

There is a new mood, a new ethic, a new vocabulary emerging among American Jews; the temptation to dismiss it as a passing fad is short-sighted. It has become increasingly clear that in the rise of Jewish conservatism we are dealing with a phenomenon which has gained considerable popular momentum in recent years. The political ethic of Jewish conservatism is supported by leaders of consequence, intellectuals in Jewish theological seminaries, universities and prestigious magazines and journals. These new opinion makers seek to redirect the liberal stance that has long been associated with Jewish social ethics in America. The traditional enthusiasms of liberalism are disavowed. The ideals of civil libertarianism, the concern for the freedom of speech, for the protection of minorities, the separation of church and state, the general belief that somehow it is necessary for the public sector of society to intervene on behalf of the disadvantaged, the sick and the poor, and the minorities — all these are seen as no longer, if they were ever, in the true interest of Jews. Much of the conservative argument traces Jewish contemporary liberalism to the Enlightenment period; to the period of Mendelssohn, and the myths of the eighteenth century in which progress and equality were held as sacred fidelities. Those sancta, it is contended, are no longer viable.

In recent years, Jewish political conservatism has been crystallized into identifiable, organizational structures. There is, for example, the formation of a Jewish Rights Council based in New York, and the publication of a journal on contemporary Jewish thought, *Ideas*, first published in August, 1968. The treatment by *Ideas* of Nixon and of Watergate provides some insight into the new mood.

Prior to the Nixon resignation, *Ideas* maintained that the issue of the impeachment and resignation of Mr. Nixon was of paramount concern to the Jewish community and that Jews ought to do everything in their power to discourage his impeachment or res-

ignation. Will Herberg, in one recent issue of *Ideas*, dismissed Watergate as a political donnybrook of minor consequence. Mr. Nixon, he asserted, "is a victim of the licentiousness of the liberal press, the victim of the shameless orgy of the Ervin committee." The break-ins and other shenanigans are part of "libidine dominandi," the natural lust for ruling inherent in politics. The January 1973 issue of the *National Jewish Monthly* included an article by Seymour Siegel, one of *Ideas*' editors, in which he calls upon Jews to accept Mr. Nixon as one of the "chasidei umot ha'olam" (one of the righteous gentiles of the world) along with Cyrus, King of Per-

THE NEW JEWISH RIGHT

HAROLD SCHULWEIS

Harold Schulweis is rabbi of Valley Beth Shalom in Encino, California. He teaches at the University of Judaism and at Hebrew Union College.

sia, and Lord Balfour.

The *Ideas* endorsement of Nixon extended far beyond his benevolent posture towards the State of Israel. The editors admire(d?) Mr. Nixon for his emphasis on Law and Order, and found Mayor Daley's order to shoot or cripple looters in Chicago praiseworthy. They supported Mr. Nixon's escalation of the bombings in North Vietnam, his policies calling for the invasion of Cambodia, his opposition to the granting of amnesty. They endorsed the administration's policy of the benign neglect of the minorities.

As far as economics is concerned, while the magazine favored Nixon's

impounding of the anti-poverty funds and his total dismantling of the Office of Economic Opportunity, they were critical of his budget for retaining one hundred twenty five billion dollars for human resources, including some three billion dollars earmarked for civil rights activity. It has published articles which are highly sympathetic to Generalissimo Franco, and justify Ian Smith's racist policy in Rhodesia — the rule of 225,000 whites over four million blacks.

Many of the same editors and writers appearing in *Ideas* organized the Jewish Rights Council. The stated purposes of the organization are threefold: to raise the level of political and social consciousness of Jews in America; to protect and preserve Jewish communities; to cooperate with other groups who are dedicated to similar aims. Unquestionably, the *cause célèbre* that triggered the formation of this organization was the Forest Hills affair, which grew out of the decision of New York City to build low-income housing in the Forest Hills neighborhood of Queens for elderly people and others. These would include black and white elements; people generally from lower socioeconomic strata than the residents of Forest Hills. The Queens Jewish Community Council opposed the project with unparalleled rage and threat. (Notable exceptions to the Council's position were Rabbi Ben-Zion Bokser and Rabbi Usher Kirshblum.) Opposition to this incursion of low-income housing into Forest Hills has been variously defended, disavowing racism. Milton Himmelfarb suggests in a *Commentary* article that to understand Jewish antagonism to low-income housing we ought to consider the posture of other ethnic groups. Take, for example, the Italian-Americans. The Italian-American considers his neighborhood as his village. He does not object to the other fellow's having a desirable place to live, he just doesn't want him, by moving in, to make his own neighborhood less of a home. This, explains Himmelfarb, is not a question of rac-

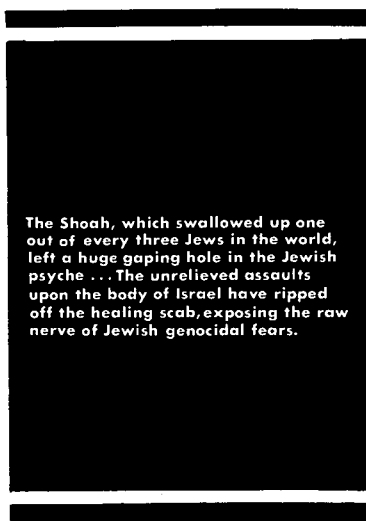
ism. It is a matter of group self-determination. What the Italian is opposing is the incursion of the elements which disturb the "family coziness of the neighborhood." Analogously, Jews in Forest Hills are not racists; they simply seek to protect the character of their neighborhood.

The issue, it is repeatedly explained, is not racist but socio-economic. Jews must be rid of the guilt foisted upon them by liberals who make them feel conscience-stricken for "making it." It so happens that most Jews are middle class; and for Jews of the middle class, the values of capitalism, free enterprise, private property, happen to coincide with Jewish self-interest. Support is drawn from Nathan Glazer, the Harvard sociologist, who cites the case of the Castro Revolution in which the Jewish middle-class, the Jewish businessmen, doctors and lawyers, were ousted from their pre-revolutionary economic advantage. Seymour Siegel concludes from this that Jews ought to defend free enterprise, capitalism, and those institutions which sustain and support the middle class.

A good number of the new Jewish conservatives are unhappy with "welfarism." In a *Commentary* symposium (August, 1966) Professor Jacob J. Petuchowski flatly declared that Judaism "opposes preferential treatment, even if the recipient of such preferential treatment is one of the underprivileged." Elsewhere he argues that social welfare, "welfare hand-outs," penalizes success and rewards indolence. He cites the Book of Proverbs, Chapter 28, "He who tilleth his land shall have plenty of bread, but who followeth after vain things shall have poverty enough." Jews have no obligation to take an active part in bringing economic change, "to sacrifice ourselves for the sake of others" (Jewish Rights Council pamphlet). Who sacrifices for Jews? For Judaic support Petuchowski calls upon the rabbinic principle of reciprocity, and cites the following as illustration: The Bible teaches that while you may not

lend money on interest to your brother, you may certainly do so to a foreign trader, to a non-Jew on grounds of reciprocity; i.e., since the foreign trader also charges you interest, you have no obligation to lend to him without interest. Based on the principle of reciprocity, Petuchowski concludes that it makes no sense for Jews to fight for others who don't or won't fight for us. "Those others" refers to those who "deny our rights" and who "demand to be placed at the top of the ladder" without struggling, as did our recent ancestors, to get there.

Generalizing from the articles I have read, I conclude that the new



Jewish conservatives, in contrast to Jewish liberals, appear to favor private philanthropy over government welfare, favor an explanation of human behavior in terms of heredity and will, as opposed to environment, favor prayer in the public school systems and federal aid to parochial schools in opposition to the liberal's traditional insistence on separation of state and church. If there is some theological grand overview, some theological superstructure that hovers over this conservative political ideology, it is expressed by both Petuchowski and Siegel in terms of a general caveat. Not all problems are solvable. Poverty

and suffering will always be with us. Therefore, the Jew ought to learn to accept the limitations and the realities of history. That modesty is echoed by a professor of philosophy at City College, Michael Wyschogrod, who in explaining the Orthodox silence on the moral issue of Vietnam, responds in Rosenzweigian fashion that the role of the Jew is to witness, to wait rather than to transform. The Jew is a meta-historical witness whose destiny is beyond history.

THE COALESCENCE OF "JEWISH INTEREST" FORCES

These thinkers reflect a serious swing of the Jewish pendulum to the right. Liberalism is no longer, as almost surely it was, the American Jew's lay religion. The new direction is a significant sociological phenomenon that may well affect the character of Jewish behavior in socio-political affairs. The trend is not a momentary backlash, nor can it be explained in Marxist terms. The people who are attracted to its "redism" have not sold their birthright for a mess of pottage or for a pot of message. Melvin Tumin, the Princeton sociologist, back in 1964, sensed the *embourgeoisement* of the American Jews, but I think his explanations were too facile. There is a convergence of diverse interests rallying around the flag of "Jewish self-interest," from lower middle class Jews, blue-collar, working class Jews, disillusioned ex-Marxists, Lubavitchers, JDL'ers, and celebrators of ethnic particularism.

While the motivations for Jewish self-interest are varied, one event haunts them all. One single event colors their perception of reality: the Holocaust. Jews are not done with the Holocaust. An earthquake, as we Californians quite well know, doesn't happen and then go away. Years after, we experience its aftershocks. The *Shoah*, which swallowed up one out of every three Jews in the world, left a huge gaping hole in the Jewish psyche. Left alone, I suspect that even this wound could have healed. Jews are

great healers, and the therapy of Israel promised that kind of healing. But the unrelieved assaults upon the body of Israel have over and over again ripped off the healing scab, exposing the raw nerve of Jewish genocidal fears. A glance at the newspaper is sufficient to confirm Israel's and the Jew's sense of abandonment and isolation.

The repeatedly traumatized conscience of the Jewish psyche is not simply traceable to the genocidal intention of our enemies; it includes the callous inattention of our friends. Adolf Hitler died a Roman Catholic, and an annual mass is still recited for him in Spain. Hermann Goering died a Lutheran, and at the Nuremberg trials, Goering explained that he regarded himself as a Christian, and so did the church which performed the marriages, christenings and burials of his family. No Nazi was excommunicated by the church.

Moreover, the coolness of the churches of Christendom during the two and a half decades of Israel's existence indicates that no great moral lessons were learned from the conspiracy of silence during the Nazi era.

The myth of Roosevelt's humanitarianism was punctured by revelation of the ugly fact that while these shores were open to English children because of the threat of the bombings of England, they remained closed to Jewish children threatened by the crematoria. A million Jewish children died of Jewishness.

A mood of suspicion hangs over Jews and extends over three tenses. Jews were betrayed, Jews are being betrayed, Jews will be betrayed again. Symptomatic of this Jewish resentment are new post-Holocaust soundings. Eliezer Berkovitz, a distinguished Orthodox Jewish theologian, will have nothing to do with talk of "dialogue" (a term rarely heard since the 1960's). He writes in anger, "All we want of Christians is that they keep their hands off us and off our children." The Jewish philosopher and theologian Emil Fackenheim can not contain his anger and despair over the fact that the original design of the in-

ternational monument erected at Bergen-Belsen contained inscriptions in all sorts of languages except Yiddish and Hebrew. Were there no Jews destroyed at Bergen-Belsen? The disillusionment is reflected in the *galgen*-humor of one of my teachers who sadly reported that in his experience there are two kinds of gentiles. One believes that Jesus was a historical figure. The other believes that Jesus never existed. But both believe that the Jews killed him.

Jews live with an expectation of the undelivered punch. Nathan Glazer, in 1971, warned that Jews would be the scapegoats of Vietnam. He argued convincingly that Americans suffered



the loss of three hundred thousand Americans killed or maimed in Vietnam. Generals don't lose wars, they find scapegoats. And the most credible and natural scapegoat is the Jew. The protesting Jewish college student and faculty member and the rabbis make vulnerable and identifiable targets for American rage. It so happens that Glazer was wrong. But that is beside the point. What is important is that for Jews his expectation was thoroughly believable. Again, a considerable number of Jews agreed that Americans were not going to tolerate the oil embargo and the long lines at the gas station, and that Israel would be blamed and Jews in America made

the scapegoat. Once again the prediction failed. But again, what is important is that the expectation of recrimination was for Jews absolutely believable. Jews are suspicious and after Auschwitz it is difficult to convince them that they should not be. And perhaps — no, surely — with justice. For, as Delmore Schwartz sadly reports, "Even paranoids have real enemies."

THE SELF BETRAYAL OF THE RADICAL JEW

History alters its face in accordance with the fortunes of the present. The Enlightenment vision of a constantly progressing universal society calling for Jews to involve themselves in the battle for social justice is now interpreted as suicidal. The Jewish conservatives point to the "idealism" of the Jewish radical whose universalism led him to repudiate his own Jewish interests. They cite the shocking words of Rosa Luxembourg, who, answering a letter from a friend as to why she was so unresponsive to the plight of the Jew, asked: "Why do you persist in pestering me with your peculiar *Judenschmerz*? I feel more deeply for the wretches on the rubber plantations of Puto-Mayo and for the Negroes of Africa whose bodies are footballs for Europe's colonial exploitation." Twenty-five years later the town of Zamoscz in which she was born was destroyed as far as the Jewish community was concerned. Could she spare no tears for Jews? Is this the lot of Jewish involvement in universal causes?

Jacob Talmon and Judd Teller offer countless illustrations of such self-betrayal. Pavel Axelrod, along with other radical Jews, joined the Narodnaya Volna in the 1870's and 1880's. They would live with the Muzhiks, with the Russian peasants, determined to help them organize against the tyranny of the Czars. But since the Muzhiks didn't accept them because they were Jewish, a number of them converted to Christianity, not out of faith but so that they be credible in the

eyes of the peasants. In the wake of the Czarist pogroms of the 1880's, however, Ukrainian peasants organized pogroms of their own against the Jews. Their actions were greeted with this statement by the executive committee of the Narodnaya Volna, dated August 30, 1881. "Good people. Honest Ukrainian people. The damned police beat you. The Yids, the dirty Jews and Jewesses rob you. People of the Ukraine suffer, most from the Yids. Who has seized the land, the wood mills and taverns? The Yids. And who does the peasant beg with tears in his eyes to let him near to his land? The Yids."

Talmon sums up the self-betrayal of Jewish radicalism as a sort of Shakespearean tragedy with bodies strewn all over the stage. Leon Trotsky has his skull split by the ax of a Stalinist agent; Rosa Luxembourg's torn, battered body is dragged out of the river; Kurt Eisner and George Landauer fall victim to assassin's bullets. Others are hanged in the small hours in small cellars. Slansky perishes as a traitor. The Paukers and the Bermans are dying in oblivion. Such is Jewish fate. Damned by the right and damned by the left. Damned if you do and damned if you don't. The Jew demonized by the world is caught upon the horns of his own dilemma.

They tell a story about a Jewish boy caught in Belfast, caught by Protestant and the Catholic gangs. They ask him: "Are you Catholic or are you Protestant?" The Jewish boy confidently replies: "I'm a Jew." "All right, then, but what kind of a Jew? — Catholic or Protestant?"

Liberalism, Universalism, Progress, Enlightenment have turned sour in the agony of post-Holocaust reflection. Pulpits and pews in the 70's resonate to messages different from those of the 50's and 60's. The voice of the liberal is muted. The ground-shaking of the Holocaust has caused a new look backwards. The innocent conceits of Enlightenment appear more sinister. The failures of Jewish radicalism cast their shadow onto the contemporary scene. Blacks, Chica-

nos, Puerto Ricans slip into the old variables occupied by the Muzhiks.

Can Jews be expected to stand at the vanguard of the minorities' revolution? Can they be called upon to throw themselves into the battle knowing that they will be exploited, then rejected and spat upon — and, ultimately, worse — by those who once spoke of the kinship of suffering? Are Jews fated to corporate masochism?

SOME REACTIONS TO THE NADIR OF JEWISH LIBERALISM

The call to Jewish conservatism, to Jewish self-interest and hard-nosed

The myth of Roosevelt's humanitarianism was punctured by the revelation that while these shores were open to English children because of the threat of the bombings of England, they remained closed to Jewish children threatened by the crematoria. A million Jewish children died of Jewishness.

realism has its roots in the Holocaust. It has turned non-Zionists into defenders of ethnic survival; it has turned Jewish theologians away from the prophetic ideal towards a new veneration of the priestly function; it has transformed theologians who once spoke the language of the suffering servant and Jewish chosenness into proponents for the shaping of Israel in the image of the other nations of the world.

Twenty-five years ago, for example, Will Herberg debated the chosenness of Israel. Jews, he wrote, were "chosen for a mission and for suffering," to be a light unto the nations and

bring "moral law to the people of the world." Chosenness means Jews must be willing to "undergo persecution, humiliation, agonies of pain and death." Chosenness places a claim upon Jews for "greater obligation, heavier responsibility, harder destiny."

What has happened to that altruistic passion? How easily the image of the suffering servant crumbled before the threats of affirmative action.

How ironic that those who struggled against the chosen-people claims and against the imposition of the suffering-servant idea in the name of Jewish "normalcy" should call for greater Jewish responsibility towards the disenfranchised of the non-Jews; while those whose theology once insisted on transcending native and cultural boundaries should now defend the coziness of neighborhoods.

There are no villains and no saints behind the rightward swing of the Jewish pendulum. The pendulum oscillates in response to the needs of the people. But the oscillation is not automatic; it is moved by responsive and responsible Jewish judgement.

I am apprehensive of the shift to the kind of conservatism I have described, and I should like to explain wherein my uneasiness lies.

A. A Shock of Recognition

It is, I think, not a matter of knee-jerk liberalism that causes me to reject the rationalizations of the new conservatives. I sense at the bottom-line of their arguments for self-interest a shameless double standard.

Where, for example, did I first hear the argument for protecting the character of neighborhoods? When I grew up as a boy in the East Bronx, the borough of Queens was popularly acknowledged to be off-limits to Jews. Forest Hills was *judenrein*. No Jew could rent or buy a house, or find lodging in its one hotel. Was the exclusion of Jews a symptom of anti-semitism? No respectable gentile would admit to such a canard. It simply expressed the right of communities to define their

own character. I never for a moment bought that argument, and I do not buy it today; it does not become more acceptable because it is articulated by Jews against "incompatible" elements who seek entrance into predominantly Jewish neighborhoods. I experience an unpleasant shock of recognition in the pronouncements of the Jewish Rights Council, and my opposition to its pronouncements does not stem from an a priori ideological commitment, but from a most natural fidelity to personal memory. Was it, after all, a "liberal" who said, "What is hateful to thee do not do to thy fellow man?"

Personal memories are more powerful than abstract ideologies. In the spring of 1965 I was in Germany, and among other meetings, I had an interview with the Bishop of Berlin-Brandenburg, D. Otto Dibelius, a former president of the World Council of Churches. I asked him why he, who had held such a respected position with the Church, had done nothing on behalf of the oppressed Jewish community. He responded with frightening candor. As Pastor he had a responsibility to protect the well-being of the Church, the interests of the baptised, the "getauft." To become embroiled with the Nazis over the Jewish issue was to endanger the Church. I asked him where was Christian conscience, the figure of the suffering Christ, the defense of one's brother? He remained adamant, convinced that Christian self-interest could not be compromised. The sound of German "obrigkeit" echoed in the Church.

I was revolted by the smugness of his posture. Am I to respond differently to the justification for Jewish corporate selfishness? Is a Jewish moral isolationism that is grounded in the rationale of exclusive self-interest — moreover, in political circumstances far less sinister than those of Nazi Germany — excusable? Does the change in accent justify a double standard?

Senator James McClure of Idaho argues American self-interest, in terms of geo-political, economic and

military considerations, and thus advocates altering United States foreign policy in favor of the Arab States. What, indeed, if he and Senator Fulbright were correct? Would we not — I think properly — appeal to America's larger self, to her humanitarian interests which ought to weigh heavier than her narrower interests in determining her support of Israel? But can we demand altruism from the other, while asserting self-interest for ourselves?

B. The Need for Distinctions

It is misleading to lump liberalism and radicalism together. Jewish



liberalism, as Judd Teller, Jacob Talmon and Werner Cohn have argued, was and is opposed to the violence and anarchy associated with radicalism. It is wrong then to cite Trotsky, Zinoviev and Kamenev as biographical illustrations of the failures of Jewish liberalism. They cannot be thrown together with the positions of Lasker, Rathenau, Cremieux and Leon Blum.

It is equally misleading to trace the self-betrayal of the Jew to his commitment to universalism by pointing to Rosa Luxemborg or Pavel Axelrod. Did Abraham Joshua Heschel betray his Jewishness by marching with Mar-

tin Luther King, Jr., and by protesting a cruel and immoral war in Vietnam? One must draw distinctions between the pseudo-universalism of self-hating Jews who embrace humanity in order to escape the claims of the Jewish community, and those whose concern for other submerged communities grows out of their Jewish experience and Jewish value-system. Buber, Magnes, Kaplan, Wise, Heschel — all understood that charity begins at home. They also knew and acted upon the wisdom that to begin and end charity in the home is to suffocate its inhabitants by provincialism.

There are dangers, of course, in pseudo-universalism, but such dangers ought not blind Jews to the peril of pseudo-particularism. For the latter offers up a loaded option for Jewish choice: choose Judaism or choose Humanity: choose to be a Jew or choose to be a man; choose Jewish interest or choose the interest of humanity. Such choices present false and ultimately self-defeating disjunctions. For they so trivialize Jewish ethics, and so shrivel the horizon of Jewish vision that they make meaningless Jewish suffering and striving. To survive only for the sake of survival, to survive only as another ethnic group with indigenous dances, songs, food and our own economic and political interests is not purpose enough to place life and death claims upon our people. Have we travelled the long trek for the sake of onions, leeks and cucumbers? Or do we so despair of meaning that we are afraid to pursue it, to make more ambitious claims on our past, on our selves?

The issue is not whether Jews should act out of self-interest. The critical question is over the perception of the Jewish self in whose interest we are bound to act. How we see the Jewish self will itself help determining the character of our interest. It is perfectly proper to ask "Is this good for Jews?" but only after we are clear — or, at least, more clear — as to what Judaism means by goodness. The short and narrow view of self-interest tends to vitiate the long-range and larger in-

terests of a community. Nothing will turn our people away from lasting identification with the Jewish community more than its tribalization and trivialization. What good is it to survive if you lose all reason to exist? The tendency to exploit the agony of the Holocaust, to "cry Auschwitz" for any and every cause of alleged Jewish self-interest, only cheapens our martyrdom. Like "crying wolf," the abuse of the survivor's cry "never again" will destroy the urgency and sanctity of our major concerns. Distinctions need to be drawn. Forest Hills is not the Warsaw Ghetto. Affirmative action is not Bergen-Belsen.

THE NEW JEWISH REALISM

Let us put aside moral arguments for a moment and play the game of political realism. Jewish liberals, its adversaries claim, have made Jews visible targets for anti-semitism because of their involvement in causes not their own. Professor Abraham Duker of Brooklyn College warned Jewish liberals that the Black revolution might turn into an anti-Jewish pogromist drive. Jewish participants in the civil rights movement, he argued in 1965, should be sensitive to such problems. Jews ought not supply our enemies with added ammunition. The future of Jews "depends on the majority's good will."

Writing in *Midstream*, Rabbi Herbert Weiner offers similar strictures and concludes that "the fight for civil liberties can get along without Judaism." Rabbis Petuchowski, Siegel and Jakobovits are critical of the Jewish liberal's opposition to prayer in public schools and Federal aid to parochial schools because, among other arguments, such liberal positions create "theological anti-Semitism," and associate Jews with atheists, agnostics and secularists.

But surely the sword cuts both ways. For Jews as a corporate body to oppose scatter-site, low-income housing, as the Jewish Rights Council does, or for Jews to organize opposi-

tion to legislators who favor affirmative action, as Siegel proposes, is to expose Jews as identifiable enemies of the poor and the minorities. To urge Jews to oppose Castro's and, in his time, Allende's radical reforms because they threaten the interest of the middle class to which many Jews belong, is to make Jews vulnerable and visible targets of the "oppressed." In terms of political shrewdness, is it any wiser for Jews to become visible on behalf of conservative causes than it was for us to become conspicuous for liberal ends? Will the conservative non-Jew embrace us more genuinely in our new ideological clothing than the liberal non-Jew welcomed the

The tendency to exploit the agony of the Holocaust, to "cry Auschwitz" for any and every cause of alleged Jewish self-interest, only cheapens our martyrdom... Forest Hills is not the Warsaw Ghetto. Affirmative action is not Bergen-Belsen.

Jewish liberal in our old?

Is it politically wise to convert economic conflicts between haves and have-nots into Jewish-poor conflicts? Is it politically wise to interpret every Black-white conflict which happens to involve Jewish whites into a Jewish-Black confrontation? Is it politically wise to allow trade-union conflicts with Blacks to turn into Jewish-Black enmities? Surely, affirmative action affects non-Jewish whites in unions, industries and colleges. Why do we not find Episcopalian, Methodist or Catholic institutions rushing in to act as amicus curiae on behalf of the white majority? Is the Church more sensitive to the oppression of the minorities than

we are, or is the Church wiser in refusing to be associated with the "suppressors" of equality?

The drift of the conservative argument tends to identify Jewish interest with middle-class interest. It may well be that for middle-class Jews capitalism, private property and parsimony in social welfare are to their advantage. But if Judaism is de facto equated with middle-classism, what interest does it hold for Jews of lower economic interests who may find in liberal or radical social reform greater self-interest? Are we to submit, accept, and even foster, a Marxist interpretation of Judaism which asserts that the religious and ethical superstructure is secondary to the economic substructure?

Whatever the limits of Jewish liberalism, its ideology and political practice transcended economic self-interest. Unlike other ethnic groups and other religious groups, Jews did not respond to political candidates with knee-jerk ethnicism or vote unqualifiedly for their co-religionists, a fact to which Robert Morgenthau, Arthur Levitt and Louis Lefkowitz in New York can give painful testimony. To the consternation of pollsters and political scientists, Jews did not vote their pockets. Misguided or not, they did not accommodate what they understood to be Jewish values (e.g., *Tz'dakah*, *Rachmanut*, *Yosher*) to their economic class advantage.

LIBERALISM, CONSERVATISM —OR JUDAISM

Discussions of the traditionally close relationship of Judaism to liberalism frequently end in a peculiar form of pseudo-particularism. In the search for the uniquely Jewish, there is a tendency to remove those elements in Judaism which are shared by others outside the Jewish circle. Thus, viewing the path taken by Mendelssohn and Spinoza, one might surmise that reason and ethics, since they are not exclusively Jewish, somehow belong more to the non-Jewish realm than to the Jewish; and it is a short way

from the "non-Jewish" to the "un-Jewish." What remains uniquely Jewish is ritual legislation and other concerns which immediately affect the Jewish community. The result of such a search for Jewish differentia yields a shrivelled Judaism in which ethics are surrendered to the public domain. Thus, Jewish universalism, humanitarianism and passion for social justice are attributed to non-Jewish sources such as the Enlightenment, Deism, or socialism. But did Judaism discover the ethic associated with liberalism from Locke or Voltaire, from Lessing or Kant? What is it that Jews have been doing for thousands of years, reading on their most sacred day the book of Jonah, which affirms, insists upon, God's interest in creation? The God of Israel is concerned with the idolators of Nineveh. His interests are larger than Jonah's narrow concern for his gourd. Did Abraham's contention with God on behalf of Sodom and Gomorrah (not Jewish cities) stem from the reading of John Toland? Is the rabbinic formulation of the classic benediction which affirms the sovereignty of God over *all* the universe derived from 18th century Enlightenment? Is the interpretation of Leviticus 19:18 to include more than Jewish neighbors alien to the rabbinic world view? Was Jacob Emden caught up in the web of "foreign" universalism when, in his commentary to the Passover Haggadah, he insisted that the call to feed the hungry is addressed to non-Jews and has priority over the invitation to other Jews to celebrate the Passover at our tables? Did the Talmud *Gittin* 61 not call upon Jews to feed the hungry gentile, visit the gentile sick, comfort the gentile bereaved, together with the hungry, sick and bereaved Jew? Was the rabbinic principle of *mipnei darkei shalom* (in the interest of promoting peace) a sign of Jewish assimilation to liberalism? And why, indeed, did the rabbis *not* employ the principle of reciprocity to their relationship with the non-Jew? Later rabbinic authorities such as Sherira Gaon, Maimonides, Judah He-Hasid and

Joseph Karo repudiated the double standard which treated gentiles in one fashion and Jews in the other because they would not polarize the world between "them" and "us." "Jew and non-Jew are to be treated alike," Maimonides wrote in his *Hilchot Mechirah*. "It is wrong to deceive any person by words, even without causing him a financial loss." Beyond the principle of reciprocity, Rabbi Israel Lipschutz taught that when a Jew is tempted to discriminate against a gentile, let him say with Joseph "How can



I do this great wickedness and sin against God" (Genesis 39:9).

UNFINISHED AGENDA

I do not wish to give the impression that Jewish ethics are automatically and universally on the side of liberalism, nor that the specific issues Jews in the 70's confront are easily resolved. There are, for example, genuine ethical dilemmas in the theory and practice of affirmative action. My plea, however, is that the Jewish community not content itself with pointing out the

flaws of liberal proposals. It is not enough to say "no" to affirmative action.

What do we as Jews say beyond our negations? What do we as Jews propose to do with the society in which we live? Are we as Jews content to withdraw, to turn inwards and deny our responsibilities to the larger community? Such Jewish exhaustion would be tragic for our society, still more tragic for its distortion of ourselves. We are not "second-class" citizens, devoid of rights and powers, and even the responsibility, to affect the larger society in which we live. If we accept the premise that Jews as members of a major religious civilization have a responsibility towards the community, we will struggle against the xenophobia which leads us down the path of privatism and irrelevance. After Auschwitz, we cannot emulate those who sought escape from responsibility through the safety-hatch of insular "self-interest." After Auschwitz, we must live beyond despair. After Auschwitz, what is required of us is moral statesmanship, even, perhaps especially, when the moral going gets rough. I cannot believe that Jewish institutions of learning and action, including seminaries and rabbinic associations, cannot mobilize their scholars and laity to contribute to the solution of national problems. I cannot, for example, believe that we cannot appeal to Jewish doctors, lawyers and businessmen in our midst so to help prepare the disadvantaged segments of the minorities that they may find easier and fairer entrance into jobs, businesses and colleges.

I believe that Jewish affirmative thinking and action can well affect the quality of life in America and can help regain the lost confidence in those institutions which are meant to transmit Jewish wisdom and ethics. For in the end what I fear most in the new Jewish political conservatism is its consequence: not "*mah yomru hagoyim*," what will the gentiles say, but "*mah yomru hay'hudim*," what will our own say, what will we ourselves say, and think. ★

Copyright of Moment Magazine (ARCHIVE) is the property of Moment Magazine and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.