Introduction

There are rare moments in one's life when radical change becomes inescapable. We do not seek these moments; they most often occur when all other options have been pushed to the ground, and collapsed. We have a number of tactics to cope with challenging times, tactics we cling to more tightly when we are desperate to escape radical change. Some of us flee into the present: We immerse ourselves in the little pleasures of life, in intimacy and bonding, in the objects we possess and the achievements we have marshaled; the rest, the dreadful memories and cloudy prospects – the events that are too certain and those that are wholly uncertain – we tend to deliberately ignore. Not to think too much is the credo of the present seeker. Or some of us try to trust in the future, hoping to gradually reform ourselves and the world, believing, like Hegel and Marx did, that the contradictions in human life must be resolved through progress in history, that the promise of harmony, fulfillment, and happiness eludes us just because we are limited by our location in the narrative. We may be devoured by opposing forces, commitments, relations – but on a higher plane, to which we shall be carried by the wings of time, these forces are not incompatible. Still others among us flee to the past: We believe that tradition possesses the ultimate authority, that it contains truth and wisdom, that if we cling to the old ways of dwelling in the world we will not only maintain dignity and identity, but will also be able to cope well with the contingencies of circumstances.

When these and other strategies of escape have been exhausted, however – when the present becomes too harsh, the notion of the future as progressive betterment is revealed as an illusion, and tradition is experienced as totally at odds with actual circumstances – the moment arrives

when we accept that we must face a decision: to make a radical transformation in the ways we act and think or to relinquish the hope of becoming a whole, or at least capable, individual. This is a moment of both sadness and excitement, of letting go of one mode of existence that shaped us and exploring the unknown.

Something similar happens to communities. They also, at rare times to be sure, reach points at which they must make decisions: change or disappear, create themselves anew or perish in their old ways. These are times for beginning from scratch, for destroying and inventing, for forgetting and imagining. When individuals transform their lives, they seclude themselves or change their vocation, or alter relations, or exhume their inner voice; when communities seek transformation, they give birth to or breathe new life into politics.

This book is about the crisis of the Jewish people in modernity, and especially about the radical politics some of them have embraced in the form of Zionism. Zionism is the creation of politics: of new institutions and resources, of zealous leaders and committed movements, of lofty ideologies and practical strategies and planning, of a public sphere (even prior to the existence of a territory) and a language enlivened mainly for the sake of that sphere – and ultimately, of course, of collective action and mass mobilization. As a phenomenon embodying radical politics, Zionism is inherently intertwined with a temporal crisis faced by some Jews at the end of the nineteenth century: a dire present in which they found themselves due to increasing anti-Semitism across Europe and to economic deterioration in the East; a disbelief that the future promised genuine integration into European nation-states or into a cosmopolitan community; and a disenchantment with faith in an almighty God and the enduring relevance of tradition. Underlying the rise of Zionism is a transformation in the way a number of Jews viewed the meaning of history, perceived its direction or lack thereof, conceived of its dangers and potentials, and interpreted the times in which they were living: "In the life of nations, as in the life of the private individual, there are rare, weighty moments, and the way these moments are being handled would determine that fate of the people or person in the future, for good or for bad. We are currently undergoing such a moment."[1]

[1] Leo Pinsker, *Auto-Emancipation* [Selbstemanzipation, 1882], at http://www.benyehuda.org/ginzberg/pinsker_autoemancipation.html. I have been assisted in the translations from this text by the English translation of the original German by Dr. D. S. Blondheim, Federation of American Zionists, 1916, at http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/Zionism/pinsker.html. (Unless I indicate otherwise, all translations in this book are mine. EC)

Yet this study also seeks to go beyond Zionism, or rather to reflect on certain aspects of modernity by virtue of understanding Zionism. Specifically, the predicament of Jews in general and of Zionists in particular serves as a springboard for reflection on the temporal imaginations of modernity, since in the European scene the modern Jews are *the prime temporal agents*. They are considered by others (and sometimes by themselves) to be the ultimate strangers, an uprooted people, and therefore they have often become the most ardent believers in visions of a future cosmopolitan society, for in such a future they will finally be at home with others and enjoy equal rights and respect regardless of primordial, territorial, cultural, national, religious, or other particularistic attachments. The Jews are also steadfast believers in their tradition: They epitomize the power of human memory in their insistence on certain practices and customs, rituals and holidays, legal codes and learning. Their identity seems to depend on their capacity for remembrance and on their ability to reinterpret and reproduce the past. Yet the Jews are also the people most identified with industrialization, commerce, and market capitalism generally. Therefore, they are often identified with the present-centeredness of this economic system, with its promotion of immediate gains, its cultivation of self-interest without regard to prior or succeeding generations, its constantly looming materialism and hedonism. In short, the Jews are the people most immersed in time, as they lack a space or a polity of their own as alternative anchors of identity. It is not an exaggeration to say, in fact, that the story of Jewish temporality since the late eighteenth century reflects the story of modern temporality at large.

I have used the term *temporal imagination*. By this I mean (to put it briefly at this stage) the ways that people represent the nature of time, as when they ponder such things as whether it is quantitative or qualitative, what connection (or lack of connection) exists among proximate and distant events, and what the overarching structure and direction of time is (ranging from a tight, progressing totality to complete arbitrariness). But before I say more about the temporal imaginations of modernity – and about their critical effects on Zionism – let us bear in mind the familiar and important accounts of the crisis of modern Jewry and the reasons for the emergence of Zionism.

This emergence is often described as the upshot of the deteriorating status of citizenship experienced by Jews in the late nineteenth century. In France, observes David Vital, "the question Jews had … increasingly to face was less whether they would be allowed to become citizens of the state than whether they would be granted membership in the

nation."[2] What was true in France was even more acutely felt in Central and Eastern European countries, where organic nationalism, *Volkish* ideologies, racism, and traditional stereotypes led many to view Jews with suspicion because of their distinct religion, culture, language, and origins. Indeed, toward the end of the nineteenth century, the universalism and equality of citizenship that had characterized the emancipation of the Jews since the French Revolution and the rise of bourgeois liberalism were gradually evaporating, and they felt increasingly discriminated against socially and humiliated.[3] Although formally Jews gained equal rights, this did not mean that they became part of the nation; the attempt of state institutions (especially in Germany and France) to integrate them into the general population ebbed with the emergence of new, populist forces that made use of the emerging public sphere and transformed the political discourse and practice by presenting Jews as interlopers. If in France this phenomenon was epitomized in the Dreyfus affair, in Tsarist Russia – where Jews were never considered equal citizens – matters were much worse: The hundreds of pogroms that occurred in southern Russia during the early 1880s demonstrated to them that their (limited) bond with the state was finished, that because of its need to boost its shaky legitimacy, the state withdrew its hold over the population and let Jews be the prey of the city mob, the frustrated peasants, or the various national minorities within its bounds.

In fact, Jews had begun to understand that even the equality of rights that started to elude them everywhere would not have promised *respect* in the eyes of nations, since such respect can only be given to members of a cohesive nation with a place and political institutions of its own, not to dispersed individuals that are alien everywhere and are always dependent on the goodwill of others.[4] It is not only the respect of others that was missing, to be precise, but also self-respect, the profound other-dependency of Jews affecting their perception of themselves and

[2] David Vital, *A People Apart: The Jews in Europe, 1789–1939* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 248.

[3] For a history of the Jews in nineteenth-century Europe, see J. Frankel and S. Zipperstein, eds., *Assimilation and Community: The Jews in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

[4] As Leo Strauss notes, political Zionists, in particular, argued that the goal must be "the restoration of their [Jews'] honor through the acquisition of statehood and therefore of a country – any country." Strauss seems to concur that Jewish honor and self-respect are at the core of Zionism. See Leo Strauss, *Spinoza's Critique of Religion* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), p. 5. On Strauss and Zionism, see Steven B. Smith, *Reading Leo Strauss* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), Chap. 2.

diminishing them internally. Because the Jews refuse to disappear as a distinct people, on the one hand, but do not exist as an independent and cohesive nation, on the other, noted Leo Pinsker, the world considers them as an "uncanny form of one of the dead walking among the living," as a kind of "ghostlike apparition of a living corpse." At times, the antipathy toward them is manifested through actual discrimination and violence, and at other times through being "tolerated" with effort and designated as a group needing special protection by the authorities. But, according to Pinsker, "to be robbed as a Jew or to be protected as a Jew is equally humiliating, equally destructive to the self-respect of the Jews." Only the restoration of the Jewish nation as an independent political body in a land of its own would restore Jewish honor and sense of self-worth.[5]

Economics and demographics also played their part in generating the Jewish quandary of modern times. In the Pale of Settlement, at least a third of the Jews were destitute and dependent on charity. They were forced to leave the villages and move to the towns; there, the artisans earned meager wages, the workers toiled in small businesses and mostly as unskilled laborers, and the traders were often confined in their business to the local level. As the fastest-growing population in Russia (as well as in more prosperous Germany, incidentally), Jews lived in terrible sanitary conditions, with entire families most often crowded into one room, and with poor health services. In other words, many Jews of Eastern Europe experienced some of the typical developments of modernization (they became more urban people and underwent a vast change in their communal life and sheer demographics), yet they could not enjoy the benefits offered by this modernization (e.g., promising vocations, better quality of life, access to higher education). Their distinctiveness prevented them from becoming members of the proletarian class that was emerging in the heavy and more established industries, nor could they become an integral part of the middle class due to severe restrictions on their movements, education, and mobility.

The economic and political crisis of modern Jewry was intermingled with a more basic, existential one of individual and collective identity. In order to become a part of the German nation, for example, Jews had to master the German language and relinquish (at least in public) their beloved Yiddish, to change their long-established commercial occupations into "productive" ones, and to embrace bourgeois mores

[5] Pinsker, *Auto-Emancipation*.

(e.g., an emphasis on hygiene, propriety, external appearance, emotional restraint, and the small family unit),[6] rather than maintain their more expressive and communal way of life. Jewish identity devolved into a state of confusion, veering between waning tradition – whose fixed practices and values offered less and less relevant answers – and secularization, whose openness posed multiple and conflicting options. Primary among these options were choosing Jewishness as a culture (rather than as a religious faith) or embracing the general culture of the relevant nation (which nevertheless remained foreign); eating kosher, not working on the Sabbath, covering one's head, teaching the children Hebrew, and so forth or ignoring all of these customs and traditions by surrendering oneself to the demands of the external world. Should a Jew choose communal life, which some experienced as suffocating, or a lonely existence with a much-shrunken family structure in the city? Should he or she choose loyalty to the collective and to Jews wherever they are (*arvut hadadit*) or give in to the nagging voice of self-interest characteristic of the modern era? The Jews, in other words, were troubled by irresolvable dilemmas in the most basic realms of their existence.

Although this generalized account of the emergence of Zionism is enlightening, it is insufficient: The political, economic, and existential crisis of modern Jewry does not lead naturally or necessarily to Zionism, as some scholars suggest. The fact that a community experiences a breakdown in its old ways of life and that external circumstances become dire does not mean that it will inevitably find a solution to that crisis, and certainly not a radical new path; history is the graveyard of countless communities that did not muster the power and inventiveness to overcome the troubles that beset them. Moreover, the history of Jews in the Diaspora is saturated with disasters that did not lead to radical solutions. In Western Europe alone, Jews were occasionally massacred (commencing with the massacres in the Rhineland during the First Crusade in 1096), expelled abruptly (from England [1290], France [1306], Spain [1492], and Portugal [1497]), ghettoized (first by Pope Paul IV in 1555), harassed by accusations of ritual murder, discriminated against economically and degraded to utter impoverishment, and so forth. None of this, however, led them to collective action aimed at returning to their ancient land, and Jews optimized strategies of adaptation, not of revolution. Indeed, it is not crisis alone that propels people to great deeds: They also

[6] Shlomit Volkov, *Bama'agal hamechushaf: yehudim, anti-shemim, vegermanim acherim* [The magic circle: Germans, Jews and Antisemites] (Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 2002), p. 172.

need to feel that action is possible, that the *world is malleable and can be crafted by humans*; no less crucial, they need to perceive themselves as potent beings, effective actors on the stage of history. Not even the rise of nationalism in modernity explains how (some) Jews found the boldness to define themselves as a viable nation – and succeed. How is it, then, that around the turn of the twentieth century, a small but decisive number of Jews began to see human affairs as hospitable to deliberate intervention and willful rupture?

Before answering this question, it is worth bearing in mind the scope of the Zionist revolution. Zionism emerged during the last decade of the nineteenth century, mainly in Eastern and Central Europe. While originally a movement of a small minority of Jews that was considered outlandish by their peers, its institutional ingenuity, combined with pressing external circumstances, gradually turned it into a viable option for the Jewish masses. At the most basic level, Zionism aimed to restore to the Jews a political body they could claim as their own; national independence was seen as the way to guard the individual against physical threats and economic want, and the collective against the menace of assimilation and disintegration. Most Zionists – seeking to legitimize their claim for nationhood and to echo the glorious Hebraic past of self-government – thought that this modern project of renewal could succeed only in *Eretz Israel* (Palestine). But Zionism meant more than political independence in Palestine. It promised both material and spiritual transformation: a modernized economy of and for the Jews, which would eliminate their threatened, fleeting patterns of survival as well as their dependent occupational structure (which often left them socially backward), and the revival of the Hebrew language, which would launch a secular, fresh cultural experiment and introduce new substance into the Jewish collective identity. Some even hoped to form a new Jew: natural, assertive, self-reliant, productive, and so on. Once we consider the radical and unprecedented nature of these goals, the question arises even more forcefully: Where did the Zionists find the *audacity* to take on such an all-engulfing experiment?

The answer has two components. The first concerns the nature of modern men and women as historical, and the second, the specific temporal quality of the late nineteenth century and of the Zionist perception of time in that era. Beginning with the French Revolution, asserts Reinhart Koselleck, time "colored the entire political and social vocabulary." Since that period, he adds, "there has hardly been a central concept of political theory or social program which does not contain a coefficient

of temporal change."[7] This new centrality of time in social and political thought is familiar. Thinkers of the seventeenth century tended to view time as neutral and could therefore envision a great degree of permanence in the world order and humans' place in that order. Locke, for example, believed that the obligations of the Law of Nature "cease not in Society." Thus, he added, "the Law of Nature stands as an Eternal Rule to all Men, legislators as well as others."[8] For Locke, then, the Law of Nature, which defines our individual rights and commitments to one another, was inscribed everlastingly in the world by the Divine.[9] This Law, and the overall order of which this Law forms a part, are wholly transparent to human reason and are judged as inherently sensible by that reason. Since neither the order and Law of God nor human reason and judgment ever change, history is characterized by continuity and coherence, rather than by constant transformation and difference.[10]

From the middle of the eighteenth century onward, however, this view was no longer tenable. In Rousseau's *Second Discourse*, for instance, time itself became a factor in human life and was conceived as shaping human consciousness, needs, motivations, character, options, and more; in short, the individual, and the species as a whole, became historical. This creed was formulated later by such diverse writers as Kant, Arndt, Comte, Hegel, Marx, Spencer, and countless others. Since the late eighteenth century, then, "time is no longer simply the medium in which all histories take place; it gains a historical quality. Consequently, history no longer occurs in, but through, time. Time becomes a dynamic and historical force in its own right."[11] In the new vista, each epoch in history (especially each century) possesses a distinct quality evident in all spheres of human existence: political institutions and economic modes of production, fashion and arts, practices and habits, moral codes and overall visions of life. To understand individuals and societies, we must be attuned to all of these spheres and how they are shaped by history.

[7] Reinhart Koselleck, "*Neuzeit*: Remarks on the Semantics of the Modern Concepts of Movement," in his *Futures Past* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1985), p. 259.
[8] John Locke, *Second Treatise of Government* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1980), p. 71.
[9] Locke professes that if we examine the reason imbued in Nature, we shall discover that we have a right to life, health, freedom, and property – and that we must respect the right of others to the same. Moreover, Locke's Law of Nature is essentially oriented toward the preservation of humankind and the enhancement of human sociability.
[10] Locke, *Second Treatise of Government*, p. 104. For a general discussion of natural law in the seventeenth century in authors such as Grotius, Pufendorf, Cumberland, and Locke, see Knud Haakonssen, *Natural Law and Moral Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), esp. Chap. 1.
[11] Koselleck, "*Neuzeit*: Remarks," p. 246.

There is no belief in human nature as such and no model of a "best regime" that is transhistorical. Indeed, there are considered to be no predetermined, tradition-laden confines to what humans can will and do; it is our specific location in time that opens some options of existence and closes others. In order to understand this location correctly, we must fathom the ontology and course of time by transcending its particular manifestations. Historical time should be contemplated abstractly – as a system with certain categories, rules, structure, rationale; in fact, some even believe that we should see it as a totality, as a coherent phenomenon that embraces all epochs as well as all places – as a world history. This overarching vision is necessary not only to understand the quality of a distant era but even more importantly to understand ourselves and the paths receptive to our actions.

More specifically, history is essential for us as we seek to fathom the answers to two clusters of critical questions. Firstly, what is the meaning of our lives in this particular time and place, and of which emerging order do we form a part? Are we the moral agents promoting in our daily moral actions a universal community of justice and Right? Are we the small cells cultivating the ancient spirit and body of the nation? Are we the proletarian threshold from which a classless society will be formed and solidarity reign? History answers these questions for us, for meaning is not merely an individual project but is dependent on our accurate comprehension of history and the truth that emerges from its unfolding.

The second cluster of questions that history answers concerns whether a certain action or policy is legitimate. For example, if history leads us by its underlying narrative toward a mosaic of nation-states, then it would be a senseless policy to weaken these institutions by strengthening transnational bodies or by forming fluid boundaries around the nation's distinct culture. When we debate with each other about what is proper to think and do, we must base our arguments on the nature of history, since if our actions are counter to its essence they would be morally wrong and politically pointless, even dangerous. The emergence of Zionism should be explained in this context: If modern men and women are indeed historical, and if Jews are prime temporal agents, then *it is the Zionist conception of time we should first probe* – even prior to the political, economic-demographic, or existential reasons for the emergence of this movement. The Zionist revolution presupposed a *temporal revolution*, a shift in the way Jews began to experience time, understand its ontology, and thereby understand their political responsibility and potential. To be

perfectly clear, without this temporal revolution, the Zionism revolution would not have been possible.

The significance of this study should be understood in the context of the existing scholarship on Zionism, which includes – surprisingly enough – little substantial political-philosophical dimension. A society formed to a large extent by the ingenuity of political institutions and actors – and a society in which philosophy blossomed through founding figures such as Martin Buber, Nathan Rotenstreich, Shmuel Hugo Bergman, and Yeshayahu Leibowitz (all of whom wrote about modern Jewish nationalism)[12] – nevertheless has failed to develop a significant tradition of political philosophy with which to reflect upon itself: No key problems have been identified, relevant concepts invented, pathbreaking and founding texts accepted. To be sure, there are plenty of studies of Zionist ideology[13] and a vast number of historical writings on Zionism (as well as studies of its sociology, language, culture, and more); these resources stand, however, in odd contrast to the relatively few political-philosophical writings that emerged from within Israel.[14]

Gershom Scholem believed that this predicament (he referred to philosophy generally) stemmed from the chaotic character of the young Hebrew language. "I think," he noted, "that what is evolving here and is alive cannot be articulated by a system or an enduring thought. I think that the lack of language and concepts are objective not subjective matters, and do not derive from the weakness of philosophers but from actual

[12] Martin Buber, *On Zion: The History of an Idea* (New York: Schocken Books, 1973); Buber, *A Land of Two Peoples: Martin Buber on Jews and Arabs* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983); Nathan Rotenstreich, *Jewish Philosophy in Modern Times: From Mendelssohn to Rosenzweig* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1968); Shmuel Hugo Bergman, *Bamish'ol* (Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 1976); Y. Leibovitch, *Yahadut, am yehudi umedinat yisrael* [Judaism, the Jewish People, and the State of Israel] (Tel Aviv: Schocken, 1975).

[13] See, in particular, Zeev Sternhell, *The Founding Myths of Israel: Nationalism, Socialism, and the Making of the Jewish State*, trans. David Maisel (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1998); Shlomo Avineri, *The Making of Modern Zionism: Intellectual Origins of the Jewish State* (New York: Basic Books, 1981); and Gideon Shimoni, *The Zionist Ideology* (Boston: Brandeis University Press, 1995).

[14] Among the notable exceptions to the general picture painted here are Rotenstreich's *Jewish Philosophy in Modern Time*; Yael Tamir, *Liberal Nationalism* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993); Yaron Ezrahi, *Rubber Bullets: Power and Conscience in Modern Israel* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997); Adi Ophir, *Lashon hara'a* [*The order of evils: Toward an ontology of morals*] (Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 2000); Yoram Hazony, *The Jewish State: The Struggle for Israel's Soul* (New York: Basic Books, 2000); and Chaim Gans, *A Just Zionism: On the Morality of the Jewish State* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008).