

Is Europe Good for the Jews? Jews and the Pluralist Tradition in Historical Perspective

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The growing trend in the Jewish community to raise the alarm about Europe and the 'new antisemitism' is alarmist and misplaced. The main threat to Jews in Europe lies in the reassertion of atavistic nationalist ideologies and the rise in the persecution of minorities, not in the growth of the transnational institutions of the European Union. The current European polity was born and continues to develop in the great European tradition of pluralism that Jews have done so much in modern times to foster.

Whether they liked it or not, Jews have been a *pluralizing* element in European history. The Jewish world was about connection and exchange, not exclusion and boundaries. It contradicted the closed, bounded vision of society that was the ethnonationalist ideal.

The European Union represents a rebirth of the old transnational, supranational and multinational form of polity. It has been a huge success because it is, in effect, the embodiment of the 'soft power' of inclusion and mutuality. Under the Hapsburg monarchy Jews, the archetypal different ethnicity, could *potentially* exist and co-exist within a complex, plural system of other ethnicities, religious communities and nationalities.

This *potential* for Jews to be regarded both as Jews and as full members of the wider community has now been largely realized in today's Europe. Jews can be Jews *and* Europeans *and*, for example, British (even English) without any conceptual or logical discomfort. In that sense Europe is definitely good for the Jews.

Jews can only uphold their time-honoured religious and secular tradition by opposing injustice in all its forms, and by unmasking false, one might say idolatrous, partial universals when they see them. This goes for the aggrandizing and absolutizing claims of ethnonationalisms of all kinds, even when that nationalism happens to be Jewish. It is European Jews' diasporic, critical-pluralist tradition that chimes with the best, inclusive elements in both Jewish and European history, and is by far the best way forward for Jews, Europe and indeed humanity as a whole.

Blaming Europe: alarmist and misplaced

Over the last few years there has been a growing trend within the Jewish community, on both sides of the Atlantic, to raise the alarm about Europe and the rise of the 'new antisemitism'. A broad range of phenomena have led to the notion that Europe is no longer so good for the Jews: from an increase of attacks on Jewish individuals and institutional buildings and structures; a perceived increase of hostility against Jews from Europe's growing Muslim communities and from their supporters and defenders on the multicultural left; all the way to a perceived anti-Israel and pro-Palestinian bias, not only from the European mass media but also from European governments, and especially from the transnational institutional components of the European Union.

It is unclear quite how far this deep unease about the Jewish position in Europe has spread. But recent articles highlighting the fear that, for example, is supposedly pushing Jews to leave France for the safer and more welcoming shores of Israel, suggest that this defensive and fearful approach to current trends in Europe is quite widespread among Jews. It appears especially prevalent among the leadership of the various Jewish institutions whose self-chosen task it has been to represent the interests of Jewish communities. From the perspective of many such leaders it is almost as though the

evil times of the first half of the twentieth century, which led to the Holocaust, are about to repeat themselves in Europe in the twenty-first.

This tide of Jewish alarm about current trends in Europe might have some proximate cause, in all those phenomena listed above, and any increase in violence and hostility towards Jews is to be decried. Yet, in the larger historical perspective, the impulse to sound the alarm is alarmist and misplaced, especially when it is aimed at 'Europe' itself. The main threat to Jews in Europe lies in the reassertion of atavistic nationalist ideologies, and the accompanying rising trends in the persecution of religious, racial and ethnic minorities, not in the growth of the transnational institutions of the European Union or the growth of a recognition of the need for mutual respect and co-existence among Europe's

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many cultures and communities of faith and meaning, including, among others, Christians, Jews and Muslims. Modern-day Europe in general, and the emerging institutions of the European Union in particular, are very good for the Jews. Indeed the current European polity was born and continues to develop in the great European tradition of pluralism that Jews have done so much in modern times to foster.

The fears of the 'new antisemitism' are, overall, unfounded, and based on a misunderstanding of what is happening in Europe. This is especially so when it comes to the complex and, admittedly, tangled response of the new Europe, with its inclusive, pluralist, multilateral and also multicultural instincts, to Israel and the ongoing crisis in the Middle East. It is in the interests of European Jews, indeed Jews the world over, to embrace the new, inclusive and pluralist character of early twenty-first century Europe, rather than concentrate on a defence of solely Jewish interests, narrowly defined. For it is in the more open and inclusive, pluralist Europe—well on the way to realization—that the model of a world is to be found in which Jewish interests and values, more broadly and generously defined, can prosper and be promoted; not in the narrow, zero-sum game world in which so many self-styled realists live, in which ethnic and

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national interests are constantly in a Darwinian or Hobbesian struggle for existence, and in which only ethnic solidarity, national security and military power count. The best hope for Jews and their interests and values resides in the pluralist tradition represented by, amongst other examples, the transnational trends in modern Europe, and the expansion of this pluralist tradition and approach to the global level. The corollary of this must be that the security and power of any one nation-state, even Israel, can only be secondary when it comes to defending and promoting both the interests, and particularly the values, of Jews worldwide—and Jewish tradition.

Defining 'Europe' and defining 'the Jews'

Much of the force of this argument depends on definitions, specifically how we define 'Europe' and how we define 'the Jews'. As will have already become clear, my definition of 'Europe' is as much about an ideal, and a potential future Europe, as it is about the very violent and often desperate Europe of the past, and the far from perfect Europe of the present. As will also become clear below, however, the very understanding and definition of that future and ideal Europe is in a mutually dependent relation to how we define and hence understand what 'Europe' was in the past and is in the present,

especially when it comes to what I have called the pluralist tradition.

Something similar can be seen in the struggles over defining who or what 'the Jews' are. Historically in modern times, there have been three leading forms of definition for Jews as: members of a religion; members of a nation; members of a race. None of these definitions have proven themselves adequate to the task of really defining who is and who is not Jewish, and each has shown itself prone to exclusionary attitudes.

Race

The racial definition was, infamously, used by antisemites to deprive fellow Europeans of their rights as citizens, and eventually of their rights as humans and sentient beings to mere existence, regardless of their beliefs or their self-identification. That experience, along with changes in attitudes in the sciences, means that race is no longer seriously considered as a mode of definition, except by the ignorant and the bigoted.

Religion

The religious definition has often been invoked as the most respectable, but it is always prone to ever narrower definitions, depending on which part of the Jewish religious community invokes it. The exclusion of those who are perceived as no longer following the strictly religious path, from, for example, an orthodox perspective, results in even 'believing' Jews, in the Liberal or Reform movements, not being seen as real Jews, to say nothing of the many Jewish individuals who are not members of synagogues, or might even have given up belief in Judaism, but still regard themselves as, albeit secular, Jews. And this group accounts for considerable numbers, especially amongst the more intellectually oriented.

Nation

The national definition, which underlies Zionist ideology, can account for many of these secular, non-religious Jews, but it also leads to the exclusion of many people who would otherwise think of themselves as Jewish, such as strictly orthodox Jews who reject secular nationalism. The mainstream Zionist definition of who is Jewish also tends to exclude, almost excommunicate, those Jewish individuals who, while seeing themselves as culturally and religiously Jewish, even as members of the Jewish people, do not accept the nationalist narrative that the state of Israel is the fulfilment of the Jewish people's right to national self-determination. From this Zionist nationalist perspective, any Jew who is anti-Zionist must needs be a self-hating contradiction-in-terms, and thus worthy of exclusion from the national fold, because they have not accepted their own national identity.

Self-identification

A fashionable variant of this 'national' definition, without the Zionist overtones, is a voluntaristic definition offered by some postmodern scholars: those who identify themselves as Jews,

in whatever manner, are Jews, and those who do not, or those who deny that they have a Jewish identity, are not Jews. The problem with this definition is that it masks the question of conflicted identity and the existence of *real* factors in the process by which individuals acquire their sense of self and their identity. Much of that is voluntary, especially in today's postmodern society, but a significant amount remains involuntary, a product of objective factors and social ascription. Looking at how people self-identify, rather than looking beyond the self-image, might be progressive and liberal in intention, and often the most practical option available, for instance for socio-demographic studies of contemporary Jewish populations. Yet it still has drawbacks for scholars and researchers trying to find out the actual state of things, especially as regards past eras, when Jewish self-identification often had such negative consequences.

Ethnicity

The only definition of who is a Jew that seems to be adequate to the task is an ethnic one, but this is almost a tautology. Saying someone was or is ethnically a Jew is simply saying that he or she is a member or offspring of an established group of people, whose common history can be traced back through many centuries, primarily by them, but also by those, both friendly and hostile, outside of the group. The ethnic definition is at base that of a *Schicksalsgemeinschaft*, a community of fate, which, as the historian Professor Dan Diner once pointed out, can, from a more postmodern perspective, be seen as equivalent to being part of a collective *memory*. This might appear to be an inadequate definition of who is Jewish, as it really only depends on the overlapping of perceptions of belonging that exist within and outside the established ethnic group, in this case the Jews. Yet the very survival of Jewish group distinctiveness over the centuries, also in modern Europe and the rest of the modern world, meant that Jews were perceived, by themselves and by others, as *different*, as their own ethnic group, despite the attrition of most national marks of identity, and indeed, in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, many of the religious marks of identity. The mere existence of this quality of *difference* has meant that Jewish ethnicity was a significant factor in European history from Antiquity on.

A pluralizing element in European history

Initially this was primarily a matter of religious distinction, as for many centuries the Jews were the only non-conformist, non-Christian religious community tolerated within Western Christendom. Later, Jews came to be seen as the 'Other' in national societies, whose exclusion was to be achieved to complete national purity, or whose inclusion would prove the liberal and tolerant nature of the national body. Jews throughout European history have, therefore, by their mere existence as a distinct, different, ethnic group, whether they liked it or not, been a *pluralizing* element, at least when viewed by non-Jewish outsiders. The experience of monotheistic religious plurality led Jews themselves to pluralistic

conclusions, as is indicated by the adoption in the Middle Ages of the criteria of the Noahide Laws to distinguish tolerable monotheistic non-Jews from intolerable pagans. The connections that Jews often had with places outside of their immediate vicinity enhanced both their strangeness, but also their exotic value as part of a wider world.

Thus Jews were often the representatives within European culture of the pluralist moment within that culture, perhaps nowhere more powerfully than in G.E. Lessing's *Nathan the Wise*. It is far from accidental that the play's hero, a Jewish merchant in Saladin's Palestine, but based on Moses Mendelssohn, should relate to Saladin the great 'Parable of the Rings', an enlightened plea for both tolerance and the power of reason and experience over intolerant, exclusive belief, which was at base a pluralist plea to respect the faith of the three monotheistic religions.¹ In more modern times, Leopold Bloom, James Joyce's embodiment of cosmopolitan humanism in *Ulysses*, with his courageous defence of his right to be both Irish and Jewish, is another such symbolic figure of the identification of Jews with Europe's pluralist moment.²

Jews were able to fit into European society well enough when that society was in its pluralist phases. The problem was that the dialectic of exclusiveness and inclusiveness that marked European society could be quite radical and often unpredictable.

Premodern and early modern Europe had a very mixed record when it came to accommodating difference in the form of Jews. There were, it hardly needs reminding, many instances of extreme cruelty and persecution against Jews, and their exclusion from many lands, including England, France and Spain. Yet there were other lands, most notably the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, Holland and northern Italy, where Jews found accommodation, even a welcome. Jews were able to fit into European society well enough when that society was in its pluralist phases. The problem was that the dialectic of exclusiveness and inclusiveness that marked European society could be quite radical and often unpredictable.

In moments of crisis and decision, whether it be the Crusades, the Great Plague, or wartime, Jews were often the victims of what was, in effect, a cleaning of the social and political (and economic) slate. The expulsion of the Jews from Spain in 1492, at the time of the final reconquest of the country from the Moors and hence at a time of renewal and unification, was characteristic of this trend. At other times, however, in other places, another side of Europe was evident. The Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, mentioned above, was the most important for late medieval and early modern European Jewry, but the Holy Roman Empire and the Habsburg monarchy were also prominent examples of this

¹ Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, *Nathan the Wise, Minna von Barnhelm and other plays and writings*. Ed. P. Demetz (New York: Continuum, 1991), 173-275.

² James Joyce, *Ulysses* (London: Bodley Head, 1960).

other side. These *transnational*, supranational and multinational polities were not always friendly to Jews. The attacks against Jews at the time of the Crusades occurred largely within the German territories of the Holy Roman Empire. Later, the Habsburg monarchy, with its militant Counter-Reformation religious ideology, was the scene of much anti-Jewish persecution, including the expulsion of the Jews from Vienna in 1670 (many to other parts of the Habsburg lands). Yet it is more the logic by which these polities functioned that is of interest here.

The 'Law of the Included Middle'

Instead of being systems that depended on the decisive and exclusive logic of either/or, where loyalty to, and identity with, a faith, a state or a nation, were in effect zero-sum games, such complex polities as the Holy Roman Empire and the Habsburg monarchy functioned more on the indecisive but inclusive logic of both/and. The historical reality is, of course, much more complex than any models of political systems can reproduce, always offering exceptions to the rule, but there were at base two main models of political organization in Western and Central Europe in the modern era. Each operated according to its own logic. The model that appeared to be the model of modernity until late into the twentieth century was that of the Westphalian state, later the nation-state. Sovereign, often absolute and centralized, with hard borders, and demanding total loyalty, the nation-state model operated on the logic of the Law of the Excluded Middle, such that, for

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example, one should be *either* German *or* French, one should never find oneself in the middle situation of being both. The model that appeared to be that of the medieval past, and an anachronism, was that of the *transnational*, complex polities of Central and Eastern Europe: Russia, the Ottoman Empire and, most notably for us, the Habsburg monarchy. These, and especially the last, with the Habsburgs' traditional claims to a more extensive dominion, operated much more along the lines of what has been termed the Law of the Included Middle, such that, for instance, one could be *either* German *or* Czech *and* (as an Austrian) *both* German *and* Czech *or* neither, depending on context and purpose.³

This inclusive logic was, as the last example suggests, often confusing, and it often led to very conservative solutions, reliant on the existing *status quo*, to avoid the perceived dangers of even more complex changes. But it did leave open a logical space in which Jews, the archetypal different ethnicity, could *potentially* exist and co-exist within a complex, plural

system of other ethnicities, religious communities and nationalities. In the Habsburg monarchy a Jew could, logically, remain a Jew and still be an Austrian citizen. Indeed, from the viewpoint of the supranational Habsburg state, he could also be a full member of the linguistic communities, by which the state defined the various nationalities of the monarchy. Depending on time and place then, many Jewish individuals were not only Austrian Jews, but also Germans *and* Czechs—all in one. This sort of logical space was not available to the same extent in the exclusive logic that informed the nation-state, where the claim to be Jewish *and* 'authentically' German, for example, was under severe nationalist pressure even by 1914.

It is true that the older nation-states, where the formation of the state had preceded a strong national identity, especially the United Kingdom (from the 1650s), France (after 1789) and the Netherlands (from the early seventeenth century), turned out to be most welcoming to Jews. These states, however, each had specific characteristics that created the same sort of logical space for Jews that a transnational polity such as the Habsburg monarchy provided. Britain was, as Ralf Dahrendorf has put it, a 'heterogeneous nation-state' with therefore an inbuilt experience of plurality.⁴ It also had, in principle, a civic, territorially-based definition of nationality (due to place of birth) which greatly helped the integration of Jews, especially those born in the country. Similarly, the Netherlands, or the United Provinces, were for a long time a heterogeneous collection of corporately organized city-states, and Jews integrated initially in the interstices of this hotchpotch. They were also greatly helped by the Dutch having set themselves up as a beacon of religious freedom, with Jews included in those groups tolerated. In the case of France also, the Jews were emancipated during the Revolution according to universal principles of religious tolerance and human rights, in a country that operated very much on a *civic* and not ethnic definition of nationality and citizenship, at a time when many French *citizens* were not even French *speakers*. Each state, in other words, had strong characteristics that approximated to the 'included middle' model, and these became reinforced by the overseas imperial dimension of each state. Ironically, in each case Jews also profited from the fact that the dominant political or religious establishment had a defined enemy in comparison to which Jews were either irrelevant, or seen as an ideological ally. Hence in Britain Roman Catholicism was the enemy, the Jews almost seen as allies. In Holland, the arrival of Jews effectively coincided with liberation from the oppressive rule of Catholic Spain. And in France the emancipation of Jews was seen as a blow against the oppressive and superstitious rule of the traditional alliance between Church and Monarchy.

From liberal nationalism to ethnonationalism

Had the nation-states of Europe all followed the civic and/or

³ The term 'Law of the Included Middle' is adopted here to characterise the form of thinking implicit in the rejection of classical logic's Law of the Excluded Middle by various alternative systems of logic, including, for instance, the anti-realism of Michael Dummett.

⁴ Ralf Dahrendorf, 'Die Zukunft des Nationalstaates', in *Merkur. Deutsche Zeitschrift für europäisches Denken* 9/10, 751-61.

heterogeneous, 'liberal' pattern of the western and northern and, in the case of Italy, southern fringes of Europe, Jews might well have effected the same sort of relatively unproblematic integration into European society as occurred in those states. The real problem for Jewish integration into modern European society arose, however, when the 'nationalizing' of Europe into an increasing number of nation-states developed along new, ethnically defined lines, into *ethnonationalism*.

At first the negative consequences of this development within nationalism were masked by the liberal ideological form in which most European and Central European nationalisms first arose. Each nationalist movement stood for the sovereignty of the 'people' and for the freedom, equality and emancipation of all, albeit with this 'all' defined as all within the national community. Those Jews who were intent on full integration into the surrounding non-Jewish society initially hailed this promise of the emancipation of all through national liberation, for they assumed that they too would be included in the *secular* definition of the national community. Under the influence of Romanticism, however, many nationalist movements in Europe, especially Central Europe, increasingly abandoned the inclusive, liberal definition of who belonged within the national community and adopted instead cultural, ethnic, and ultimately racial definitions of who was an authentic member of the *Volk*. Jews, it hardly needs to be added, having long been seen as members of a separate religious and ethnic group, no longer qualified under these exclusive definitions of the national 'family', and this lack of belonging was biologically 'confirmed' once the concept of race gained widespread acceptance in the later nineteenth century. The need to establish a definite unity and decisive identity of the nation, along the lines of the logic of either/or, meant that Jews, with their historically established difference, could not conceptually belong to the ethnic nation, for that could only happen at the cost of that nation's purity, unity and strength. Hence it was within the nationalist politics of Central Europe that the most strident ethnonationalist, indeed racial nationalist movements arose, especially in the defensive camp of the German nationalists. It was from this group that the radical, integral nationalism of Georg von Schönerer arose, and, ultimately, much of the ideological ammunition of Hitler and the National Socialists.

Up until 1918, this development of ethnonationalism took place largely within the framework of, and indeed was contained by, the inclusive, transnational polity of the Habsburg monarchy. It is an interesting historiographical question whether the way in which the monarchy was ruled in its last decades was a factor which actually worsened the effects of ethnonationalism after its demise, but the *beneficial* effects of having such a transnational entity in the middle of Europe until 1918 are often underappreciated. It was, after all, the setting for the great flowering of modern culture, largely transnational and cosmopolitan, we know as Vienna 1900, a cultural and intellectual phenomenon that extended into the interwar years, after the monarchy's fall.

The Jewish role in Vienna 1900's pluralist and critical culture

The primary value of the culture of Vienna 1900 was to be found in its pluralist and critical character, and it is not mere coincidence that this modern culture was largely produced by Jews, that is to say by individuals with some connection through descent with the Jewish ethnic group. Hence the cultural pantheon of Vienna 1900 is peopled by figures such as Sigmund Freud (an atheist); Ludwig Wittgenstein (Catholic); Otto Neurath (German Protestant on his mother's side); Karl Popper (Protestant); Karl Kraus (a convert to Catholicism for a time); Arthur Schnitzler (an agnostic); Gustav Mahler (a convert to Catholicism); and Arnold Schoenberg (a convert to Lutheranism for a time)—all of whom nevertheless identified, or were identified, with the Jewish ethnic group.

This culture, with related cultural worlds in Prague, Budapest and other Central European urban centres, was marked by what Allan Janik has called 'critical modernism', with systems of thought that were open-ended and inclusive.⁵

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This is not to say that there were not definite views held by the various protagonists of this culture, and indeed many of the above were antagonists to each other. The very fact that this was a *critical* modernism suggests that there was at least a definite sense of what was *wrong* with the *status quo*, but what marked this culture was a resistance to adopt absolute positions and a readiness to keep an open mind as to what was right and true. Even apparently more authoritarian and closed systems, with claims to universal validity, such as the psychoanalytic theory of Freud, nevertheless stressed the aim of freeing individuals to make their own decisions. A figure such as Otto Neurath, with his encyclopaedic approach to scientific knowledge, offered an exemplary synthesis of the critical and pluralist aspects of the culture. The emphasis was not on demanding conformity but rather on enabling emancipation, and indeed on allowing both the articulation and integration of difference, as well as mutual understanding.

There was in this a sometimes overlooked connection between the world of critical high culture and the world of rather uncritical, but equally 'Jewish' and very pluralist mass popular culture, especially the world of show business and operetta, with its multiethnic casts and nationally diverse musical forms (*czardas*, polka and waltz just to begin with). Namely, both the critical modernists and cultural pluralists defied or denied the absolute claims of the partial universals

⁵ Allan Janik, 'Vienna 1900 revisited: paradigms and problems', in ed. S. Beller, *Rethinking Vienna 1900* (Oxford: Berghahn, 2001), 27–56.

of national cultures. Both sides of the modern culture of Vienna thus rejected the idea that national culture was the be all and end all of culture, for both saw beyond, or between the boundaries of such limited, national cultures. It was no accident that both the critical and the pluralist sides of this modern culture were heavily Jewish in terms of personnel (and that Jews were very prominent in the critical and pluralist wings of modern culture in the Western nation-states as well), because this role of looking beyond and outside the supposedly closed world of the *genius loci*, the genius of place, of the particular locality, had been one Jews had played for many centuries.

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pluralizing and unsettling factor in Europe's—supposedly—stable and self-sufficient national cultures. Jews, sometimes against their will, played an emancipatory and leavening role in modern European culture. Yuri Slezkine's characterization of Jews as 'Mercurians' in contrast to the 'Apollonian' agrarian peoples amongst whom they lived, though it has all the drawbacks of an overly schematic framework, does convey the central difference between Jews and those around them. Jews were not the only 'Mercurians' in Europe, for there were many other groups, such as Greeks and Armenians, or Germans in Russia, to name but a few, but Jews were the most prominent of the 'Mercurian' peoples. This meant they were different because they were a people without territory, dependent on finance, trade and communication—hence on their intelligence and education (interpreted by the Apollonians as trickery), on persuasion and legal protection rather than on their own brute force. Their very livelihood depended to a very large part on being in contact with the world beyond the horizon, and seeing the world as a network of connection, between one Jewish community and another, but also between themselves and the non-Jewish society in which they performed.

The enduring significance of the diasporic experience

Their religious tradition was similarly marked by their diasporic condition, for the Talmudic tradition had developed in exile, without the absolute, central authority of agrarian-based polities. Hence the Jewish religion in its traditional form might require strict adherence to the ritual laws, but in matters of belief and meaning it was non-dogmatic and dependent not on closed logic but on textual interpretation,

with an open-ended, potentially unlimited amount of interpretation of the 'truth' possible. There was no Jewish 'orthodoxy' before the modern era. Similarly, Jewish history had for centuries been one of the diasporic experience, not of a territorial nation, and in the modern era it was their status as members of a diaspora that made them stand out, as Jews. Even those Jews who tried to assimilate fully into the host nations tended to react quite differently to questions of what the values and ultimate goals of those nations were, tending mostly to a liberal and universalist interpretation of their (adoptive) nation's values and character.

One of the reasons why Jews adapted so successfully to the modern intellectual and economic world was not because, as antisemites and many others have asserted, the change from the pre-modern Jewish world to the modern world was particularly radical and complete (from an ahistorical, closed, ritualistic world into 'history'). But rather precisely that their *traditional* Jewish culture had been in many crucial respects already anticipatory of this new, modern world of rationality, capital and commerce, of open, not closed systems of thought.

Jews were thus not like other, more 'normal' ethnic or religious groups in Europe—they were in a different situation, and did tend to have a more non-dogmatic, less closed approach to religious and national matters, despite what antisemites said at the time, or indeed what orthodox and Zionist interpretations of the Jewish past might assert in hindsight.

Jews and antisemites: a clash of cultures and world views

Antisemites were, from their own perspective, quite sensible in going after Jews, because the Jewish ethnic group in Europe did indeed represent a different version of the world from that of the antisemites. It did contradict the closed, bounded vision of society that was the ethnonationalist ideal. The Jewish world was, in contrast, about connection and exchange, not exclusion and boundaries. There was a deep irony here, to do with the struggle over how to understand the modern world. Jews might be well suited to the actual modern world of capitalism and commerce, along 'Anglo-Saxon' free trade lines, but that was not how much of continental Europe saw the road to economic and social modernity. Instead, for most of the nineteenth century and early twentieth, the ethnonationalists were in the ascendant, and nationalism seen not in contradiction with modernity but as the main path to it. The predominance of the 'either/or' approach underlying both the 'Westphalian' state and nationalism meant that Jews were seen as outsiders and pariahs, marginal men, whereas they could just as well have been seen, from the perspective of the Included Middle, as communicators and middle men, not at the edge of society so much as at the interstices, at the points at which the components of European, indeed Western, society and culture came together.

The Jewish 'marginality' so decried by authors such as Franz Kafka can in this sense be seen as a distortion of what was actually a mediatory role, not only between (secularized) traditional Jewish values and the non-Jewish cultures of

⁶ Yuri Slezkine, *The Jewish century* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2004), esp. 4–39.

Europe, but also between those cultures themselves (Jews were very prominent as translators) and between the universal values of liberalism and the Enlightenment and the particular national cultures. This role in the inclusive middle can be seen in Central European figures such as Stefan Zweig, but also further afield—it was not coincidental that the inventor of Esperanto was Jewish.

Strip away the paranoid rhetoric of conspiracy from antisemitic claims about Jewish cosmopolitanism and there was a real clash not only of cultures but world views between Jews and antisemites. It comes down to a question of viewpoint. If one sees human organization in terms of a collection of discrete, self-sufficient, bounded societies, then Jews are marginal outsiders to each. But if one views human society as a connected whole of relations, reliant on communication and commerce, on intellectual interchange and economic exchange across social and cultural lines, based on a common humanity and common needs, then a group such as the Jews becomes a mediatory enabler of mutual understanding and mutually beneficial development. It again seems all too predictable that the formulator of the idea of comparative advantage justifying free trade was David Ricardo. The Jews, precisely because they were vital mediators of European society, were, in nationalist eyes, at one and the same time both 'marginal' to society and a foreign, extra-national—because international—threat. It all depended on how one viewed the world, and how one wanted the future world to look. Extreme 'integral' nationalists did not want to see Jews in that world.

It was thus no accident that National Socialists targeted Jews as their prime enemy, because Jews posed a conceptual challenge to the whole holistically nationalist world view, which wanted to abolish difference within the national community, and absolutize it without. The Jews, both the traditional outsiders *and* the traditional link to the outside world, were to be banished from this world, as were internationalists of all kinds, such as communists, Catholics ultimately and, not accidentally, the Habsburgs.

This hyperbolic nationalism 'achieved' the genocide of six million Jews and the murder of millions of others, before it froze to death in the vast expanses of the Russian steppe in 1942 and 1943, and was finally destroyed in 1945. At first it looked as though the form of universalist reaction that might replace it in Europe was Stalinist communism, but in the end it was the transnational and pluralist 'European' movement, based on the ideals of individuals such as Jean Monnet and Robert Schuman, and the geopolitical considerations of post-war American policy, that won out as the most cogent response to the self-destruction of nationalism that the Nazi catastrophe represented.

The transnational European polity reborn

What is now the European Union (EU), as it has developed since the immediate post-war years, represents a rebirth of the old transnational, supranational and multinational form of polity, using the inclusive logic of the Included Middle, that

once informed the Habsburg monarchy and before it the Holy Roman Empire. This has been especially so in recent years, as attempts to form a European 'super state' have given way to more modest goals of a pooling of sovereignty and notions of subsidiarity, a division of political competence along several lines and levels. As Jan Zielonka has pointed out, the Union is increasingly looking like a case study in what Hedley Bull called 'neo-medievalism'.⁷ As such it is all about communication and connection, mutual benefit, multilateralism, negotiation and compromise, divided sovereignty, and an inclusive—until recently a completely consensual—approach to decision-making.

Its overall success and steady expansion, despite the occasional setback, has baffled its many critics, who cannot understand how anything so indecisive and unwieldy can be an effective political actor. These critics also blame 'Europe', and the sort of open and inclusive approach to questions of identity that it encourages, for weakening the hold of national identity and hence, from their nationalist perspective, undermining the sense of the common good and indeed of morality that are held by them to rely on national solidarity.

Strip away the paranoid rhetoric of conspiracy from antisemitic claims about Jewish cosmopolitanism and there was a real clash not only of cultures but world views between Jews and antisemites.

The EU is thus held responsible both for an erosion of national strength from without (loss of sovereignty) and from within (national unity replaced by narrow, identity politics, and a multiculturalism that is just another form of moral relativism). According to this argument, European nation-states, already besieged by globalization, migration and immigration, even by 'Americanization', should not cede more of their power and cohesion to some utopian, pie-in-the-sky project called 'Europe'.

The best answer to such critics is to point to the dire consequences of *not* having the transnational and supranational institutions of the EU in an age in which forms of globalization, such as the spread of the internet and of information technologies, are high unavoidable—and highly beneficial to almost all Europeans. 'Brussels' provides the normative power to set rules and protect the consumer and citizen, as well as the producer, on a European-wide level from dangerous, unfair or unhealthy practices, that no individual European country on its own can match. This 'Europe' is, as most in the business community would avow, far from 'utopian' but rather a practical *necessity* in today's global economy. It is the normalization provided by European regulation that allows the immense European economy to function so effectively, and interact so relatively smoothly with the world economy. Most European national economies, especially the

⁷ Jan Zielonka, *Europe as empire: the nature of the enlarged European Union* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2006); Hedley Bull, *The anarchical society: a study of order in world politics* (Macmillan, 1977), 254–5.

smaller ones, derive great advantages from being part of this larger whole.

I would argue that the same is true in social and cultural matters as well. It is not that European integration exacerbates the problems caused on a national level by the side effects of globalization, such as immigration and accompanying sociocultural tensions concerning minorities. If the European level were not involved, such tensions and strains would be that much worse, with no mediating factor such as the transnational context of European institutions provides. What Eurosceptics and critics of the European project miss, or choose to misconstrue, is that the EU actually helps its various member nation-states negotiate such conflicts and tensions by providing a broader framework in which problems can be tamed and their intensity lessened by fostering international and transnational co-operation and understanding. By loosening the restrictive stays and corsets of the national uniforms, the European project has actually helped to enhance and make far more comfortable and maintainable the identities and social norms of the member states. In the case of Northern Ireland, an insoluble conflict for decades, it was precisely the larger context of the EU and the increase of prosperity of Eire (partly due to European Community investments) that allowed both sides to recognise that their conflict, based largely on a question of identity, was an unnecessary one, because the larger context meant that both interpretations of what it meant to be Northern Irish could now co-exist. The answer, in other words, to the claim that Europe is undermining national identity by breaking down boundaries and borders, is that, quite to the contrary, it is precisely the facilitation of connection, co-operation, and communication, that is allowing the various national cultures and identities to co-exist and interact peacefully and

National cultures closed in on themselves tend to fester and rot; opened up to interaction and co-operation with others, they thrive and grow.

productively with each other, both enhancing their substance and ensuring their survival. National cultures closed in on themselves tend to fester and rot; opened up to interaction and co-operation with others, they thrive and grow.

A multiculturalism of shared human values

One large irony concerning the issue of Europe promoting 'moral relativism' is that the EU is very much intent on a maintenance of common moral standards, and has in fact been a strong force in recent years for the spread of tolerance and equal rights for women, ethnic and religious minorities and gays and lesbians in the new member states in Central and Eastern Europe.⁸ This is not moral relativism. This is the application of the ethical principles of equality and freedom, and if anyone has been holding the EU back from enhancing

this important ethical aspect to its mission it has been none other than those Eurosceptics whose influence has prevented the United Kingdom from signing on to the Charter of Fundamental Rights.

Despite this minor limitation on the moral achievement of the collectivity of European member states through the institutions of the EU, the fact remains that the last couple of decades have seen one of the greatest expansions of human rights and human freedom, and hence a great moral triumph, that the European continent has yet seen, in the embrace of the former Warsaw Bloc states into the EU. With the expansion of the Schengen Agreement to include those countries, the fact that individuals can now cross the border between Poland and Germany, Austria and the Czech Republic, at will, and that the barbed wire fences and watchtowers of the Iron Curtain are a thing of the past, is testimony to the great ethical achievement that a united Europe represents. In the light of this vast expansion of freedom, the arguments of those who liken Schengen's standardization of European border control to the imposition of a 'fortress Europe' are petty and disingenuous. This is especially so given that the largest opter-out from Schengen, the United Kingdom, has done so because Schengen, in British opinion, is not fortress-like *enough* in its security measures.

The European project has, in other words, been a huge success, and it has been so because it is, in effect, the embodiment of the Law of the Included Middle, and the 'soft power' of inclusion and mutuality. The arguments about it fostering a multiculturalism that leads to moral relativism are a complete misunderstanding of its character. While multiculturalism is certainly a watchword of many on the left and many pro-Europeans who embrace the opportunities for diversity that Europe presents, the European project does not actually promote the sort of groundless multiculturalism that denies the links between cultures (in the way that extreme forms of nationalism do), but rather encourages a multiculturalism that accepts and celebrates the shared human values of all cultures, national or otherwise. European multiculturalism is therefore less a form, strictly speaking, of multiculturalism, and more a form of pluralism.

Europe's liberal pluralism: a Jewish version of the world

This pluralism of the European project is based on a combination of shared experience (the *acquis*) and the recognition and respect of others' right to be different, whether in national or other terms. It has not done away with the nation-state, nor will it any time soon, but what it has done is take away the perverse, absolute claims of the nation, made European national societies open to difference and to other forms of social, economic and political organization, whether on the local, regional or international level, and developed a vision of Europe as one not of national competition and conflict, but of connection, co-operation and mutual understanding and respect. This is not so much 'neo-medievalism' as 'liberal pluralism'. As such it represents a 'Jewish' version of the world, understood in terms of the

⁸ Matti Bunzl, *Symptoms of modernity: Jews and queers in late-twentieth-century Vienna* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: Univ. of California Press, 2004), esp. 192-6.

Jewish diasporic experience.

Many of the champions of liberal pluralism in post-war Europe were, not coincidentally, Jewish, the prime example being Isaiah Berlin. It is also the case that many of the more enthusiastic proponents of the EU have been Jews, such as, to cite some British examples, former Conservative Home Secretary Leon Brittan, and the current Labour Foreign Minister, David Miliband. This is understandable, because today's Europe represents the freeing up of Europeans, economically but also intellectually and culturally, from the narrow and restrictive bonds of particular, national forms and systems, much as the Jewish mediating and pluralizing tradition did in earlier times. One of the groups that has benefited from this emancipation from solely national frameworks has been European Jewry, because Jews too gain from the pluralist respect for the other that is implicit in the European project. The *potential* for Jews to be regarded both as Jews and as full members of the community that existed within the logic of the Habsburg monarchy has now been largely realized in today's Europe, where Jews can be Jews *and* Europeans *and*, for example, British (even English) without any conceptual or logical discomfort—much as is also the case for American Jews. The bracketing and hyphenation of modern transatlantic identity that has come with the success of liberal pluralist systems means that the old problems of whether Jews 'belonged' in the societies in which they lived no longer have cogency. Jews in this dispensation simply are also European as they are also American. In that sense Europe (along with America) is definitely good for the Jews.

Jewish support for the European project cannot be taken for granted

This inclusion of Jews in the liberal pluralist Western societies of today requires, however, a reciprocal acceptance by Jews of the non-Jewish others as partners in the pluralist enterprise. This might seem obvious, given the 'Jewish' character of these liberal pluralist systems, were it not for the fact that there are also countervailing tendencies, especially within the various Jewish communities in Europe and North America, militating against such openness and inclusiveness. The obvious case in point is the approach to be taken to Muslims within Europe. At a time when Israeli policy is the spring of much anti-Zionist and anti-Jewish hostility among Muslims in many parts of Europe, some of it even physical, there is a temptation of Jews to join the anti-Muslim forces that, often citing the need to uphold 'Western values', are intent on viewing Islam as non-European and hence restricting, or even reversing Muslim immigration into their national societies.⁹ This strategy of joining the exclusionary forces in Europe is a rather perverse echo of the same strategy of 'negative integration' that allowed similarly outsider groups to assimilate into the national communities in Central Europe, such as Czechs becoming Austrian Germans in

Vienna, by being able to identify themselves as *not* Jewish. It is a strategy that should be avoided, because it can only encourage the logic of exclusion that once before destroyed much of European Jewry, and reneges on the promise of the inclusive Europe that has emerged in past decades.

Jews should instead be encouraging connection and communication with their fellow, Muslim Europeans, and facilitating their integration and acceptance into the European fold. Along with other Europeans, Jews can demand that Muslim Europeans follow the basic requirements of all citizens in following the rule of law and respecting others, whether that means the rights of other individuals and other beliefs, or the legitimate interests of other communities.

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Jewish experience should tell us, however, that what should not be demanded from Muslims in Europe is complete assimilation and the denial of difference. That is, from the perspective of liberal pluralism, an unnecessary and illegitimate imposition. What should be urged is rather the *acceptance* of difference, but within the greater whole.

Avoid putting ethnonationalism above justice and the law

Furthermore, Jews can only uphold their time-honoured religious and secular tradition by opposing injustice in all its forms, and by unmasking false, one might say idolatrous, partial universals when they see them. This goes for the aggrandizing and absolutizing claims of ethnonationalisms of all kinds, even when that nationalism happens to be Jewish. The tendency of some versions of Zionism to put the cause of the Jewish state above justice and the law is clearly un-Jewish in this sense.

The state of Israel has, historically, served as a refuge from antisemitic persecution, and has provided many Jews with an opportunity to build a Jewish identity among other Jews. It has also become a most significant beacon of identity for Jews outside its borders. There is no getting away from the fact, though, that it was not only a response to, but also a child of, European nationalism, and at its heart it is a project of precisely the ethnonationalist thinking that modern-day Europe is trying to transcend. Israel has aspects that make it more like a civic nation-state, it is true, but the ethnonational aspects, as in the Law of Return, are hard to deny, and are, from this perspective, becoming increasingly passé. Moreover, if this interpretation of Jewish history and tradition is right, what Israel does and how Israel fares, while understandably important on a human and emotional level to all Jews, can only be *secondary* to the central Jewish role in the world and the Jewish mission. This always has been, and always will be, to be a 'light unto the nations', providing illumination and insight,

⁹ For a case in point, see Lord Stanley Kalms, 'Muslim peace offer? Don't fall for it.', in *Jewish Chronicle*, 7 March 2008, 30.

and enabling, as through a fibre-optic network, channels of communication to facilitate the mutual understanding of human beings the world over—quite apart from opening men's minds to the higher spiritual and ethical truths that lie within the Jewish religious tradition, as they do in other religious and spiritual traditions.

Had Israel been as the founding figure of political Zionism, Theodor Herzl, had wanted his 'Judenstaat' to be—a center of religious and ethnic tolerance and pluralism, of scientific and artistic achievement, of successful social and political experimentation, the seat not only of a restored Temple but also of the Palace of Peace, and the hub of a prosperous Middle East and Africa, fostering economic development, good health and international co-operation—then it would clearly have merited being seen, as Herzl intended, as a continuation of this enlightening tradition.¹⁰ Too often in the last decades, however, the reality of Israeli policy towards Palestinians and indeed Arab Israelis has been anything but enlightening, and has not lived up to the high

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standards that Jewish tradition, and indeed Herzl and the other founders of Zionism, demanded and demand. It is true that the reasons for this lie as much with the immense hostility that first the Zionist settlement and then the Jewish state has encountered from its neighbours and from the indigenous population. Yet from the very start, given that the main thrust of Zionism came to be to establish a *Jewish*, that is to say an ethnonational state in Palestine, it is difficult to see how it could have been otherwise.

As an ethnonational state, with all the qualifications provided above, it has tended to follow the same patterns as other ethnonational states, closing itself off at various times from the international community, often in a mode of defiance, putting its own interests above those of international law, and preaching national necessity and security against an upholding of human rights, as well as individual property rights. Its founding took place, as with many ethnonational states, in the midst of and through a vast, and as we now know deliberate, 'ethnic cleansing' in 1948. The Arab states were the ones who refused to accept the UN partition plans, and also did very bad things, but this cannot, surely, justify the obvious moral transgressions that have marked Israeli policy since, especially when it comes to the territories occupied in 1967 and the continuation, against international law and the benevolent

advice of its Western allies, of the settlement policy. This leaves us with the very pressing paradox that, as things currently stand, it is not only that the state of Israel should be a *secondary* priority for Jews, but that its policies and actions have been actively *detrimental* to the greater goals of Jewish tradition.

Multiple loyalties: a natural part of a pluralist Europe

This leaves Jews in the Diaspora, and particularly European Jews, in a potentially awkward position. Their embrace of and participation in the pluralist European project might appear to be at odds with their support for what at time appears an ethnonational state practicing in often crude ways the exclusivist logic that was such anathema and a mortal threat to Jews in Europe in the first half of the twentieth century. To think, though, that this situation is not negotiable is to fall prey to precisely the sort of exclusivist, either/or logic that informs nationalism (including Jewish nationalism).

The fact is that in many multiethnic and pluralist democracies, most obviously the United States of America, the idea of multiple loyalties, of a loyalty to one's nation-state coupled with a residual one to one's ancestral homeland, whether it be Ireland, Italy, Africa or wherever, is quite normal and accepted. This is very much how loyalty to Israel among American Jews is perceived by other Americans, and this is, in a pluralist logic, quite fine. Having connections and loyalties to places and groups outside of the nation is, indeed, part of what makes diasporic minority groups such as Jews a key factor in the practice of liberal democracy, which, as Isaiah Berlin once pointed out in a debate with Arthur Koestler, would not be able to live up to its principles as such without the opportunity to manage and accommodate such difference. It is only those such as Koestler, reliant on the idea that only uniformity can produce the solidarity necessary for democracy, who have a profound difficulty with there being both Jewish communities all around the world and a Jewish state in Israel. Koestler's claim in that debate that Jews should either fully assimilate in European societies or emigrate to Israel, while it might mirror Zionist rhetoric about *aliyah*, is completely at odds with the pluralist logic at the heart of liberal democracy.¹¹ To that extent, indeed, any form of Zionism that claims that Jews should emigrate to Israel to really become fully Jewish is not only a misreading of the modern Jewish experience, but also, from the perspective of that experience, a complete contradiction and attack on Jewish tradition. There has always been within Zionism an undercurrent of wanting to solve the Jewish Question by actually 'normalizing' the Jews, making them like just any other national group. From the perspective of the experience outlined here, however, it is precisely this normalization that threatens to destroy what is most valuable in Jewish tradition.

European Jews, then, are quite at liberty to support a

¹⁰ Steven Beller, *Herzl* (London: Halban, 2004), esp. 83–106.

¹¹ The Koestler-Berlin exchange is in Douglas Villiers, ed., *Next year in Jerusalem: Jews in the twentieth century* (London: Douglas Villiers, 1976), 98–106.

Jewish state such as Israel—it is indeed a further contribution to European pluralism and diversity. Yet this support must surely be conditioned by their own pluralist Jewish tradition, and their own support of human rights and social justice. If pluralism is a system that connects rather than divides, the connections should go both ways, and European Jews should surely apply the same standards to Israeli policies that they have demanded and benefited from in today's pluralist Europe. European Jews would be selling themselves, and the Jewish tradition itself, short if they did not heartily criticize what they saw as injustice in Israeli policy and if they did not maintain a policy of openness and inclusiveness to their fellow Europeans, of whatever ethnicity or creed. They would especially be betraying their own pluralist tradition, their mission to be 'a light unto the nations', if they were to join in the exclusion of their Muslim brothers and sisters from the community of Europeans.

European (and American) Jewry have a critical-pluralist tradition of their own of which they should be proud and should indeed live up to and defend, also against narrowly ethnocentric calls for unquestioning support of Israel, for in the larger perspective it is that critical-pluralist tradition that chimes with the best, inclusive elements in both Jewish and European history, and is by far the best way forward for Jews, Europe and indeed humanity as a whole.

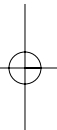
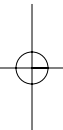
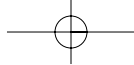
The path of inclusion and connection: the way forward for Europe's Jews

Here then is yet another way in which Europe and its Jews, for all the tragedies of their relationship over the ages, now have finally come to share a mutually reinforcing character and role in today's world. If David Miliband is right, as I think he is, in describing Europe as a normative 'model power', inspiring by example, then this has for centuries been how Jews have

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thought of themselves, as a 'model people', and how, in an admittedly complex way, they have functioned. Ironically, in the past it was the example of biblical Jewry that provided the model for many nationalisms.¹² But for the present and in the future it is the diasporic Jewish tradition, whose experience has resulted in a full appreciation of the merits of liberal pluralism, that *should* be the basis of the Jewish role in this world. It is the path of inclusion and connection, the pluralist path that modern-day Europe is following, that is the best way forward, not a relapse into exclusive ethnocentricity and the nationalist temptation.

¹² Aviel Roshwald, *The endurance of nationalism: ancient roots and modern dilemmas* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2006), 8-32.



The Institute for Jewish Policy Research (JPR) is an independent think tank working for an inclusive Europe, where difference is cherished and common values prevail.

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