



SHALOM HARTMAN INSTITUTE מכון  
OF NORTH AMERICA שלום הרטמן

## **Is Zionism Legitimate in an Age of Nationalist Populism and Ethnocentrism?**

Temple Emanuel

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# Europe, North Africa and the Near East in 1800 (l.) and 2000 (r.)



## What is Nationalism?

### 1) Michael Ignatieff, Blood and Belonging: Journeys into the New Nationalism

As a political doctrine, nationalism is the belief that the world's peoples are divided into nations, and that each of these nations has the right of self-determination, either as self-governing units within existing nation-states or as nation-states of their own.

As a cultural ideal, nationalism is the claim that while men and women have many identities, it is the nation that provides them with their primary form of belonging.

As a moral ideal, nationalism is an ethic of heroic sacrifice, justifying the use of violence in the defense of one's nation against enemies, internal or external...

### 2) George Orwell, "Notes on Nationalism"

By 'nationalism' I mean first of all the habit of assuming that human beings can be classified like insects and that whole blocks of millions or tens of millions of people can be confidently labelled 'good' or 'bad'. But secondly – and this is much more important – **I mean the habit of identifying oneself with a single nation or other unit, placing it beyond good and evil and recognizing no other duty than that of advancing its interests. Nationalism is not to be confused with patriotism.** Both words are normally used in so vague a way that any definition is liable to be challenged, but one must draw a distinction between them, since two different and even opposing ideas are involved. **By 'patriotism' I mean devotion to a particular place and a particular way of life, which one believes to be the best in the world but has no wish to force on other people. Patriotism is of its nature defensive, both militarily and culturally. Nationalism, on the other hand, is inseparable from the desire for power.** The abiding purpose of every nationalist is to secure more power and more prestige, not for himself but for the nation or other unit in which he has chosen to sink his own individuality.

### 3) Ignatieff, Blood and Belonging

Stripped of such sentimentality, what, then, is this belonging, and the need for it, which nationalism seems to satisfy so successfully? **When nationalists claim that national belonging is the overridingly important form of all belonging, they mean that there is no other form of belonging — to your family, work, or friends — that is secure if you do not have a nation to protect you. This is what warrants sacrifice on the nation's behalf. Without a nation's protection, everything that an individual values can be rendered worthless. Belonging, on this account, is first and foremost protection from violence. Where you belong is where you are safe; and where you are safe is where you belong.** If nationalism is persuasive because it warrants violence, it is also persuasive because it offers protection from violence. The warlord is his people's protector; if he kills, he does so in defense of the noblest cause: the protection of the innocent.

But **belonging also means being recognized and being understood**. As Isaiah Berlin has written in *Two Concepts of Liberty*, **when I am among my own people, “they understand me, as I understand them; and this understanding creates within me a sense of being somebody in the world.”** To belong is to understand the tacit codes of the people you live with; it is to know that you will be understood without having to explain yourself. People, in short, “speak your language.” This is why, incidentally, the protection and defense of a nation’s language is such a deeply emotional nationalist cause, for it is language, more than land and history, that provides the essential form of belonging, which is to be understood. One can, of course, be understood in languages and in countries other than one’s own; one can find belonging even in exile. But **the nationalist claim is that full belonging, the warm sensation that people understand not merely what you say but what you mean, can come only when you are among your own people in your native land.**

Globalism in a post-imperial age permits a post-nationalist consciousness only for those cosmopolitans who are lucky enough to live in the wealthy West. It has brought chaos and violence for the many small peoples too weak to establish defensible states of their own. The Bosnian Muslims are perhaps the most dramatic example of a people who turned in vain to more powerful neighbors to protect them. The people of Sarajevo were true cosmopolitans, fierce believers in ethnic heterogeneity. But they lacked either a reliable imperial protector or a state of their own to guarantee peace among contending ethnicities.

What has happened in Bosnia must give pause to anyone who believes in the virtues of cosmopolitanism. **It is only too apparent that cosmopolitanism is the privilege of those who can take a secure nation-state for granted. Though we have passed into a post-imperial age, we have not moved to a post-nationalist age, and I cannot see how we will ever do so. The cosmopolitan order of the great cities — London, Los Angeles, New York, Paris — depends critically on the rule-enforcing capacities of the nation-state. When this order breaks down, as it did during the Los Angeles riots of 1992, it becomes apparent that civilized, cosmopolitan multi-ethnic cities have as great a propensity for ethnic warfare as any Eastern European country.**

In this sense, therefore, cosmopolitans like myself are not beyond the nation; and a cosmopolitan, post-nationalist spirit will always depend, in the end, on the capacity of nation-states to provide security and civility for their citizens. In that sense alone, I am a civic nationalist, someone who believes in the necessity of nations and in the duty of citizens to defend the capacity of nations to provide the security and the rights we all need in order to live cosmopolitan lives. At the very least, cosmopolitan disdain and astonishment at the ferocity with which people will fight to win a nation-state of their own is misplaced. They are, after all, only fighting for a privilege, cosmopolitans have long taken for granted.

## Jews and Nationalism Liberalism

### 4) Lucien Wolf, “The Zionist Peril” (1904)

Think for a moment what we have done in these hundred years. **Our legal emancipation has been won in every civilized country in the world** except Russia, Roumania, and Turkey, and in those lands we are refused our political rights only by virtue of a retrograde doctrine of nationality, which is itself one of the chief inspirations of Zionism. As for the alleged unreality and possible reversal of these emancipations we may easily reassure ourselves. **Broadly speaking our victories were due, not to any special tolerance or sympathy for the Jewish people, but to a revolution in the conception of nationality which is fundamental to the modern constitution of society. Religious toleration and the acceptance of naturalization in lieu of the old doctrine of the indelibility of allegiance were the principles which governed Jewish emancipation. They established a sort of economic Brotherhood of Man in place of the old theologico-racial classification of nations...**

To sum up, then: **the characteristic peril of Zionism is that it is the natural and abiding ally of anti-Semitism and its most powerful justification.** It is an attempt to turn back the course of modern Jewish history, which hitherto, on its political side, has had for its main object to secure for the Jewish people an equal place with their fellow citizens of other creeds in the countries in which they dwell, and a common lot with them in the main stream of human progress. **It is essentially an ignorant and a narrow-minded view of a great problem – ignorant because it takes no account of the decisive element of progress in history; and narrow-minded because it confounds a political memory with a religious ideal. ...**

**The temporal power of Judaism was a stage in the religious progress of the world, the product of conditions which have passed away for ever.** To try to reproduce it now would be like trying to breed fish in an exhausted watercourse...

We have to show an example to the nations. We take our stand on the lofty toleration and real universalism of the Talmudic axiom that “the pious of all nations have their place in the world to come.” Our highest traditional ideal is undoubtedly national, but it is not the nation of a kept principality but the holy nation of the Kingdom of priests. Having given to the world the fundamental laws which have made the most advanced races what they are, we have to complete the work in our providential dispersion by leading the way in the most fruitful application of those laws. That is the real Jewish Nationalism, the only true Zion.

### 5) Hermann Cohen, Reply to Martin Buber (1916)

We interpret our entire history as pointing to this Messianic goal. ... All our prophets have us living among the nations, and all view “Israel’s Remnant” from the perspective of its world mission. ...

This politico-religious orientation of ours constitutes, for all practical purposes, the difference between us and Zionism. **While the Zionist believes that Judaism can be preserved only by an**

all-encompassing Jewish nationalism, we are of the opposite view, believing that only a universal, mankind-oriented Judaism can preserve the Jewish religion. ...

We love Germany and all that it stands for not merely because we love our homeland as the bird loves its nest ...[but mainly **because of**] **our awareness of that innermost accord existing between the German spirit and our Messianic religiosity. Their German spirit is the spirit of classical humanism and true universalism. ... Therefore it is only natural that we German Jews should feel at one with ourselves, as Jews and Germans. And the Jews of other countries, whose religious life has been fructified by the science of Judaism (which has its roots in Germany), should learn to acknowledge and appreciate Germany's central significance for moral culture.**

## Cosmopolitanism

### 6) Emma Goldman, "Anarchism: What it Really Stands For" (1910)

Anarchism stands for the liberation of the human mind from the dominion of religion and liberation of the human body from the coercion of property; liberation from the shackles and restraint of government. It stands for a social order based on the free grouping of individuals.

### 7) George Steiner, "Our Homeland, the Text" (1985)

How can a thinking man, a native of the word, be anything but the most wary and provisional of patriots? **The nation-state is founded on myths of instauration and of militant glory.** It perpetuates itself by lies and half-truths (machine guns and sub-machine guns). In his model of the social contract, Rousseau declared unequivocally that there is a contradiction between humanity and citizenship: "Forcé de combattre la nature ou les institutions sociales, il faut opter entre faire un homme ou un citoyen; car on ne peut pas faire à la fois l'un et l'autre." The consequence is stark: "a patriot is hard on strangers, for they are but men."

The 'patriotism' of the truth-seeker is antithetical to Rousseau's civic option. The sole citizenship of the cleric is that of a critical humanism. He knows not only that virulent infection edging the species towards mutual massacre. He knows that it signifies an abstention from free and clear thought and from the disinterested pursuit of justice. **The man or woman at home in the text is, by definition, a conscientious objector: to the vulgar mystique of the flag and the anthem, to "my country, right or wrong", to the pathos and the eloquence of collective mendacities on which the nation-state - be it a mass-consumer mercantile technocracy or a totalitarian oligarchy- builds its power and aggressions. The locus of truth is always extraterritorial; its diffusion is made clandestine by the barbed wire and watch-towers of national dogma.**

## Diaspora Nationalism

### 8) Simon Dubnow, "Autonomism" (1901)

Autonomy as a historic claim is thus the firm and inalienable right of each national individuality; only its forms depend on the status which a nationality has within a multinational state. ... In view of its condition in the Diaspora, **Jewish nationality cannot strive for territorial or political isolation, but only for social and cultural autonomy. The Jew says: "As a citizen of my country I participate in its civic and political life, but as a member of the Jewish nationality I have, in addition, my own national needs, and in this sphere I must be independent to the same degree that any other national minority is autonomous in the state.** I have the right to speak my language, to use it in all my social institutions, to make it the language of instruction in my schools, to order my internal life in my communities, and to create institution serving a variety of national purposes; to join in the common activities with my brethren not only in this country but in all countries of the world and to participate in all the organizations which serve to further the needs of the Jewish nationality and to defend them everywhere.

### 9) Judah Magnes, "A Republic of Nationalities" (1909)

It must be accepted as almost axiomatic, that every one living in this land should be a citizen of the land... The newcomers of the past generation and more have equaled their predecessors in the avidity with which they have entered into political partnership with their fellow citizens. There is no force, no compulsion about American citizenship. It is a privilege and a duty. A man is attracted to American citizenship just because this nation was conceived in liberty, and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created free and equal. **There is hardly an American citizen who does not love this land, its history, its heroes, its literature, its institutions and its ideals of freedom and equality. ...**

**This does not, however, by any means, imply that therefore a man's traditional national culture must be abandoned. On the contrary, it is possible and it is desirable that parallel with a high appreciation of, and assimilation to English culture, a man align with reverence to the national culture of his fathers.** Such a parallelism is desirable both from the point of view of the individual and for the sake of the developing culture of this country.

### 10) Louis D. Brandeis, (1915)

Let no American imagine that Zionism is inconsistent with Patriotism. **Multiple loyalties are objectionable only if they are inconsistent. A man is a better citizen of the United States for being also a loyal citizen of his state, and of his city; for being loyal to his family, and to his profession or trade; for being loyal to his college or his lodge. Every Irish American who contributed towards advancing home rule was a better man and a better American for the sacrifice he made. Every American Jew who aids in advancing the Jewish settlement in Palestine, though he feels that neither he nor his descendants will ever live there, will likewise be a better man and a better American for doing so.**

## Realism

### 11) Andrea Dworkin

In the world I'm looking for, nation states will not exist. But in the world I live in, I want there to be an Israel.

### 12) Letty Cottin Pogrebin, "Anti-Semitism in the Women's Movement" (<https://jwa.org/media/anti-semitism-in-womens-movement-by-letty-cottin-pogrebin-transcript>)

After evaluating the results of my anti-Semitism survey and writing the article for Ms., I saw the importance of being a public, affirmative Jew - even when ethnicity or religion "didn't matter." **As much as I might wish for a world of universalist values and de-emphasized differences, I would no longer tolerate a women's movement in which Jews are the only group asked to relinquish their own interests while other women were allowed to push their private agendas and subvert feminist ideals when it suited them.** I would no longer assume all women were my sisters.

**I still have universalist dreams** - visions of one world without the rancors of nationalism, tribalism, and patriarchy - **but now I dream them only when fully awake**, and I take my inspiration not from some naïve UNICEF greeting card but from a pluralist feminism founded on a mutual respect for each other's "identity politics," which include the particularities of culture, peoplehood, and history.

## Zionism

### 13) Ahad Ha-am, A letter to Ha'aretz in 1922, in *Kol Kitvei Ahad Ha-am* 1953, p 462.

*This letter was written upon hearing a rumor that Jews had killed an innocent Arab boy in an act of revenge.*

"Jew and blood! Are there any greater opposites than these?" this is how I closed one of my first articles many, many years ago. I was sure then that this was self-evident; that no Jew would question its truth. **For what did we rescue from the upheaval of the destruction if not the teaching of our prophets, that we took with us on the long road of exile to lighten what darkened our lives in foreign lands?** Our blood was spilt like water in all the corners of the earth for millennia, but we did not spill blood; we remembered always that the great and moral Torah that our ancestors inherited is the Torah of the future, that we must give our lives to it until it becomes the possession of all humanity...

Thus lived our people generation after generation, living in foreign lands, among people who lived by the sword, for whom murder was a lifelong occupation. And **that people, everywhere pursued, with all its external lowliness, knew deep in its heart that it did not have, and never**



**would have, any connection to a life like that because it held in its hands the great moral truth that it is destined to spread to every land, to put an end to cruelty, to murder in the whole world.** And then that people would also dwell securely in its land and would see with its own eyes its great victory, the victory of its moral Torah, for which it was slain for thousands of years.

And this generation has merited to see a kind of "beginning of the redemption," the return of the children to their borders. Our children have come from far away lands to offer their lives in service to the nation and building the land... Have the days arrived that the prophets foresaw, that we would return and lift a banner in their land and once again become "a light into the nations" as we were millennia ago?

And now, what can we say if the rumors are true?... Is this really the [messianic] end? ... That we should come to Zion and contaminate its land by spilling innocent blood?

#### **14) Uri Tzvi Greenberg, "One Truth, Not Two"**

Your Rabbis taught: land is bought with money.

You buy the field and dig it with a hoe.

I say: land is not bought with money

And with a hoe you also dig and bury the dead.

I say: land is conquered with blood.

And only when conquered with blood, is it hallowed to the people  
By the holiness of blood.

And only one who follows the cannon in the field,  
shall merit to follow his good plow  
On this conquered field .

And only this field gives forth nourishing, filling bread  
And the house that rises from its mound is a fortress and a temple,  
For in this field there is honorable blood.

Your Rabbis taught: the Messiah will come in generations to come  
and Judea shall rise without fire or blood.

She will rise with each tree, with each new house.

I say: if your generation lags

And does not force the end with blows and bare hands

and will not come in fire with a Shield of David

and his horses will not come wallowing in blood -

the Messiah will not come even in the distant generations

Judea shall not rise.

[...]

Your Rabbis taught: there is one truth for the nations:

blood for blood - and it is not a Jewish truth.

And I say: one truth, not two.

[...]

*And the blood will decide: who is sole ruler here.*

**15) Berl Katznelson, quoted in Luz, Ehud. “‘Jewish ethics’ as an argument in the public debate over the Israeli reaction to Palestinian terror.” *Israel Studies* 7.3 (2002): 134–156, 139.**

We are a people with a great culture whose basis is a regard for human life, and I doubt that having achieved such respect and appreciation for human life after two thousand years of education, we ought to give them up. **Deep down, we are afraid of blood. This profound trait that has been preserved in us is among the obstacles standing in our way ... [but] ... if we want to get rid of this trait, we shall not readily be able to do so, and I also believe that if we do, we shall regret it later...**

**We stand up to those who attack us, but we do not want our weapons to be stained with innocent blood.** ... Self-restraint is both a political and a moral approach, stemming from our history and our present reality, from our character and the conditions of the war in which we are engaged. **If, instead of being true to ourselves, we were to take a different approach, we would long since have lost the battle.**