out of their sockets like yolks from broken shells.

His voice, though, remained miraculously intact. With a volume perhaps inherited from his father, Dovid's plangent soprano wail was louder than the chuffing engine and the farting Munya. Boys who were able to shake off their paralysis slowly stepped forward from the coal bins and stood over him. Having shed their coats and tunics in the swelter of the hold, they spread them on top of the grimy tarp—like you'd throw dirt on a grave, thought Yankel, who did the same. Muffled but still amazingly shrill, Dovid's wailing persisted, prompting the boys to make a noise of their own. Although there were fewer than ten Jews present, and they not yet reached their majority, there were more than enough males to constitute a minyan. So they said Kaddish over the hill of greatcoats until the sounds emanating from under it were eventually exorcized.

Alerted to the disturbance, non-commissioned officers stormed below to break up the funeral with knouts. They directed the boys to carry the corpse aloft and drop it overboard, into sulphurous water that scarcely consented to splash. It was dusk and rations of a sort were being issued, the recruits told to line up outside a makeshift galley on the afterdeck. They were further warned that anyone refusing to eat would be forced to, and for those who didn't comprehend, there followed a demonstration—a funnel shoved down the throat of the colicky Chaim Fish, who was anyhow too far gone for such abuse to matter. Yankel received his tin of pork rind in broth, his cube of stale black bread, and recalled that dispensations might be made to save one's life. But since when did he want to save his life?

On the other hand, death out here on the river wasn't the event it was back in the world. In Shatsk you didn't so much die as you were invited to join the upper yeshiva. They scrubbed you and laid you out so tenderly, with a candle at your head; then they tucked you into a hole whose walls were boxed with the boards from your own prayer bench. The whole village turned out to escort you to the cemetary, that a like

multitude of angels might greet your entry into paradise. But here death lacked dignity, not to say significance. To die was to do Fonya a favor which Yankel no longer felt so disposed to render.

"Besides," he recalled from *The Ethics of the Fathers* (or was it Onkelos?), "where there's no bread there's no Torah."

So he dipped the bread in his cup of bilge and gnawed greedily, somehow keeping it down, and afterwards he felt a little less shaken. Before they were driven back into the stokehold, Yankel even noticed the sky. It was runneled in red like veins on the back of God's hand. The river reflected the color of the sky in that duplication of above and below specified in Kabbalah; they might be sailing down the Lord's own bloodstream, Yankel thought. But later the image of the reflecting river tended to outshine any allegorical references that found their way into his head.

The next day at sunset those who weren't too moribund were sent on deck again. This time Yankel observed how the steppe stretched away from them like nothing he'd ever encountered in holy books. Like a sea of violet grass. On the day after that they got cold porridge in the morning, and Yankel saw that they'd entered a sea of sunflowers, windmills listing like masts on the horizon. Another day, another sea, this one of acacias, that of blossoming hops. While he'd never before paid much attention to external phenomena, Yankel supposed he must be in the presence of beauty. The psalms you might call beautiful, or the hymns of Solomon written in the language of birds, but that a landscape should similarly thrill the senses: this was news. In neither Hebrew nor Yiddish could Yankel find the words to describe it. Maybe Russian—for which he was acquiring a proficiency since having it shouted at him night and day—would prove more applicable.

At the town of Zaporozhye the boat docked and what was left of Yankel's company were marched down a gangplank into a gaudy bazaar. Brooded over by ancient Cossack watchtowers, the market sold everything from spices to carpets, weapons to wives. The mixed tongues of men vied with the tongues of beasts, some of which stood as high as the carved wooden balconies, an occasional monkey riding their hump. Reaching a station the bewildered recruits were loaded into cattle cars that rocked and jolted out across a rolling plain. Through the slats those who cared to were able to spy vast orchards, vegetation that didn't know better than to flourish in a month when growing things were supposed to die. They had a glimpse before the walls of Rostov of a sea that was neither feather grass nor grain, but pure shimmering emerald brine.

It occurred to Yankel that at least one of the days through which they'd traveled must have been Shabbos. How strange that its lack of observance should have been so unremarkable, without a bump or blemish in the atmosphere to advise you of its passing.

At Stavropol the train came to a full stop and the recruits were routed from their stupor; they were hustled through streets paved in pumpkin seeds, a slate-shingled town that hunkered beneath a bank of jagged dove-gray clouds. On closer inspection the clouds turned out to be the snowy peaks of a deep mauve mountain range, and it was toward that distant fastness that their formal forced march inclined. Just beyond the town there were vertical pastures where gaunt men in astrakhan hats herded sheep on horseback. They carried daggers and pistols and sat ramrod-straight in their saddles, some showing fringes beneath their pleated shirts. Yankel had heard of these mountain Jews, who fought like demons, had several wives, and lived to astronomical ages. It heartened somehow to know that, aside from their ritual fringes, they were in no way distinguishable from their neighbors.

On the long, punishing ascent to the cloud garrison more boys were lost. Death no longer needed a leg up from the conscripts themselves, since the deprivations of the journey were more than sufficient to do them in. There were also diseases, though seldom dramatic, a feeble cough or slight ague often signaling the final collapse. But Yankel, now that he'd decided that an untimely quietus was not for him, had set about trying to survive, adapting himself to the field rations of hardtack and boiled leather. In fact, while he slogged as listlessly as the others in order not to be noticed, he felt he was beginning to thrive on *treyf* as once he'd thrived on scripture. Grown thin, he was becoming hard inside and out.

For a time Yankel composed letters in his head to Malkeh and Shlomo. Rather than console and reassure them, however, he angrily accused them of having countenanced his abduction; he catalogued in gruesome detail the indignities he was subjected to. But since, on the march, mail was neither incoming or outgoing, nor ever promised to be, Yankel supposed the best he could do with respect to his family was forget them. As a strategy this worked so well that he resolved to apply it to other areas of lingering irritation.

The Guzhny garrison was a stone-hedged aerie clinging to mist-shrouded crags high above the perpendicular city of Tiflis. Full of outcasts too

sociopathic for more civilized assignments, the barracks were tense with hostilities. There were rivalries between primitive Georgians and sodden Cossacks, between Cossacks and wild Circassian horsemen, who frequently called one another out for duels. The ruffians bullied the fanatical spit-and-polish types who in turn hounded the malcontents quoting Bakunin's *Revolutionary Catechism*, but all were united in their hatred of yids. When the remnant of Yankel's company arrived at the outpost after the crucible of their month-long trek, officers and enlisted men alike joined in continuing their persecution. Having ruled out dying in harness, Yankel began to consider the other prescribed alternatives. Emigration was of course out of the question and conversion carried with it a stigma even among the gentiles; as witness Mottel Toches-Lekker who'd kissed the rosary of the garrison priest, and was afterward thrashed for a coward as well as for being a member of a verminous race. So how should one proceed to live?

Briefly Yankel flirted with the notion of becoming a model soldier. But model soldiers were conspicuous, distinguished by rank and decoration, and lately Yankel was leaning more toward invisibility. It was a condition that he feared might not come naturally, though, to the once famous prodigy of Shatsk. Then it struck him how, in a sense, he'd already begun to effect his own dissolution. By erasing his memory, Yankel covered his tracks; he lost his identity and thus became no one. And as no one, it stood to reason, he would scarcely be worthy of Fonya's regard.

Thanks to a traumatic journey the picture of his home had grown dim, and along with it much of the learning that flourished only in native mud. Further abetted through the rigors of the regimental routine—the maneuvers across chasms and raging torrents, bayonet drills on fields of ice, tedious footslogs interrupted by sudden skirmishes with furious slant-eyed bandits, the food that wasn't food, sleep that wasn't sleep—Yankel began to forget his Talmud by degrees. The first to go were the commentaries on the orders and tractates, then the orders and tractates themselves: the laws concerning the preparation of a red heifer's ashes to purify those who have contact with the dead; the laws governing adultery, murder, war, the duties incumbent on the first-born. Next he lost the threads of aggadah and midrashim, the tales of golems, dybbuks, and fallen angels, the tales of miracles. He forgot the one about what's-her-face, Queen Esther, who outwitted an enemy of Israel (or was it that she cut somebody's hair?) and Joseph who fought a giant in a dream. In the end Yankel began to forget the Hebrew alphabet itself: the letter *mem* like a cat arching its back, the *shin* like a fleur-de-lis, elegant *gimmel* like a lady's boot, or was it her glove?

Eventually all the books he used to know became one book in Yankel's mind, a single Book which contained all the stories including his own. He was comfortable with this hypothesis, that the Book should bear the burden of remembering; it let him off the hook and made exile seem less like exile than the place where, for the time being, he happened to belong.

"Change your place and you change your luck," he announced to the other boys eroded by homesickness. When they asked where he'd gleaned that particular tidbit of wisdom, Yankel shrugged and couldn't say.

It helped that there was nothing in this remote mountain stronghold to remind him of the past, though odd scraps of memory still surfaced now and then. He might be shivering at his sentry post, gazing from the ramparts toward a corona of moon above some dizzy pinnacle, when he remembered the Bird's Nest. This was the hallowed dwelling place of Messiah until such time as He should be called to earth to redeem His people. Or during patrols it might come to him that these fierce mountain Jews were one of the ten lost tribes. Didn't they live beyond a river that could have been the legendary Sambatyon, though in these parts it was known as Kura Gorge? And among the veiled peaks that shouldered one another like a battalion of headless colossi, blocking your path between the Black and Caspian Seas, wasn't there one called Ararat? That was where, if Yankel weren't mistaken, a passenger boat had once run aground in a flood. But such associations were inconsequential, like shrapnel from bygone wars, pieces of which sometimes worked their way out of an old soldier's knee. The soldier would extract the shard with a blade then throw it away as casually as a splinter, never thinking to keep it for a souvenir. □

In the final movement, the subsequent generations are brought up to date, their stories leading inevitably back to North Main Street. The last section of the novella, and again the farthest removed from the present, concerns Yankel's desertion from the Russian army; it details his two decades of wandering, during which he accumulates certain mythical creatures fled from holy books burned in the pogroms. In the end, Yankel Kabakoff and his band of misfits cross the ocean to the Golden Land.

BOOK REVIEW

Shtetl on the Range

Paul Buhle

Comrades and Chicken Farmers: The Story of a California Jewish Community, by Kenneth L. Kann. Cornell University Press, 1993, 303 pp.

No immigrant group, it is safe to say, has ever been or will ever be documented as thoroughly as Eastern European Jews in the United States. Hundreds of analytical volumes, thousands of semifictional plays, films, novels, and short stories (with more of all these in the making), testify to the vividness and the continuing salability of their unique historical experience. And yet, amidst the crowded field, significant areas remain almost uncharted. Of Jews in the American countryside, for instance, we hear relatively little; meanwhile, Jewish radicalism continues to be seen mainly in relation to large institutions (unions, parties, etc.) rather than in relation to Jewish social and cultural life of the time.

Oral history helps to fill these gaps, while imparting a new feel to immigrant lives. Old-timers of every type and educational level invariably slip into mentally reconstructing their pasts to make their lives seem less flawed and contradictory. But their stories, as stories, can have the revelatory quality of good fiction. An outsider to both Jewish and immigrant life, I found myself a decade ago moving from beach to beach (Brighton to Miami) and other outposts (Co-op City to West Los Angeles) with tape recorder in hand, encountering ageless veterans whose children and grandchildren had long since lost interest in the immigrant tales. They gave me those stories hungrily, knowing as I did that they and their generation would soon vanish. I fell head-over-heels for them and remain determinedly faithful to the people who extended their hands and hearts to me—and changed my view of the world.



Oral historian Ken Kann has, I think, had a similar experience, more locally intense but touched with the same respect and admiration. *Comrades and Chicken Farmers*, the second literary consequence of his work (his earlier volume, *Joe Rapoport: The Life of a Jewish Radical* was published a decade ago) will touch readers who remember energetic, argumentative, and sometimes intolerable grandparents who nevertheless uttered tender phrases in broken accents. But even those without such personal memories will discover some element of the Jewishness tapped here.

A century ago in Petaluma, a community thirty-five miles north of San Francisco, a handful of German Jews planted themselves among the gentile farmers, unknowingly opening the way for East Europeans fleeing a world on fire. During the 1910s, probably the most radical era in Jewish history, Yiddish-speaking immigrants bubbled with visions of socialism, communism, and labor Zionism. A large number had imbibed enough *Yiddishkayt* to reject cultural (emphatically including language) assimilation. They also knew that without a drastic change in the world and/or in Jewish conditions, their European relatives were living on borrowed time. Thousands of youngsters decided not to stay in revolutionary Russia or Poland but still yearned for a socialist world or at least a socialistic Zion in Palestine. But while they dreamed, they had to make a living in America.

From the New York point of entry, Los Angeles sounded like the Promised Land. But it was an open-shop town and besides had few industrial jobs available. Those who hated the false smiles of commercial trades and yearned for country living heard of a significantly Jewish place where they might work for themselves. All they had to do was to learn to raise chickens by the tens of thousands and to survive rural isolation among the gentiles.

In any oral history with old-timers, it is youthful memory which stands out, and naturally the harsh recollections of the Old Country along with the first days of Petaluma are extraordinarily vivid. "I was in my first strike when I was fourteen… At that time I was an

Paul Buhle interviewed many Yiddish speakers (among others) of every progressive inclination for the Oral History of the American Left, Tamiment Library, New York University, whose collection is open to the public.

idealist... We wanted a working class revolution that should make a free world where you don't need money and everything will be wonderful." Later: "We heard from friends that Petaluma is a good place to start a chicken ranch. You don't work for anybody." Or, "I met Emma at a Labor Zionist summer camp. She was a waitress at my table. I still had it in my mind to be a farmer in Palestine. I thought Petaluma was in that direction... Instead, I found a shtetl in California."

These are typical stories of what more than one old-timer proudly described to me as the "fortunate generation." They went through great physical danger in Europe, two American red scares, and finally the incomprehension of their children and grandchildren toward their experiences. But still they were fortunate, they insisted, because they had lived the sharing of ideals and had kept up intimate friendships for a half-century or more. Of disillusionments, they had plenty along the way. But they have always seemed remarkably firm in their own identities, secure, despite everything, in the knowledge of what they had been and had tried to do for the world and for Jews.

The stories of the Petaluma crowd generally grow less dramatic after the early years. They learned the chicken trade and they survived the Depression through intensely practical cooperation. Whether labor Zionists, bundists, or communists, they voted alike for Robert LaFollette in 1924 and later for Roosevelt the way they joined anti-fascist movements. Many, if not all, shared a contempt for "Jewish businessmen" who didn't work with their hands for a living.

But they ran into trouble with each other (isn't it always true?) over relations with the gentiles. The Left wanted a high profile, including forceful opposition to assorted anti-Semites who operated openly (albeit usually without mass support) in rural California of the 1930s. The *rekhte* (the "Right," actually the anti-communist moderates) feared exposure of the community. Lie low or take your chances? It's always a Jewish question.

Nevertheless, because anti-fascism and not "revolution" was becoming the keynote of the 1930s, the *linke* (the Left—with few actual communists but many members of the fraternal International Workers Order) waxed strong. When in 1934 the *linke* elected a majority of the directors in the Jewish Community Center (JCC) that all factions had joined, their opponents responded through the legal power of the shareholders. It was a scandal for the people involved; their kids hardly understood what it was all about and skeptics considered both sides to be living in a fantastic international dream with little relevance for Petaluma.

Thousands of young Jews decided not to stay in revolutionary Russia but still yearned for a socialist world or at least a socialistic Zion in Palestine.

The communists pushed the question of political identity in 1935 through their organized sympathy with a nearby fruit-pickers' strike. The tale of communist fund-raisers and vigilante violence, including the kidnapping and tar-and-feathering of one of the town's favorite radicals, sounds like an unpublished "ethnic" chapter from *Grapes of Wrath* (with "Preacher Casey" as a Yiddishist!). But for the unsympathetic Jews, *Ikh volt dir moikhel deven dem sensation*—who needs the sensation?

The shared commitments and prosperity of World War II prompted a last moment of peaceful and relative unity in Jewish Petaluma. Yiddish cultural life was still lively, although it was painfully clear that all efforts to transmit it to younger generations would fail. Then came the Cold War and the final split; shortly after, the International Workers Order (IWO) appeared on the dreaded Attorney General's list of "subversive" organizations. Once more deeply fearful of the gentiles, and increasingly bitter at the Left's continuing hold on part of the town, the moderates excluded the IWO and the Jewish Folk Chorus from the JCC—this time by gathering proxy votes of people who had left the area. It was undemocratic and ignominious. And it was also true that the moderates were right about Soviet persecution of Jews.

But as a non-communist observer noted, the fearful *rekhte* had missed a subtler point. Jewish communists and near-communists also had families murdered by the Nazis, relatives struggling in Israel, and others living precariously in Russia. They needed time to adjust their beliefs and shake off their myths about Stalinism. And they had every reason to attack the racism and injustice in American society that erstwhile socialists now seemed ever more willing to overlook. Did the FBI or the goyim ever really care so much, anyway, about a bunch of old-timers who got together to sing songs and read Yiddish? The Petaluma IWO met at the Petaluma Women's Club and the Jewish chorus hired the VFW Hall! To most of the gentiles, the Jew was a Jew.

In any event, by the 1950s, their way of life was vanishing. Small and even medium-sized family producers were pushed to the wall by giant chicken operations, precursors of the Perdue-style agribusiness, with growth hormones for the chickens and dangerous, minimum-wage toil for the workers. For the Left, financial ruin of the local cooperative proved once more the heartlessness of capitalism. For others, it demonstrated the necessity to leave the last illusions of the old life behind, join the local Chamber of Commerce or Kiwanis, and become real Americans.

By the sixties, as the freeways reached Petaluma, land had become most valuable for tract housing. It seems like the end of the story, but not quite. Imagine the third-generation kids. In high school they were naturally the ones against the Vietnam War, threatened by boys whose grandfathers had beaten their own *zeydas* thirty years earlier. Just as naturally, as they went on to college, they became Bay Area hippies. Then one day, they show up in Petaluma again, dozens of childhood friends, take off their clothes and jump in the hot tub together. Sound like the afterthought for an overly long movie?

The main, the real story, is far less happy. From a political angle, it may be typified by the new JCC staffer who came across stacks of "books on socialism and communism" and couldn't figure why in the world they were in a Jewish community collection. She threw them out. Even the memory of a memory had vanished.

From another standpoint, the loss is more cultural than political. A grizzled

old lefty recalls painfully, "We had an atmosphere of Yiddish culture around the house. But our movement did not succeed to bring it to the next generation. Not in Petaluma, not anywhere." An equally ancient labor Zionist, on the other side of decades of fratricidal conflict, chimes in similarly, "My own children disappeared from Petaluma... Those who remain do not participate in our Jewish community life. It happened in our own good Zionist families—the grandchildren married gentiles and went over to the goyim...we get mixed up and disappear. We are being swallowed up in America!"

No doubt we take some consolation that other, later immigrants now celebrate (or at least tolerate) their own *zeydes* and *bobbes* with rich recollections and heavy accents in Spanish or Chinese or Haitian patois. And we can be happy that so much work continues to be done about Jewish generational memory—from popular culture accounts to scholarship.

Speaking for myself, all this is rather cold comfort. The lives of the "fortunate generation" in the first half of the twentieth century, stateless but never without ideals, will continue to resonate because nothing has replaced their *Yiddishkayt* and their supreme humanism.

Their ideals, their Jewish warmth, are surely not beyond recuperation and redemption. Indeed, Akiva Lerner, in the pages of this magazine ("Roundtable: Twentysomethings," May/June 1993) reflected upon the need of the twentysomething generation to find a road back to a mixture of universalism and Jewish values. It will not be easy. Itche Goldberg—octogenarian editor of *Yiddishe Kultur*—is fond of saying that there is no *Yiddishkayt* without tears, and not only tears for the victims of the Holocaust, but for our own sense of loss. We can aspire to relocate in ourselves the values that the late Irving Howe describes in the closing pages of *World of Our Fathers*, a "code of *menschlikhkeit*, a readiness to live for ideals beyond the clamor of self...and a persuasion that human existence is a deeply serious matter for which all of us are finally accountable."

This is beautifully stated, but misses one point especially vital for us today. Read the short stories of Sholom Aleichem, talk to the old-timers (if you can still find any) who remember hitch-hiking through the Rockies in the 1920s or 1930s and consider what the early Petalumans really wanted besides self-employment. The Jewish love for nature, rooted as much in shtetl daily life and American summer escapes from the city as in historical doctrine, weakened for several generations of upward mobility climaxing in the suburbs. The aspiration to "make the deserts bloom" in Israel was perhaps a final substitute for pastoral aspirations, even if it did not comprehend what the loss of precious wetlands and the use of pesticides actually meant to a fragile ecology.

Ask schoolchildren today what "issue" is most vital to them and they are likely to say: the planet. If we are looking for a Jewish link, we will find it still waiting for us, with so much else, in the lives and the yearnings of immigrant idealists. To pretend we have yet learned the great lessons that those vanished ones had to give would be worse, by far, than merely mourning their final disappearance. □

BOOK REVIEW

When Men Became Boys

Ruth Rosen

American Manhood: Transformations in Masculinity from the Revolution to the Modern Era, by E. Anthony Rotundo, Basic Books 1993, 297 pp, $25.

Recently, a flurry of controversies has titillated a public baffled by changing notions of what private and public sexual behavior is appropriate for men. The Clarence Thomas hearings, the William Kennedy Smith and Mike Tyson date rape trials, the Navy's Tailhook sex scandal, the gang rape of a retarded girl in New Jersey, proposed new regulations at the University of Virginia that would forbid any faculty sexual involvement with undergraduates, and the furious debate over homosexuals in the military—all have sparked national debates on the subject.

But, despite the accompanying talk-show frenzy, none of this is really new. In the midst of the sexual "revolution" of the 1960s, feminists began to reconsider the political dimensions of sexuality. To some feminists, the new freedom seemed too rife with exploitation, too much on men's terms. Few wanted to curb their liberties, but many feminists sought to limit the damage they could bring and to insure gender equality. So activists and writers excavated and exposed, named and redefined the hidden injuries of sex—rape, harassment, incest, marital and date rape. Meanwhile, gays and lesbians struggled to persuade American society that sexual orientation was an

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individual right, not cause for discrimination.

So the sexual wars have simmered for nearly three decades, episodically erupting into public life. Now, in the aftermath of so many scandals, what used to be a conversation among feminists has entered the political discourse of the entire nation.

Many Americans are confused. The "good" old days when men could abuse women with impunity are fast disappearing. But a new national consensus has yet to be forged. When does sexual interest cross the line and turn into harassment? When does "no" really mean "no"? Can and should a democratic society legislate affairs of the heart? Men are bewildered; they are no longer sure how to behave with their female co-workers. Women are baffled as well. Even feminists sharply debate whether new policies should protect women or advance their sexual freedom.

Those who defended Bob Packwood, Mike Tyson, William Kennedy Smith, the Tailhook molesters, and assorted teenaged "pranksters" usually justified their behavior with a common phrase: Boys will be boys. Don't take it so seriously, they insinuated, it's just the way men are.

But where did the idea originate that men are fundamentally out of control, cannot contain their sexual lust, and must, if they are real men, grab every opportunity for sexual conquest, even if it results in rape or sexual harassment?

According to E. Anthony Rotundo, author of *American Manhood*, our views about American manhood, including the notion that boys will be boys, originated in the nineteenth century. In a study based largely on the private papers of middle-class whites from the Northeast, he argues that seventeenth-century colonists would have blanched at such an idea. Their male paragon tried to treat his dependents with firm but affectionate wisdom and sought to live a pious, dutiful, restrained life. Self-assertion was limited by one's duty to God and obligation to serve the larger community.

By the mid-nineteenth century, however, what Rotundo dubs "communal manhood" had undergone a dramatic transformation. As men in the rising middle class entered a booming market economy, they began to take their social status and identity from their own achievement, not from the accident of their birth. In an age of entrepreneurs and industrialists, they hoped to become self-made men. Once regarded as evidence of religious defiance, individualism and self-assertion now turned into virtues. In an age that valued competition over cooperation, men jealously defended their autonomy and freedom from external authority. The urge for dominance—over women as well as other men—soon became a mark of manliness.

Fearing this new definition of manly passion, middle-class women, newly redefined as passionless, took up the task of taming men. With growing numbers of absentee fathers at work, mothers—the new guardians of the culture—were expected to train their sons to restrain their bestial natures by teaching them the cardinal Victorian virtues of discipline, rationality, and self-restraint.

The legacy of "boy culture," challenged by feminists but hardly demolished, is still alive and thrashing about in the American psyche.

Middle-class men, then, received mixed messages. To succeed, they needed to be both self-restrained and aggressive. What prepared them for this adult role was "Boy Culture." According to Rotundo, Boy Culture flourished beyond the rules of the home and the marketplace. Free of maternal and paternal surveillance, boys ran wild, tested each other's physical prowess and manly courage with considerable social sadism, exalted courage and aggression and discouraged the display of emotion, especially tender feelings. Boy culture allowed young men to short-circuit their mother's influence, even as it prepared them for social and economic combat as adult men.

Boys in the nineteenth century, therefore, learned to live a schizoid existence, now so common we barely notice the contradictions. "It meant," as Rotundo argues, "a constant adjustment to the clashing values and demands of two different worlds—back and forth from a domestic world of mutual dependence to a public world of independence; from an atmosphere of cooperation and nurture to one of competition and conflict; from a sphere where intimacy was encouraged to one where human relationships were treated instrumentally; from an environment that supported affectionate impulses to one that sanctioned aggressive impulses; from a social space that was seen as female to another that was considered male."

None of this seems particularly strange to those of us who have watched men behave like tyrants at work, only to return home and engage in tender relationships with their families. The cold, competitive business voice on the phone who whispers sweet nothings in the evening is eerily familiar. Not all men negotiate the transition deftly, but it is no longer a new development. We expect a change in tone as a man—and increasingly a woman—commutes between the marketplace and home. For nineteenth-century men, however, such divided lives were new. And it was Boy Culture that prepared them to enter an initially confusing and often frightening commercial world.

Still, many men found the transition difficult. They suffered from trying to combine the virtues of a Christian gentlemen with the ruthlessness of a self-made man. While middle-class women resolved their disgruntlement with new social constraints through hysterical symptoms, men escaped into neurasthenia—a vague, debilitating illness that sapped their ability to compete or even function in the new society. Recurrent breakdowns—accompanied by such symptoms as blurred vision, indigestion, restlessness, backache, constipation, disorientation, palpitations, insomnia, tension, depression, and fatigue—gave men a socially acceptable way of finding temporary respite from modern life.

Curiously, the disease began to disappear after 1910. This is when Rotundo suggests that a second "revolution" in the meaning of masculinity began to appear in American society. Victorians had viewed aggressive competition as a means toward an end. Now it became the end itself. In

the early twentieth century—at the dawn of the consumer culture, when single women began flooding the workplace and corporate culture began limiting men's upward mobility—a new ideal of masculinity appeared, one that glamorized a forceful, decisive, vigorous, bold personality. What Rotundo calls "passionate manhood" emerged; Teddy Roosevelt preached it as "the doctrine of the strenuous life."

Enthusiasts of vigorous manliness equated strength of character with strength of body. Those animal instincts—lust, greed, selfishness, ambition, and physical assertiveness—which Victorians had regarded as threats to civilization—were now celebrated as positive attributes. Eager to compare themselves to the new "primitives" just being discovered by colonialists and imperialists, affluent men tramped through woods and hills, hoping to cure their "American nervousness" by learning from what contemporaries described as "Oriental people, the inhabitants of the tropics, and the colored peoples generally." Fraternal lodges self-consciously created new rituals that drew upon the rites of "savage" peoples. Jack London's 1903 *Call of the Wild* reinforced the increasingly popular idea that behind every man lurked a wild animal.

Unlike the Victorian entrepreneur, the new male warrior no longer defined himself in opposition to boyhood. Rather, adult middle-class men desired to embody the aggressive, sadistic, adventuresome, and playful qualities attributed to boys. Grown men, argues Rotundo, were ever more likely to be called boys. "We men are after all, but grown up boys," Edward Bok wrote in 1892 in a *Ladies Home Journal* editorial. When asked why he went on a dangerous expedition up the Amazon in his fifties, Teddy Roosevelt replied, "I had to go. It was my last chance to be a boy."

Thus was born the idea that boys will be boys—an idea that would have shocked the Puritans and astonished most Victorians. In the crucible of a consumer culture and an increasingly imperialist nation, the idea that men could—and should—act like boys had a certain logic—and necessity. To become proper consumers, men had to throw off some of their self-restraint. To make the world safe for American democracy, men had to demonstrate savage instincts as warriors.

Unfortunately Rotundo's story—despite the book's title—abruptly ends in the early twentieth century. In an epilogue, he sketches out a predictable scenario—how the therapeutic culture of the twentieth century has redefined masculinity in terms of self-expression and self-enjoyment. Against the conformism of the corporate team player, popular culture idealizes the existential anti-hero. Against the machismo of the military warrior, we have New Age "spiritual warriors," who, à la Robert Bly and friends, glory in the mythopoeic fantasies of the past. Like their early twentieth-century counterparts, these born-again masculinists seek to recover their sense of manliness through the rituals of premodern males. Like the warriors of the early imperialist age, their quest requires stylized retreats and separation from the domestic influence of women.

Like their early twentieth-century counterparts, Bly's born-again masculinists seek to recover their sense of manliness through the rituals of pre-modern males. Like the warriors of the early imperialist age, their quest requires stylized retreats and separation from the domestic influence of women.

Rotundo deserves praise for contributing a historical perspective to the swirling debates over men's appropriate sexual behavior. His book also widens an important current debate about the recent history of sexuality. In their 1986 book, *Remaking Love*, Barbara Ehrenreich and her coauthors argued that it is women whose sexual behavior has changed most dramatically in the twentieth century and therefore caused the sexual revolution. Men's sexual behavior, they argued, stayed pretty much the same. Rotundo's account reminds us that consumerist reinventions of manhood have also given men permission to behave as predators, indulging in the sport of conquest for its own sake. Without that permission, the wounds of the sexual revolution would not make sense.

Regrettably, Rotundo's story stops just when the history of masculinity and manhood gets most complicated—and exciting. At the end of the twentieth century, there is no longer one dominant paradigm of manhood. Today, an astonishing array of masculine identities compete for men's loyalty and purchasing power. A white middle-class man, of the sort Rotundo studied, can choose between Rambo-ish machismo or the achingly sensitive new male. Any man—of whatever ethnic or racial background—who can afford it can mix and match masculine identities, according to whim and situation. At work, he can dress the Yuppie; at the gym, the bodybuilder; at home, he can switch to jeans and work shirt, thus confirming his ultimate loyalty to the working class. On weekends, in the spirit of Teddy Roosevelt, he can outfit himself as an urban rugged individualist—tooling about town in Jeep and safari jacket.

The creation of multiple and overlapping masculine identities is a major development in the history of manhood. Yet, despite the choices available, it is the predatory male, the man who acts like a boy, who is hauled out to rationalize naval officers or teenagers who run amok. The legacy of "boy culture," challenged by feminists but hardly demolished, is still alive and thrashing about the American psyche.

Rotundo, in his graceful book informed by a feminist perspective lightly worn, has unearthed the origins of our most persistent idea about masculinity. What we don't know is how long it will take for the cultural gap to close, for Americans to give up this baleful link with the nineteenth century and to realize, at long last, that real men don't behave as boys. □

THE YEAR OF THE AGUNAH

(Continued from p. 53)

property to take into account any barrier to remarriage, including the failure of the husband to give a *get*. This law has helped a number of women, but some rabbis in Agudath Israel, a right-wing Orthodox organization, are seeking its repeal on the grounds that it results in a coerced *get*, which is halachically invalid. (Compare the opinion of Maimonides, who says that a husband may be beaten until he says "I am willing" to give a *get*, and the get is not considered coerced and is valid.) New Yorkers concerned about this challenge can write in support of the law to Governor Mario Cuomo or Assemblyman Sheldon Silver, the law's original sponsor.

The need to turn to the civil authorities to find a remedy for *agunah* is an embarrassment to the Orthodox community, constituting an acknowledgement on the part of halachic authorities that have failed to deal with a burning social and ethical problem. In the absence of an effective solution, some Orthodox synagogues are putting pressure on recalcitrant husbands by ostracizing them from the community. Unfortunately, given the fragmentation of American Orthodoxy, it is easy for such men to switch to other congregations, where they can be called to the Torah, teach, and even serve as rabbis.

Rivkeh Haut and Susan Aranoff, two of the co-founders of Agunah, Inc., an organization seeking reform of the *beit din* system and a halachic solution to the problem of *agunah*, argue that the persistence of *agunot* undermines the moral legitimacy of Orthodoxy. On the one hand, Orthodox rabbis argue that, for the sake of Jewish unity, all marriage and divorce procedures should adhere strictly to Halacha. On the other hand, they are unwilling to address the vulnerability of women who enter into halachically valid marriages. Moreover, while Orthodox rabbis are always bemoaning intermarriage and low birth rates, their failure to free *agunot* is keeping large numbers of traditional women who would love to have children, or additional children, from remarrying. Haut suggests that non-Orthodox Jews seize opportunities posed by weddings, bar mitzvahs, lectures, and other public events to challenge Orthodox rabbis with these questions: "What are you doing to help *agunot*? How can you ask us to become Orthodox, to be converted or married by Orthodox standards, when you are permitting this terrible

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situation to exist?" Moreover, no interdenominational discussion of intermarriage or Jewish birthrates should take place that fails to raise this issue.

The CCAR and RRA (Reform and Reconstructionist rabbinic organizations respectively) can also put pressure on the Orthodox in a more systematic way. Some formerly Orthodox men seek out Reform and Reconstructionist rabbis so that they can remarry without giving their wives a *get.* If the two rabbinic organizations passed motions that, on moral grounds, urged rabbis not perform any weddings for such men, they could cut off an avenue of escape, at the same time making an important ethical statement.

Meanwhile, desperate *agunot* and their supporters are becoming more militant. Agunah, Inc., which is an Orthodox feminist group, has organized demonstrations at Agudath Israel conferences. It and G.E.T. (Getting Equitable Treatment), another organization for *agunah* relief, have picketed the homes, businesses, and synagogues of men who are withholding *gittin* from their wives. The recent founding of ICAR represents an attempt to marshall the energy of organizations throughout the Jewish world, from those focused specifically on questions of divorce to broad-based groups such as Hadassah. ICAR hopes to sponsor a series of high-profile local and international events that will bring together many segments of the Jewish community to address the plight of *agunot*. Its goal is to get the Israeli rabbinate to formulate a halachic solution to the problem of *agunah* that halachic Jews worldwide will find acceptable.

As Susan Alter, the third co-founder of Agunah, Inc., points out, this goal has a certain irony. Orthodox women pressing the rabbinate for halachic change are asking those who have oppressed them to find a way to alleviate that oppression. But since oppressors are not known for spontaneously surrendering their power out of sympathetic identification with their victims, Israeli or American rabbis are unlikely to act until the shame and cost of wielding power in this way are made to outweigh its rewards. While all Jews can increase the pressure for a creative halachic response to the issue, those of us in communities where women have a voice can reexamine the deeper problems with marriage, divorce, and rabbinic authority that generate *agunot* in the first place. Getting Orthodox rabbis to solve the problem of divorce within a framework that denies the agency of women is a necessary short-term remedy. Changing the foundations of Jewish marriage and empowering women to participate in the formulation of Jewish law are the only solutions that will prevent abuse in the long haul. □

POLITICS OF MEANING

(Continued from p. 26)

city kids who turn to gangs—that the individual he seeks to protect is dependent on the strength of community; indeed, a politics of meaning seeks to nourish an individuality which is dying in the absence of the necessary social supports. Moreover, Wieseltier is dishonest in not acknowledging that the pathologies of unrestrained individualism—so palpable in the last decade among the outlaw savings and loan entrepreneurs, the Wall Street junk bond speculators, and the yuppie culture of greed—can be as tragic as those of undisciplined communitarianism. But communitarians should not overlook the reality that historically civil society has not been very civil and community has meant in-groups coalescing around their hatred of out-groups.

I think it's important for us to emphasize that the politics of meaning is a particular kind of communitarianism, and that in our variant we are talking about forms of community that are relatively new, we are *not* subscribing to community on *any* terms, and we are not subscribing to a romanticized view of community of the past. The nostalgia of some forms of communitarianism must be avoided. That leads me to the view that we must look at embryonic communities, the actual forms of political practice that already embody elements of the politics of meaning, from feminism to environmentalism, that already have aspects of their movements concerned with issues of value, community, solidarity, and responsibility. And there are people involved in working with gangs, recovery groups, groups involved in dealing with the homeless, and many other ongoing activities where one can move from the realm of theory to that of emerging practice.

Edsall: What is distinctive about Michael Lerner's formulation of the politics of meaning is the way that he does root this in a real daily life issue, the issue of the family that no one on the Left has been willing to address in as much detail. Where the household is in crisis, all these other kinds of emerging communities will not mean enough, not unless there is a politics that speaks to the family crisis—and that is why I think it wrong to say that Lerner isn't already suggesting a politics which move beyond theory and into practice, only it is the concrete experience of families, not of community organizations, from which these ideas emerge.

Derber: But the politics of meaning needs to link the

crisis of families to the crisis of larger support structures that used to provide a context for individual families.

Edsall: Without blinking at highly charged issues of restriction and reduced options for individual expressive freedom.

Derber: Yes, without blaming.

Edsall: No, *with blaming*. I think the Left has been so allergic to blaming that it has impoverished the discourse of community. If you don't meet your responsibilities you are blameworthy, and this has been hard for the Left to accept. Not only hard, but genuinely painful.

Derber: True.

Edsall: We have a crisis of father absence and we need *men* to take up this issue of responsibility, caring, commitment to others. That's why it's important that the politics of meaning not be seen just as a feminist issue, but as emerging from a movement in which men have a crucial role to play.

Gabel: What we need is a way of thinking and talking that is evocative, playful, and moves people. We need a way of speaking that evokes a certain kind of feeling that makes people feel the aliveness and connectedness to which the concepts refer. I currently am engaged in one of the new experiments in community of which Charlie Derber talks. New College of California seeks to break down the distinction between education and the real world. The curriculum aims to develop students who can both function in the real world and yet remain critical of existing social arrangements, can remain empathic to people's unique needs, and can remain curious. The college seeks to be a cultural center not only for students but also for community groups in the surrounding community so that students have this connection with nontraditional and social change organizations in the larger world.

The main problems we have cannot be solved by looking at how food co-ops in the Northeast function, or how ESOPs work. The problems we have are more like this: the fear that people have at being part of a community, the sense of mistrust that people feel participating in committee meetings, the paranoia that gets enacted within the institution—these are the things that most impact on undermining progressive social change. And these are aspects of reality that are unfortunately being dismissed as the psychological dimension of the world, with the notion that psychological has to do with personal life and the isolated individual or his or her family, and dealing with the problem in therapy. In fact, this is a central political problem: to foster a sense of confidence that a community can be built and sustained. The way to really tell the story of New College is not to draw a flow chart of the alternative ways that we are organized in order to create a communal environment, but rather to describe the reality of the psychodynamics that happen in the institution, so that the reader or listener can hear the distortions in human relationships and the ways of building confidence that we've learned over time, and through that process learning how their own fears might be spoken to.

In building the politics of meaning, what we need is to discuss the experience of people struggling against their feeling of alienation and their attempts to create community, and on the other hand reacting in fear of that and acting out in various ways that distort the project.

Derber: Exactly the kind of evocative descriptions you talk about is what we must do in building the politics of meaning. But there's also a need for analysis at every level.

TIKKUN ought to offer a framework for analyzing current developments in the Clinton administration and its programs from the standpoint of the new paradigm of politics that the politics of meaning offers.

Edsall: I think that it is the long-term vision, not the short-term policy directions, that is most exciting about the politics of meaning—and I think it is that that originally captured the imagination of Hillary Clinton because she could see the originality and intelligence and the possibility of providing a framework for a direction for the future.

TIKKUN: Ironically, her embracing of the politics of meaning now leads some people to assume that what we mean is what they are actually doing. But the reality is that there is a big distance between the philosophical framework we've been articulating and the actual political practice of the Clinton administration.

Gabel: There was an opening of people's hopes and aspirations after the election. It's important to help sustain that opening. I found the wording of the policy on gays in the military to be painfully alienated and awful; and yet I saw Colin Powell speaking to a Senate

committee in a way that indicated some movement of an entrenched bureaucracy toward greater understanding of the realities of gays and lesbians. So the attitude we should be taking is one that looks at the dimension of potential opening, because abandoning the Clintons for the mistakes or imperfect formulations they make in part reflects our fear of succeeding.

Bill Clinton may have been wrong about the gays-in-the-military policy, or Lani Guinier, or whatever. But the temptation on the part of each of us to draw a line somewhere that says, "This time he has disappointed me too much ... I put my faith in Clinton and now I'm going to go back into my private isolation"—that temptation must be resisted.

Derber: So it's important to not let the politics of meaning get defined by or rest on the accomplishments of the Clintons. To wed a new paradigm to a particular administration or to the discourse and movement of elites is a mistake.

Gabel: If people don't see something from the public arena reflected back that validates their experience, if their concerns are never seen as legitimate in the public sphere, they tend to become hopeless. That's why it wasn't inconsequential that Mrs. Clinton validated the politics of meaning concerns, and that's why it's important that TIKKUN is well known in the public arena as a voice that validates the concerns that people have about work, family life, alienation, the sense of isolation that they've been experiencing, the frustrations about living in a world of selfishness, and the feelings that so much of their lives feels meaningless. It's this external validation that gives people the sense that it's worth it to go sit through a boring meeting or start donating to a cause or giving time to volunteer or to take some step beyond just sitting by themselves and feeling despairing.

TIKKUN: There are many people involved in projects that embody to some extent the concerns of a politics of meaning. One of the tasks of TIKKUN is to get them to recognize each other as part of the same movement—and for that we need help in getting our readers to identify groups that seem to be addressing these questions, getting those groups to start reading and participating in the dialogue in TIKKUN, and eventually coming together in the conference on the politics of meaning that we will be holding, in Boston this November, and in Washington this coming March, or in creating local or regional conferences of this sort. □

A NEW SEXUAL ETHICS

(Continued from p. 68)

mosexuality and the fear of being feminized, and part of the hesitation about legitimating homosexuality is that doing so may put on the agenda a fundamental rethinking of what masculinity is or should be.

Another ironic dimension: at the same time that there is this treatment of homosexuality as an abomination, there is this eroticism articulated between Israel and God that is often imagined as a heterosexual eroticism between God the husband and Israel the wife, but the people doing this imagining are all male rabbis imagining themselves as part of this feminine Israel. So there's a way in which this tradition has a homoerotic love between men and a male God at the very center of the tradition, even as it attempts to evade the consequences of this erotic love, this dynamic may be feeding the conception that homosexuality is an abomination.

TIKKUN: The exclusion of gays from the Israel Day parade in New York in May 1993 goes far beyond any halachic requirement and suggests that there may be a homophobic element in the way people in the religious world are understanding Halacha.

Kimelman: That there are psychological factors in most ethical positions is indisputable; the question is whether the ethical position is reducible to the psychological factors.

As to the point of privileging heterosexuality, I think that one can privilege heterosexuality without persecuting homosexuality. I think in Judaism a pluralism is desirable—allowing validity in positions different from mine.

Eilberg-Schwartz: When you talk about allocation of resources within a community, there is little likelihood that you can privilege one position without discriminating against another. You are talking about whether you are going to ordain homosexuals, whether they can be members of the synagogue, how money from the Federation is spent on supporting what kind of families—and this will certainly have consequences.

Kimelman: I would like to be shown that the sanctification of homosexual relationships does not threaten to de-privileging heterosexual relationships in Jewish life. If children are exposed to this reality, they will come to see heterosexual families and raising the next generation as only one of the possible lifestyle options. □

THE NEW REPUBLIC

(Continued from p. 14)

"consultation," "participation," or any other management technique designed to co-opt rather than empower. Wieseltier apparently fails to grasp the radical implications of Lerner's politics of meaning—to notice that in some ways it raises fundamental questions about the capitalist system, and that, far from playing footsie with management, it provides a language and strategy for challenging management prerogatives and rejuvenating the labor movement.

In any case, it strains belief to the limit to assume that Wieseltier would be seriously criticizing Lerner as a tool of management or any other conservative interest. TIKKUN came on the scene and has succeeded first and foremost as "the liberal alternative to *Commentary*," giving a voice to those of us long silenced by the deafening chorus of the voices of Jewish conservatism.

What is really going on here is the defense of the most powerful weapon of the established interests The *New Republic* has come to represent: the universality and inevitability of individualist politics and meaning. Wieseltier says it himself: "The individual is the universal, the true universal."

The irony of this philosophy is that individualism was merely the smoke-screen of the Reagan/Bush years, which were as close as this country has come in recent times to a feudal regime: the holders of enormous wealth allied with the proponents of fundamentalist religion. Trying to demonstrate that any political meaning is dangerous, Wieseltier correctly points to what was actually a surfeit of meaning in the Reagan/Bush years:

> "That the Soviet Union was evil.... that the entrepreneur is the hero of capitalism, that abortion is murder ... that the federal government should not fund sexually explicit art, ... that affirmative action is a distortion of the ideal of merit."

Although he wishes to leave the reader with the impression that the meaning imparted by the Reagan/Bush era was bad, all Wieseltier proves is that meaning is unavoidable. And he's right about that. But the problem is that the ethos of individualism served that profoundly retrograde meaning by justifying huge defense expenditures as individualistic nationalism, bloated executive salaries as individualist entrepreneurial justice, and employment of the boss's golf buddies as a level playing field for individual merit. There were and are those of us who thought that the Soviet Union was not the worst evil we faced, that Reaganomics gave money to the rich from the poor and from our children, that control of reproduction was a core meaning of equal rights for half the population, and that what Wieseltier calls "merit" was mostly an affirmative action program for white men. We never got to engage the debate, however, because the conservatives hid their meaning behind Wieseltier's so-called "natural" and foundational fact of individualism.

But just in case some Rhodes scholar or other smart person sees through the "natural" business with a deft philosophical argument like "Sez who?" Wieseltier also tells his readers not to try to think of alternative "natural" orders; there are just things "that are difficult to know." The dirty little secret about this position is that the only thing more effective than controlling what's natural is controlling what can be known. The entrenched conservative establishment of rich white men has no weapon as lethal as skepticism. If nothing can be known, then nothing can be changed. If nothing can be changed, then the existing relationships of power remain in place. And the existing power rests almost entirely in the hands of rich white men—like the ones who write and read The *New Republic*.

The irony of The *New Republic*'s scoffing at Hillary Rodham Clinton and Michael Lerner is that there are few more poignant pleas for meaning than Andrew Sullivan's plea for the legalization of homosexual marriage, recently articulated on CNN's "Firing Line." Here's the president of The *New Republic* fraternity of scoffers when his interests are involved: "Marriage is about an emotional and civil commitment of one person to another. It's a far higher thing than simply sex or sexual acts. It's about one's emotional commitment to another person for good, under God ... I want to be high-minded." When it comes to his own interests, Sullivan won't even yield on the issue Wieseltier used so vociferously against the politics of meaning—that law is not morality and it is not the place of the state to approve his private quest for meaning. No, skeptical tolerance is not enough for Sullivan. He is explicitly asking for the legalization of marriage as an affirmation of his "integrity as a human being" "in the civil and public square."

Sullivan's plea convinced me. As I have held for twenty years, in a true republic, gay men and lesbian women would be allowed to marry. Who knows? Marriage might give Sullivan's life a new meaning. □

THE POLITICS OF THE SMALL

(Continued from p. 18)

too bad that we are not all people like my mother, but nevertheless, some of us are like my father, who never learned to resolve the contradiction with which he lived out his life.

For instance, when he died, when hundreds of people showed up for the memorial service, we were taken by surprise because we thought of him as a shy, quiet man. We were even more surprised when one person after another came forward to recount the acts of concern my father had performed in secret throughout his life, while pledging them to secrecy. (I think the dancing school "scholarship" my mother arranged for my childhood friend may have been provided by my father, but my mother would not have known of this.)

Maybe my father was just one of those shy, modest people who like to remain hidden. Or maybe he thought my mother and I might have laughed at him, the way we would also have laughed at the neighbor building birdhouses for endangered species, or the woman who rescues greyhounds, or the man who is concerned about the cutting down of trees and the spotted owl. If the small is problematic, the large has its problems too. It tends to encourage a sense of contempt for anything that is not as large as itself, so that soon one's work with the mentally ill, or the homeless, or the battered can come to seem futile when set against the large numbers of homeless and battered and mentally ill who wander the streets beyond the reach of one's acts of concern; so that soon one is not doing what one might because one is defeated by not doing what one should, and the process of closing off sets in and soon one is wrapped in a numbing, life-threatening indifference, as I was in my dream.

It would be better if we could all do more. It would also be better if we all could do something. That something may never be enough, but it *is* something and in that sense better than doing nothing. Taken together, as the total investment of the human community in acts of concern, these small acts, each appropriate to the temperament of the person acting, begin to add up. Add together all the local, individual, specific, particular, private acts and you find that each one of us, doing what we are able to do, doing something, involved in our small acts according to our temperamental inclination are contributing to a global effort of concern. It does not really matter which acts are larger, or smaller, or more important, or more lasting, or more consequential, or which should come first while others are postponed, because what matters is that every form of suffering and depletion be addressed, as a great deal more of it would be if all of us acted, whenever we could, to the degree we can. I know that the small (left to itself) does not stop wars from occurring, or halt the spread of fascism, or the collapse of economic systems, or the decline of great states. But who after all knows where these small acts lead? At the very least, they set in motion a considerable decency to set against the considerable destructiveness in the world.

I think of this as the psychology of political minimalism, which takes note of the power of the small, observes its potential for generating consequence, and places each individual act of concern within the totality of concerned acts that represent the human community's commitment to itself and to life on this planet. A social movement founded on a respect for these small acts, made up (among others) of people whose capacities are organized by the politics of the small, might find itself gathering its members once or twice a year to take note of the collective power that has been generated by individual acts of concern. Such a movement, by observing the totality that grows out of small acts, would begin to generate a collective identity of concern. Sooner or later, each of us acting as an "I" would know ourself to be part of a loosely constructed "we," a movement of social engagement whose actions move in consistently expanding, concentric circles from the individual and local through the more general, to the most severe global issues of social injustice, without ever losing track of its roots in the small.

The small, it might be said, spins the threads that weave the net that catches the world. This world-net we cast, almost unknowingly, from our gathering together of individual acts, holds as a value that which is intimate, immediate, participatory, and personally engaged. When these values grow strong enough to address a disintegrating society, we will be standing face-to-face with a movement for social justice that may be fundamentally different from movements that have come before. Built on the widest possible temperamental diversity, this movement, in an effort to take in the widest span of social concerns, should have room in it for the practitioners of the small, the sometime activists, the world-changing idealists, the meat-and-potato practical workers, as well as those of us who like to think more, act less, but undoubtedly would be inspired to act more in a sisterhood or fellowship that welcomed bit part (en)actors.

In this sense, aphoristically, (at least for now), I am proposing that we do the *least* we can. For that least done will still be more than the more we should do, but tend to leave undone. □

JEWS, MONEY, AND SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

(Continued from p. 36)

ranks of the economically privileged, has also lessened the Jewish sense of stake in urban issues.

Despite these obstacles, there is still substantial agreement among American Jews about the need to overcome the poverty that torments 32 million American families and undermines the well-being of the United States as a whole. Motivated both by self-interest and by a well-preserved prophetic sensibility, the Jewish community as a whole remains one of America's most tenacious advocates of democracy, generosity, and open-mindedness, notwithstanding twelve years of conservative government. "When Ronald Reagan asked and George Bush echoed, 'Are you better off today than you were eight years ago,'" said Michael Pelavin, then-chair of NJCRAC, in a 1989 address, "the Jewish community answered not individually but collectively. While many of us may indeed be better of financially today than in 1980, we dispute the premise of the question. We ask today, 'What is the state of America today compared to eight years ago?' ...The strength of the Jewish community and its ability to survive in freedom bears a direct relationship to the quality of life of those around us..."

Whether we render our economic life into a Torah of Money or an idolatrous worship of the Almighty Dollar, our choices have consequences.

Pelavin's affirmation of Jewish prosperity during the Reagan-Bush years is offset by the sense of downward mobility faced by many baby-boomer Jews, their younger siblings, and children. The white-collar recession of the past few years and the general stagnation of the middle class has hit Jews hard. Unemployment for college graduates, notes Rob Hoffman in the *International Jewish Monthly* of B'nai B'rith (May 1992), rose from 5.2 percent to 6.9 percent in 1991, and two thirds [of college graduates] see job security as a first job's most important feature... .Law firms are among those hit hardest... starting with a 10-20 percent decline in recruitment by larger firms over the last two years." Likewise have the Jewish poor and elderly been particularly affected by the fraying of the social "safety net," although Jewish communal services have done an outstanding job at preventing their situation from deteriorating as badly as it has for other ethnic groups.

Building an alliance between the social responsibility movement and the organized Jewish community does not, therefore, necessitate politically converting American Jews. Individuals and institutions, rather, need to be emboldened to put their money where their values are.

One such fortifying effort is the Tzedek Economic Development Campaign (TzEDeC) of The Shefa Fund, which is exploring ways for Jews and Jewish institutions to invest publicly and participate visibly in low-income community development throughout the United States. Toward this end, The Shefa Fund is convening a board of experts in business and finance, community economic development, social investment, philanthropy, and Jewish communal affairs, to develop a feasibility study of various strategies (such as community loan funds, housing development tax credits, and enterprise zones) that could be adopted to stimulate Jewish investment. This feasibility study will lead to a business plan to implement TzEDeC's goals within two years.

We believe an alliance between the Jewish community and the social responsibility movement would be of great mutual benefit. For the social responsibility movement, it would mean access to billions of new dollars, tremendous financial and political savvy, and a vocabulary of religious humanism that has great power and currency in modern American life. For the Jewish community, working with the social responsibility movement would help define an activist role for the consumer, investor, and contributor. This would expand the landscape of politics beyond the kinds of activism that mobilized Jews in the past as trade unionists, students, and community residents but have become less and less relevant to the daily lives of professional, suburbanized Jewish Americans today.

Such an alliance would also mean bringing our Judaism and our Jewish selves into fruitful contact with issues of universal concern—issues with which many Jewish activists who make their home outside the organized Jewish community are already involved. Finally, it could help win for Judaism and for the Torah of Money a heightened investment from caring people for whom the "ism's" of the past century have exhausted their theoretical and prescriptive power. □

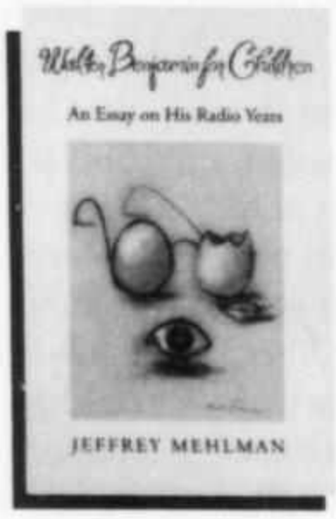
CURING HOMOPHOBIA

(Continued from p. 10)

deficit. Instead, I implore you to shift your focus, dealing with what is really "weak" and what is really "strong," and why so many men are so fixated on this issue.

If you want to change this society, you are going to have to win over people who are currently opposed to your views—including people with sexist, racist, homophobic, or anti-Semitic practices or sentiments. Can you accomplish this by preaching fairness or civil liberties? It has never worked. Speak to their pain, talk about their deepest desires for caring and mutual recognition. Although these desires have been systematically frustrated, they will resurface if you continue to speak to them. This strategy can only work, however, if you accept that these are not bad people, but individuals who share some of the same needs and desires that we all have. The Left is fearful of that view, but you should not find it frightening—you have an empathic side that allowed you to be attracted initially to the politics of meaning. Now you've got to do more than understand it—you've got to make it the focus of your public discourse and be prepared to endure the caricatures from the Right. You've also got to insist that the pain and frustration that leads people to the Right can be overcome. If you persist, not only will you achieve your political agenda, you will transform American politics.

And if you don't do this, perhaps some sector of the liberal and progressive world will start to do it on their own. For them, too, it's really the only chance of moving beyond the political isolation that has been their fate for twenty years. But then again, that may be the prospect that scares them most, because there has been a certain comfort in being "correct," morally righteous losers. It remains to be seen if any will to win remains on the Left. If so, then speaking to the pain of white males must be part of the process. □



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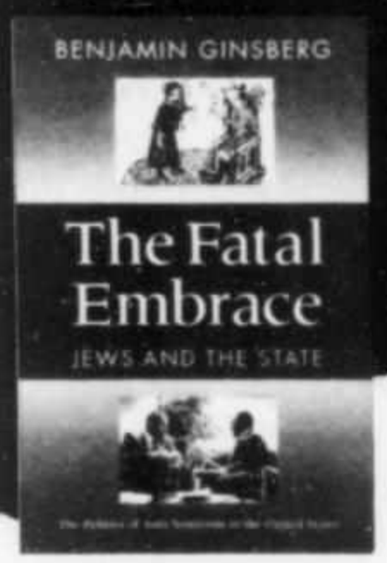
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The New Abortion Debate

(Continued from p. 32)

Thompson argues that to remain "connected" to the stranger would be a wonderful gesture of compassion, but her point is that it is not obligatory. This point only takes us a portion of the way we need to go in the analogy, however. It is far tougher to "disconnect" when the stranger in the bed is not a random Other, but a specific Other, your maybe-child. The act of abortion is always a loss. The state should not prohibit the ability of women to make tragic choices, especially given the desperate oppression in which many women live out a life. But the yearning for a world in which loss is less compelled can certainly be embraced by a women's movement committed to creating such a reality. We are, after all, committed to increasing connection. To suggest this is not to "construct a barbed wire fence around the United States," it is merely to recall a vision behind the givenness of the world.

Is abortion murder?

The act of withdrawal will certainly kill the violinist. Like all withdrawal of life support that is done in the reasonable medical context of this era, we do not call such killing "murder." This is not some semantic nicety. It is in fact deeply connected to the Jewish textual tradition on the problem. Abortion is permitted in Halacha (Jewish law code) under certain circumstances. Rachel Biale, Laura Geller, Elliot Dorff, and many others have written extensively of this, and of the distinction that Jewish law makes between killing for just cause, as in self-defense, and the act of murder. In classic texts of the Talmud, the distinction is made between a different moral appeal of the yet-to-be born and the ensouled born child. A moral distinction is also made in the situations that seemed to classic commentators to be times that the choice to kill must be allowed. Finally, the textual tradition suggests another critical point. The decision about the language of the choice is framed by the woman herself (it is she who names the situation as unendurable and thus asserts her moral voice over the voice of the fetus), but the discourse is to be made in conjunction with a spiritual teacher, a mentor: a rabbi. The discourse is not wholly private, nor wholly public. It is striking that even in the unabashedly patriarchal context, the decision is not the state's, not the husband's. It opens at least the theoretical possibility that the discourse is primarily based in the context of a supportive and caring community. It is this kind of nuance that we must attend to in thinking through the moral issues of this debate, long after the legal ones are addressed.

Is abortion about sexual freedom?

Savoy is correct when he questions the formulation of rights as useful in this debate. It is disconcerting to then have him insist on "the right to sexual happiness." This is disingenuous at best. Has he truly been absent from the events of the last decade, in which an entire generation found out that sexual freedom without relationship bears a complex burden? Does he actually think that it is a demonization of men to suggest that child support payments ought to be made? That such support is some hysterical and grasping revenge on the hapless male, a plot rooted in legality? Here again, the right-wing "defense of the family," for all its transparent duplicity in policy enactment, was exactly on the political mark. All choices are not morally equal, with sole criteria for defensibility their relative voluntariness. The demand for the protection of sensuality cannot be transmuted into an excuse for fathers who neglect the business of buying shoes and pencils. This point is a non-sequitur in his otherwise critical insight about the creation of responsible and caring communities. Behind the sexuality of heterosexual sex, for many years of a woman's life, exists the possibility of birth. That is why it is different from other bodily pleasure. It is not some "illusion" to feel that, just under the desire. Sex is in part a "need" because of the biologic starkness of this fact.

There is no "freedom" from the necessity of human embodiment in our world. In his search for a language to help us think about abortion, Savoy would have us speak of liberty, and hence morality, as separation, the free ability to "disconnect" regardless of the consequence. Ultimately, his argument rests not in the new discourse of community but in the oldest of Enlightenment traditions of the liberal state: that each is born free of all association except those which are taken on voluntarily. Adding a sober reflection on "duty" prior to the taking on of these commitments does not help. The point of community, as opposed to autonomy, as an organizing principle in which to base a new language is that the ties that we are born into and born among have some moral meaning. They are more than restraints on freedom—they are the loving expectations, the dependencies, the complex context for all human action. The "moral imagination" that Savoy speaks of does not drift above this awkward world. We need to speak of the stories of love and loss and near miss and persistent effort toward the good when we speak together of abortion. Without such speech, the abortion debate will certainly always rage, and the premise and protection of a law based on the narrow and shaken ground of privacy will always be at stake. □

Yizkor

It's almost midnight
and I'm sitting here in the living room
keeping your yahrzeit candle company.
It's so many years now
I closed my eyes to remember
something real about you
and you know what I thought of?
I saw you ironing
it was his underwear!

When I was a girl I wondered if someday
I'd love someone enough to iron his underwear.
Well, I've been married twenty years
And I love him very much
but I don't iron his underwear.
I don't even turn it right side out
I don't even fold it
I sort of stuff it in the drawer.
Truly I love him very much
but I still think what I thought when I was 11 —
no one sees your underwear.

I'm all grown up now
completely grown up now
and still I don't get it —
no one sees your underwear.

I'm not being critical
I'm not making fun
It's just that we both have to face it —
I'm a different kind of wife.

You're gone
and he's gone
the foyer is gone
the ironing board is gone
and the underwear is gone.

All that remains is me
sitting in this chair
looking at the yahrzeit candle
remembering.

Jerusalem
1989

Merle Feld

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LETTERS

(Continued from p. 4)

keep his kids busy, a way to give his kids some hope. Another friend completed college and wants to go to graduate school, but lacks the resources. Once we have given people the opportunity to compete on the playing field and a real chance to succeed, then we can talk about philosophy.

Ken Kaufman
Chicago, Illinois

Editor Responds:

If the liberals had been able to deliver the resources to the people of the West Side, they should have done that already. The problem is that they don't have the power to deliver, and won't, until a lot of people who don't agree with spending money to take care of someone else's problems get a reason to change their mind. The politics of meaning is a strategy to do that—to get people to understand that the problem facing others is really their problem as well and to expand their sphere of concern so that the problems of Chicago's West Side become problems for people on the North Shore. So far, the strategies developed by liberals and progressives to do that have been a failure. That's why they need to consider the politics of meaning—it's a strategy to shift the dominant consciousness from selfishness to caring for others. Without that shift, you can piss and moan all you want about the poverty and homelessness and social despair, and it won't amount to any significant change. Far from abandoning the people on the West Side, the politics of meaning is one of the few serious attempts to take their needs seriously enough, to abandon past strategies that haven't been working, and to find a way to take abstract caring and make it concrete.

To the Editor:

I recently overheard some friends dismissing your politics of meaning because of what they perceived to be the "idealistic impossibility" of teaching workers about the common good. Their elitist argument was based on their views that the average high-school educated worker couldn't grasp the analysis necessary to understand such issues. My own experience leads me to believe your ideas are very workable.

From 1989 to 1993 I taught courses inside a federal correctional institute for men and a federal women's camp, and in both cases I designed a curriculum to discuss the kinds of issues raised by TIKKUN's politics of meaning. My courses included material from the Hebrew prophets and the papal encyclicals on social justice; I taught ethical theories; I had students analyze films and literature from spiritually and politically progressive standpoints. Most had never been exposed to any serious ethical or spiritual thinking, given the federal government's other gag order—no religion or ethics in public schools.

My classes were multicultural in every respect, multiethnic, multi-religious, and with every sector of the working class represented. Students enthusiastically grasped and grappled with the ideas. Contrary to elitist perceptions, it was not impossible for my students to understand and care about the same kinds of materials that are presented in first-rate graduate or professional schools but usually kept away from the rest of the population.

Mary G. Taylor
Newtown, Connecticut

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What is a Politics of Meaning?

Human beings have psychological, ethical, and spiritual needs that transcend the normal liberal agenda. Liberals have tended to focus exclusively on economic entitlements and political rights. But most people need something more: We need to be part of loving families and ethically and spiritually grounded communities that provide a meaning for our lives that transcends the individualism and me-firstism of the competitive market.

Hillary Rodham Clinton made this point decisively when she said in her Austin, Texas speech that "The market knows the cost of everything but the value of nothing." What counts in life transcends the materialism of the marketplace. So, too, does it transcend the "rights-oriented" focus of so much traditional liberal politics.

An economistic focus for the Democrats worked well in the '30s, when most Americans were economically oppressed, and a rights-oriented focus worked well in the '60s, when most Americans responded to the demands for equality of the civil rights and women's movements. But by the late '70s, most Americans were experiencing a different kind of pain—a pain related to the breakdown of values, a crisis in relationships, an escalating divorce rate, a growing frustration with the alienation people were experiencing in the world of work.

It was the Right, not the Left, that recognized the crisis of meaning and went about the business of creating a new politics of meaning. Nobody claimed that Ronald Reagan was talking "psychobabble," as they now do about Hillary Rodham Clinton, when the Republican standard-bearer announced the crisis in families and the decline of values. The media never renamed his wife "St. Nancy" when she tried to persuade high school students to "just say no" to drugs or premarital sex.

What the Right recognized, but the Left would not, was that the society was in a deep ethical and spiritual crisis, and this crisis had everything to do with how the society and government are organized. The Right understood that it was impossible for individual families or churches to withstand the heavy assault on the values they were trying to teach their children.

But the Right's politics of meaning was severely flawed. Its solution to the deprivation of meaning was to hail an idealized community and family. Yet neither of these had any reality in people's daily lives. The Right's answer to this complaint was demagogic and dangerous: Our fantasy doesn't work because of some Other (gays, Blacks, feminists, tax-and-spend liberals) undermining our otherwise wonderful society.

The Right ignored the role of the competitive marketplace, the way our daily lives in the world of work lead us to subordinate all values to the struggle for material success. Nor could the Right acknowledge that an economy whose bottom-line mentality rewarded those who were most effective at manipulating or controlling others would necessarily produce narcissistic personalities who were unable to sustain loving relationships in family life. The Right fails to understand that its defense of the right of corporations to plunder the resources of the world and pollute the environment not only threatens the physical survival of the planet, but also our moral lives, because it models an ethos of looting that shapes everyone's consciousness about "how the real world works." Addressing the crisis in values and the crisis in families without making significant changes in the values that govern our economic life is ultimately futile.

Nevertheless, most people felt grateful to the Right. They intuitively understood that their children's rejection of ethically and spiritually sensitive values had something to do with outside influences, and that the reason relationships and families were harder to sustain had something to do with social realities outside the family.

The Right was able to get away with blaming feminists, Blacks, gays, etc.—and ignoring the impact of the competitive marketplace—because the Democrats and the Left simply had no understanding whatsoever of the crisis of meaning. Ethical and spiritual issues? For the liberals, these were purely personal, to be dealt with through psychotherapy, or Sunday-only religion, for the left, they were nothing but a smokescreen through which Rightists would assault liberal programs.

Fearing that the First Amendment would be undermined if a debate about values entered into the public sphere, oblivious to the fact that values already had entered the public sphere and that right-wing values were triumphing because liberals refused to enter the debate, the Democrats buried their heads in the sand, imagining that if they offered another middle-class entitlement or more highway construction they would win back the American people.

It took Bill Clinton to weave a politics of meaning subtly but consistently into his economic program for the Democrats to win back the White House. But Clinton's policies as President sometimes veer far from a consistent application of a progressive politics of meaning.

The Right has already popularized its politics of meaning. Its values pervade the public arena and public discourse and are embodied in the daily practices of a competitive marketplace which rewards selfishness and materialism. A progressive politics of meaning would seek to level the playing field by developing policies that reward ethical, spiritual, and ecological sensitivity. Applied to the world of work, its central tenet would be workers' control over decision-making—not management-sponsored feel-goodism or phony participatory schemes designed to manipulate consensus without giving workers real power.

Although we've published a twenty-page explanation of the policy implications of a politics of meaning (some of which is summarized in this issue in Michael Lerner's "Memo To Clinton"), the key is not the details. The politics of meaning represents a paradigm switch from a discourse of materialism and selfishness to a discourse of caring and community. The psychological, ethical, and spiritual needs, though not reducible to something quantifiable or easily subject to scientific observation, are validated as equally important with material needs and quantifiable data. □

Tikkun (tē-kün) . . . to heal, repair and transform the world.
All the rest is commentary

תיקון

The Socialism of Fools

ANTI-SEMITISM ON THE LEFT

by Michael Lerner



This is a powerful and provocative book.

Michael Lerner is a major progressive Jewish intellectual who has been an outspoken critic of the conservativism in the American-Jewish community and of the Israeli occupation of the West Bank. His critique should not be dismissed as an attempt to set Israel above criticism or to conceal conservative interests in the Jewish world.

Lerner's text goes far beyond the issue of anti-Semitism to put forward a creative and challenging interpretation of Jewish history and Jewish destiny.

—Cornel West, Professor of Religion and Director of African-American Studies at Princeton University

Anti-Semitism Even Pervades the Culturally Hip, the Psychologically Sensitive, and the Progressively Intellectual

Even Jews sometimes internalize the pervasive anti-Semitic attitudes of our culture and legitimate these attitudes in culturally hip circles. Jews often try to show that they are not "too" Jewish—by altering our noses, our hair, our bodies, our clothes, our manner of speaking—and we often put down others for being too intellectual or pushy or attention-seeking because we think these traits might identify us as fitting dominant negative stereotypes of Jews.

The need to disidentify with Jewishness even leads some Jews to be reluctant about subscribing to TIKKUN although they know it's the best intellectual/cultural magazine in the U.S.

Many Jewish artists, writers, intellectuals, therapists, and social change activists are invested in playing down their Jewishness, certain that if they don't, they will be "marginalized" and not taken seriously by others (many of whom, in turn, are also Jews trying to assimilate).

Lerner is aware of the Right's tendency to accuse anyone who critiques Israeli policy of being an anti-Semite or a self-hating Jew. As a leading critic of Israeli policy toward Palestinians, Lerner analyzes the difference between legitimate and anti-Semitic criticisms. He also spells out a strategy to combat anti-Semitism in Third World communities. Lerner insists that the main problem of anti-Semitism still comes from the Right, not the Left—but he also insists that there is a real problem among culturally hip and liberal intellectuals.

This book is invaluable—for college students, for writers and thinkers, for therapists and teachers, intellectuals and social change activists.

To order: Send $12 to TIKKUN at P.O. Box 460926, Escondido, CA 92046-9914 or call 1-800-864-8575 for Visa, Mastercard, or American Express orders. Or get your bookstore to order from Publisher's Group West, 1-510-658-3453.

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