



Yeshiva University High Schools  
THE MARSHA STERN TALMUDICAL ACADEMY/  
YESHIVA UNIVERSITY HIGH SCHOOL FOR BOYS



# The Polis

A Centennial Edition

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***Introduction***

Dr. Seth Taylor

What do Utopian Socialism, Jewish concepts of Time and Space and the Theater of the Absurd have in common? Only that they appear together as the subjects of scholarly excursions in this diverse and eclectic anthology of articles written by students and faculty members of The Marsha Stern Talmudical Academy–Yeshiva University High School for Boys (MTA). The idea for this compilation comes from two current juniors at MTA, Yehuda Goldberg and Noam Josse (the editors of this periodical), who sought a venue to show off the type of scholarship that takes place at MTA on regular basis. Typically, high school publications do not reflect the highest level of academic rigor, consisting largely of short articles focusing on school events or reiterating news found in national publications. These aspiring editors called for a new forum highlighting the most sophisticated exchange of ideas at MTA and it wasn't long before they were joined by a collection of students and faculty members who saw an opportunity to showcase their own work.

The result is this centennial edition of *The Polis*, a publication with a long history at MTA as a news magazine but here appropriated in this special edition for the purpose of highlighting MTA scholarship. The title, *The Polis*, was favored by the editors from among the many MTA publications. Derived from the Greek word for city-state, the title suited the earlier news magazine because of its emphasis on politics. Yet, in its broader meaning, the 'polis' was not just the political structure of Greek government; a polis implies a sense of

community, a collection of individuals bound together by a common culture and vision who develop that vision through the free exchange of ideas. It is in this sense that the title, *The Polis* suits the goals of its contributors. This centennial edition is no mere high school publication; it is the think-tank of our community at work.

The articles in this collection are extremely diverse, representing the interests and current research of its contributors. The editors have tried to group them into three broad categories (history, Judaic themes and the Language Arts) yet even that proved difficult since many of the papers easily fit into more than one category. Yet the diversity of the subjects should not be an impediment to the reader's enjoyment. The collection of articles showcased in *The Polis* demonstrates that in an age where reading is being replaced by the internet and where the Humanities are disappearing from the college campus, the Republic of Letters remain very much alive at MTA.

## ***The History of Canadian Liberalism and Justin Trudeau***

Rami Nordlicht ('16)

If a freelance reporter were to ask refugees from Syria or Afghanistan or Libya where they would ideally want to resettle, many of them would undoubtedly give an answer that would have been nearly unheard of three quarters of a century ago: Canada. While Canada has always maintained a satisfactory record of human rights, the reason why so many refugees are cited by *Humans of New York* as yearning to resettle in Canada may have much more to do with the evolution of Canadian culture and politics. Hence, when Justin Trudeau took office as the new Prime Minister of Canada on November 4, 2015, one of the most successful democracies in the entire Western world was continuing its long and unique tradition as a constantly evolving government—a sentiment that is echoed by its citizens, politicians, and even immigrants.

It is impossible to understand the evolution of Canadian liberalism without first understanding the background of Canada's current Prime Minister, Justin Trudeau. The description of Trudeau's journey to 24 Sussex Drive begins with his upbringing at none other than 24 Sussex Drive. Pierre and Margaret Trudeau believed in raising their children with relative normalcy and therefore sent Justin—via school bus, no less (albeit one that was constantly followed by police)—to an Ottawa public school that integrated children from both poor and affluent backgrounds. As Justin quickly realized the unusualness of his status, he began to appreciate the differing and diverse lifestyles of his classmates—an appreciation that has had a major effect on Justin's beliefs.

For example, in one of the more notable anecdotes from Trudeau's childhood, a classmate of Justin's revealed to him that he had known that the secret of Santa Claus was not true for quite some time because his parents could not afford to buy him any Christmas presents. Upon comparing his classmate's reality with his own, Trudeau was able to understand the materialism that played an enormous role in his life due to his high-ranking status.

As Trudeau began his career, his future policies and version of Canadian liberalism continued to develop as his career took a rather unusual course. After studying French and English literature at McGill, Justin backpacked around the world, taught snowboarding, and worked as a nightclub bouncer before finally settling for a job in education in which he taught in a public high school. Finally, in 2007, Trudeau entered the world of Canadian politics and did so in grand fashion when he campaigned for and won a seat that represented an area of Downtown Montreal that was known for favoring Quebec-separatist candidates (instead of a safe liberal seat [of which there are plenty in other areas of Quebec]). Subsequently, Trudeau joined The Official Opposition (a subgroup of the largest parliamentary opposition party in the House of Commons), and his outspoken criticism of the Stephen Harper-led Conservative government began. In 2013, Trudeau won control of the Liberal Party and finally, in 2015, Justin Trudeau defeated Stephen Harper in the federal election in a decisive victory for the Liberal Party that allowed it to gain control of 184 of the 338 parliamentary seats.

While Trudeau's political career has not been without some controversy (he has been criticized for some ill-advised comments and political naiveté), many Canadians see Trudeau as something of a young Theodore Roosevelt, a young, energetic, and innovative politician with a reputation for highly unscripted comments. A man who seeks not only to revolutionize Canadian politics but also to change the way the majority of citizens picture an "ideal" candidate. Additionally, Trudeau represents Canada in many ways; as a man with a unique yet in many ways cultured background and an idiosyncratic career, many Canadians can easily identify with Trudeau and his liberal policies.

Ever since Canada gained its full independence from the United Kingdom in

the early twentieth century, many of the liberal movements in Canada have paralleled similar movements in its parent country, the UK, and its influential neighbor to the south, the United States. For example, during the Great Depression, when President Franklin Delano Roosevelt was reforming the United States' laissez faire-oriented government faster than Herbert Hoover could say "burn the tents," Canada was also undergoing similar, if not more modest reforms. And while the Canadian government never went as far as implementing some of the more radical aspects of the New Deal, revolutionary reforms were implemented by the Canadian government to help the small Canadian population arise out of severe depression. Likewise some of the more modern social movements, such as the Occupy movement (worldwide), the neo-liberal Tea Party movement (in the United States), and the 2011 protests in the United Kingdom have all seen similar movements in Canada, as similar worldwide economic conditions have yielded similar responses.

Liberalism is classically associated with a bigger, more involved government, and while this is certainly true regarding Canada, the Canadian Liberal Party has always been one of the most conservative compared to other major progressive parties in other countries. An oversimplified but accurate description of liberalism is a tendency to favor government intervention regarding economic matters but oppose government intervention regarding social issues. This description is an accurate one for the Canadian Liberal party, and is especially true of Justin Trudeau's government, particularly regarding social issues.

The first true examples of liberalism in the Canadian government occurred during the prelude to the Great Depression in the 1920s. Throughout the Interwar Period, Veterans of WWI had long advocated that they were entitled to state protection from poverty, homelessness, and unemployment, arguing that the government had not properly rewarded their military services. And while this instance of activism did not have immediate success, it did pave the way for government interventionism on local and provincial levels. When the Depression finally hit in the early 1930s, it hit Canada especially hard and the young nation saw its hardest years only shortly after gaining full independence through the Statute of Westminster in 1931 (which gave Canada absolute sovereignty in both domestic and foreign affairs). The Depression truly tested

many national governments across the globe and was a clear indicator of the responsiveness of the fledgling Canadian government. Mackenzie King, the Canadian Prime Minister at the start of the Depression, was a member of the Liberal party and is largely credited with helping establish Canada as a Welfare State in the mid-twentieth century. However, King's government was painfully slow to react to the extreme hardships of the depression, and embittered and desperate voters elected R.B. Bennett, a headstrong member of the Conservative Party, to the Prime Ministry. Although Bennett was a successful businessman from Calgary, his economic prowess was no match for the severity of the Depression, as his welfare projects, make-work programs, and public works projects were cancelled after the federal deficit was deemed to have grown too large, worsening the depression as additional government employees were subsequently laid off. As a last-ditch effort to save Canada from the worst of the depression, Bennett incorporated many of Franklin Delano Roosevelt's New Deal programs into the Canadian economic system. However, Bennett's efforts, including programs of minimum wage, unemployment insurance, and new public works projects were largely unsuccessful. In the ensuing Election of 1935, Mackenzie King was once again elected Prime Minister in a landslide, this time with a much direr situation on his hands.

King's second term as Prime Minister, from his return to office in October 1935 until his retirement in 1948, was the defining period of his political career and is often considered one of the most successful political campaigns in North American political history. In his first few months in office, King instituted the first successful reforms that Canada had seen since the commencement of the Depression, establishing relief programs in the National Housing Act and National Employment Commission. King also nationalized many public works industries, such as the CBC (Canadian Broadcasting Corporation), and Trans-Canada Airlines, the precursor to Air Canada, and Canada's current flag carrier. He focused much of his funding on industrial projects in Quebec and Ontario, and accepted a Keynesian solution to unemployment that included tax cuts, deficit spending, and housing subsidies; King, like the vast majority of Canadian politicians, was opposed to direct federal relief. By 1936, Canada, along with much of the rest of the world, grew wary of the increasing levels of fascism and military aggression that were occurring in Europe and Asia. For-

eign policy would come to dominate much of the rest of King's tenure in office. However, King's impact on Canadian domestic affairs would be forever recognized as one of the most successful in history, and, much like FDR's reforms on American domestic policy in the Great Depression, they greatly shaped the way the liberal party and the Canadian government would interact with its citizens for much of the rest of the twentieth century. Moreover, his policies defined Canadian Government as a liberal-style, intervening government that ultimately prefers individualism and privatization and only intervenes when significant groups are oppressed by the law, economy, or local government.

Throughout the 50s and 60s, when the Civil Rights movement swept across the United States, Canada was also experiencing its own version of a Civil Rights movement. During this time period, the Democratic Party in the United States came to be associated with defending civil rights and ending segregation, and by 1964, the election that saw Lyndon Johnson re-elected, many white southerners abandoned the Democratic Party for the Republican Party. Over time, the Canadian Liberal party also came to earn this reputation. In 1953, a couple of Inuit families were relocated from their homes in Northern Quebec town of Inukjuak on the shores of Hudson Bay (which has been known to experience snow in July) to new hunting communities in the High Arctic and lands with much more harsh living conditions. Although the Canadian government justified the move by claiming that it would save the lives of starving Inuit while allowing them to remain living on a subsistence lifestyle, the relocation has also been seen as a Cold War-era move by the Canadian government to establish a Canadian presence in contested territories in the Arctic region. The move caused uproar throughout the Canadian public, and paved the way for Pierre Trudeau (The current Prime Minister's father) to establish a "just society" in his terms as Prime Minister from 1968 to 1979 and again from 1980 to 1984.

When Pierre Trudeau first assumed office, he was perceived as the sort of revolutionary that is now characteristic of his son; bilingual, multicultural, and fairly cosmopolitan, Trudeau sought to push Canada into the increasingly interconnected world, making French an official language, solving the October Crisis, an event which saw the kidnapping of the British Trade Consul and

Quebec Labor Minister by a Marxist and Quebecois separatist group, and embarking on a ‘tour of world peace’ with John Lennon and Yoko Ono. However, some liberals felt that Trudeau might have gone a bit too far to the center. His 1968 White Paper on Indians, which proposed full assimilation of the First Nations into Canadian society in an effort to make Canada a true and classical liberal participatory democracy, was largely seen as a policy failure when it backfired and somewhat alienated many representatives of the First Nations. Nevertheless, Trudeau still left long lasting effects on Canadian liberal policy, the likes of which had not been seen since the tenure of Mackenzie King; perhaps most importantly Trudeau’s tenure saw the birth of a new national Canadian identity, as Trudeau’s ministry saw a large upswing in nationalism that made many people proud to be Canadian.

Continuing Trudeau’s left-of-center legacy was Jean Chretien, who served from 1993–2003. By the early 90s, Canada had accumulated much debt after the Trudeau and Mulroney ministries and one of Chretien’s first major challenges was reducing the national deficit. Despite the fact that in most countries, a more Conservative government is usually more successful in reducing deficit (as they tend to limit welfare programs), the federal deficit was reduced to 3% by 1996, the result of carefully coordinated cuts to defense spending. Another one of Chretien’s hallmark successes as a leader of the Liberal Party of Canada was his victory in the 1995 Quebec Referendum on separation. A French Canadian himself, Chretien was adamantly opposed to the Quebecois separatist movement, and although an ensuing referendum was a relatively close vote, Chretien was able to accomplish his goal of keeping Canada unified, continuing Trudeau’s legacy of unbridled nationalism.

Throughout Canadian history, the Liberal party has adapted, evolved, and modified significantly, eventually becoming today’s forward-thinking government led by the charismatic Justin Trudeau. Where the party will evolve from the present is uncertain; however, no matter what the future holds, Trudeau will be continuing the long and storied history of one of the most original political parties in world history.

## ***The Experimental Roots of Positive Psychology: Harlow’s Monkeys***

Adam Dobrick

### **Introduction:**

At the outset of the twentieth century, the field of psychology was dominated by behaviorism, a theory which stressed that all learning was the product of a stimulus response mechanism, and that mental and emotional life was not an important subject for the advancement of the science of psychology. In fact, many psychologists felt that the very notion of displaying physical affection to a child was negative.

In 1930, Harry Harlow took a professorship at the University of Wisconsin Madison. Lacking sufficient animals to study, Harlow took his graduate students, including Abraham Maslow, to the zoo to study the behavior of animals. After much study, Harlow became increasingly certain that that the behavior that he and his students were observing in primates were in fact attributes like curiosity, intelligence and problem solving. This theory stood in contrast to the behaviorist worldview that all observed animal actions were merely the function of rewards and punishments. Thus, it was with the goal of shattering the behaviorist paradigm that Harlow asked the university to create a laboratory space for him. When the university declined his request, Harlow found a vacant building that he transformed into an unprecedented research facility.



By 1955, Harlow began the ambitious project of creating a self-sustaining breeding colony of rhesus monkeys because of the difficulty of obtaining specimens for research. This was the first lab of its kind in the United States of America. To ensure that the infant monkeys would not be exposed to disease, they were isolated from the other monkeys, raised in their own cages under specially controlled conditions.<sup>1</sup>

### **Animal Psychology: When Science Broke Monkeys?**

When Harlow reintroduced the carefully reared infant monkeys back into the general population, he and his colleagues were shocked at what they saw. The monkeys were completely unable to socialize with the other animals or even perform basic cognitive tasks. The monkeys they had so carefully raised were broken for the purposes of their research. William Mason, one of Harlow's graduate students, observed that the baby monkeys would often carry a diaper that was placed in the bottom of their cages around with them and that they would cling to the diaper in times of stress. Mason wondered whether the monkeys would cling to anything or whether there was something specific about the soft cloth diaper. In exploring why these baby monkeys held on to diapers, Harlow went on to perform some of the most famous experiments in the history of psychology.

From a behaviorist perspective, the reason that an infant monkey would attach itself to a mother is because she was the source of milk and positive reinforcement. Harlow set out to directly challenge this hypothesis. He constructed two surrogate monkey mothers, one of wire and one of cloth. Eight infant monkeys were isolated and given two surrogate mothers, one of wire and cloth. For four of the monkeys, milk was provided from the wire "mother," and for four of the monkeys, milk was provided by the cloth "mother." Freud and the behaviorist school would have predicted that the baby monkeys would spend their time with and become attached to the milk giver. However, that is not what happened. All of the monkeys spent almost all of the time playing with and getting close to their cloth "mother," even when the cloth mother had no milk. The image of a monkey clinging to a "surrogate" cloth mother who

did not provide milk was something inexplicable to the behaviorist model. Harlow demonstrated repeatedly that animals have complex emotional and mental needs from birth that go beyond basic stimulus response mechanisms. In 1958 he was elected as the president of the American Psychological Association. At their annual conference, he delivered a speech discussing his research on love, later published as *The Nature of Love* in the *American Psychologist*, 1959. Harlow begins his work on *The Nature of Love* by expressing the continued revolt and rejection of a simple behaviorist model of learning and development:

"Love is a wondrous state, deep, tender, and rewarding. Because of its intimate and personal nature it is regarded by some as an improper topic for experimental research. But, whatever our personal feelings may be, our assigned mission as psychologists is to analyze all facets of human and animal behavior into their component variables. So far as love or affection is concerned, psychologists have failed in this mission (Harlow, 1959)."

### **Harlow Goes Bananas:**

Unfortunately, as Harlow continued his work and became more driven by fame and notoriety, his work became increasingly dark. Knowing that the monkeys liked to be comforted by the cloth "mother," he made an "iron maiden" mother that would suddenly injure the infants with a variety of devious methods from spikes to compressed freezing air. Apparently, the infant monkeys would return to their bad mothers regardless of how they were treated.

After his wife died of cancer in 1971, Harlow began to move away from studying the "nature of love" to studying depression and isolation. He and his team removed infants from their mothers at birth and raised them in total isolation in a device that he named the "pit of despair." The animals that were subjected to this treatment were destroyed mentally and could not be reintroduced to any social environment. They could not interact with other animals, showed autistic behaviors and showed no signs of sexual capacity. Wanting to explore

the effects of this isolation on motherhood, they created a device called the “rape rack” to ensure that the animals raised in complete isolation would procreate. He ultimately compared the mothers he had fashioned out of cloth to the mothers that he had fashioned through his methods of experimentation.

Very soon he discovered that he had created a new animal—the motherless mother monkey. The monkey mothers that had never experienced love of any kind were devoid of love for their infants, a lack of feeling unfortunately shared by all too many of their human counterparts. Most of the monkey motherless mothers ignored their infants, but other motherless mothers abused their babies by crushing the infant’s face to the floor, chewing off the infant’s feet and fingers and in one case by putting the infant’s head in her mouth and crushing it like an eggshell. Harlow once wrote that “even in our most devious dreams could we have designed a surrogate as evil as these real monkey mothers.”

His former graduate student Mason, who had begun his career so brightly with Harlow remarked on his former mentor’s later work:

“He would write things about his experiments as if he did them with glee, as if he enjoyed the animal’s suffering, that he couldn’t wait to take these monkeys and destroy them.... He kept this going to the point where it was clear to many people that the work was really violating ordinary sensibilities, that anybody with respect for life or people would find this offensive”

### **Conclusion:**

Regardless of these disturbing truths, Harlow’s research disproved the fundamental behaviorist notion that all learning was a product of reward and punishment. Moreover, his experiments demonstrated that one’s mental and emotional life was in fact a key aspect of understanding animal behavior. After Harlow, the behaviorist notion that parents should not show affection to their children and that children should be raised apart from their parents to be conditioned appropriately was banished from public discourse. Harlow’s research

is still employed today by interests as disparate as the U.S. Department of Defense and animal rights organizations. Given the cold scientific materialism with which Harlow conducted his experiments, it is certainly ironic that these experiments helped make clear the pivotal role of emotions in learning. With a growing focus on emotional life and learning, and with the center of our learning and emotional life, the human mind, becoming more extensively mapped and understood every day, Harlow’s experiments and theories proved key in the advancement of both the fields of psychology and education.

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### **END NOTES**

- 1 Haidt, 2006, 110

## *Success of an Insurgency: The Imjin War*

Yoni Benovitz ('19)

On December, 28th, 2015 the Japanese government announced an official apology for its use of Korean women for pleasure in World War II, and for the first time ever the Korean government accepted. However, World War II was only the most recent chapter in a long history of conflict between Japan and Korea. The atrocities of the last century mirror the events of half a millennium ago during the Imjin War. Between 1592 and 1598 the Japanese invaded Korea and took 60,000 Korean men and women captive. Many were shipped to Japan to be used as slaves and prostitutes. Furthermore, in the Japanese temple of Mimizuka there lays a tomb filled with 126,000 Korean noses that Japan has refused to return to Korea for 400 years.<sup>1</sup>

This gory exercise was carried out by Japanese troops as they retreated from Korea after a failed invasion. The pinnacle of military excellence in East Asia, the Japanese army, trained in the art of war, and armed with some of the most advanced technology in the eastern world, had been defeated by Korea, a hermit kingdom which hadn't fought a real war in 200 years, and whose armaments were outdated. To the Japanese, noses were a proper way to exact justice on the stubborn Koreans. However as history has proven time and again, conventional armies cannot properly crush an ideologically driven force, which is exactly what the Korean guerrilla army was.

East Asia, in the years preceding the Imjin War, was a generally peaceful the-

atre, save the few pirate raids. At the center of this peaceful world sat the Chinese Ming Empire vindicated by the all-powerful Mandate of Heaven. According to Confucian ideology held by most east Asian states, the Ming, the holders of the Mandate of Heaven, were to be viewed as the lords of all other states and all states were to be viewed as vassals to the Ming. This feudal system, aside from giving the Ming political control of all other states, put them at the center of a vast trade network and positioned China to accept tribute from all its vassals. The Ming decided who got what from this trade network based on a hierarchy of its tributaries. In the sixteenth century the most trusted state in this hierarchy was Korea.<sup>2</sup>

Korea at this time was an idyllic neo-Confucian state. It was subservient to its Chinese overlords and adopted Ming culture and ideas. Korea also adopted the Ming style of government run by the Emperor, or king, on top with Confucian scholars from the upper Yangban class,<sup>3</sup> who were trained and tested in the Confucian classics, acting as the ministers and courtiers to the ruler. Furthermore, the Korean style of life was dependent on the Ming. The legitimacy of its entire monarchy, the Joseon dynasty, held on to power based only on support from the Celestial Throne, or the holder of the mandate of heaven, the Ming emperor.

The most notable exception from the Ming tribute trade system was Japan. Due to civil war, Japan had existed in near total isolation for a century. However, between 1560 and 1580 Oda Nobunaga, a powerful local warlord and aristocratic (known as daimyos in Japan), had been working to unify Japan, and in 1582 on the brink of completing his goal he was betrayed by one of his generals who killed him. The reunification of Japan was then completed under Nobunaga's general, Toyotomi Hideyoshi. Hideyoshi then faced a series of problems, all of which explain his desire to conquer Korea. (1) After Hideyoshi's coup his large and well trained armies were now idle (2) the powerful daimyo who were his vassals were seeking rewards for supporting Hideyoshi, and land was becoming scarce in Japan and (3) the Japanese had been mostly isolated from trade during the civil war.<sup>4</sup> However Hideyoshi's ultimate goal was not to stop in Korea, because Korea would only be the start of Hideyoshi's plans. As early as 1587, he planned to conquer all of China and acquire the Mandate of Heaven.

In the years preceding the Imjin War, Korea was completely oblivious, or ignored signs of Hideyoshi's intentions, even though Hideyoshi had made it very clear that he intended to supplant the Ming, and had even sent envoys to Korea demanding their submission to him.<sup>5</sup> Because Korea ignored Japan's obvious militancy, as they had done for the past two hundred years of peace, nothing about their disorganized, undermanned army was reformed. And while the Korean army had intricate chains of command and draft policies in case of emergency on paper, in actuality these systems were dysfunctional.<sup>6</sup> Furthermore, the state of the weapons used in the Korean army were almost all, aside from artillery weapons, technologically 200 years behind their times, and no match for the muskets in use around the world. The only functional part of the Korean military was the navy, which had spent the last 200 years under constant development in order to counter pirate raids that constantly threatened Korea's long coastlines. The navy, prior to the war, consisted of 250 *Panokseon*, which were large ships about 80 feet long lined with cannons and archer slots.<sup>7</sup>

While the Koreans ignored the signs of war, Hideyoshi began to assemble his invasion force. By the beginning of 1592 158,800 soldiers with, another 160,000 held in reserve, had gathered at the Japanese military port of Nagoya. This was an amazingly large invasion force for the time. The Japanese troops were divided into three groups. The *ashigaru* or the foot soldiers, who usually led at the vanguard of the Japanese army, were usually armed with short spears, bows, and the staple of the Japanese army: muskets. The armor they wore was usually just a simple layer of thick leather. Following the *ashigaru* was the samurai, the fearsome warrior class of Japan, they used their famous longswords, the *katana*, and usually disdained the use of guns as weapons of the lower class. The samurai armor was thick plated iron, on top of leather padding, painted in bright colors to confuse the enemy. Finally, the commanders of the army were an elite group of daimyo personally selected by Hideyoshi to lead his armies. However, the Japanese, despite their powerful land forces lacked a comparable navy. The Japanese navy numbered at around 1,000 of which only 300 were actual warships. Additionally, these ships were at a technological disadvantage to their Korean counterparts because, Japan's naval technology had been stifled in the years of civil conflict. Therefore, the role of Japan's navy was largely limited to boarding enemy vessels and transporting troops and

supplies. As such most Japanese warships were either giant floating castles with a few cannons for thinning out enemy crew or small ships meant to move soldiers in position for boarding the enemy.<sup>8</sup>

As the Japanese armies gathered, some of the more farsighted Korean leaders realized what was happening and began to quietly organize defenses. However, Korea's last ditch attempts to prepare only highlight its complete incompetence in military manners. For example, when the Korean Prime Minister Ryu Seong-nyeong instructed a general to conduct an overview of the army in preparation for the possibility of an invasion he responded, "Do not worry ... even if they have muskets, do they score every time that they shoot?"<sup>9</sup> Furthermore when defenses were built in preparation of a Japanese invasion, instead of small forts in easily defendable locations, huge sprawling fortresses were built with miles of walls which the small Korean army couldn't afford to guard all at one time.<sup>10</sup> Despite obvious failures in their preparations for defense one of the few actions which ultimately turned out to be helpful was the appointment Yi Sun-sin to the position of Admiral of the Left Cholla Province. Yi, before his appointment, had been a little known military magistrate, but upon his appointment Yi realized the dire state of the Korean military and immediately set about reconstructing neglected ports and innovating on current naval technology. One of Yi's most famous and important innovations was the design of the *Kobukosun*, the turtle ship. *Kobukosun* were a huge innovation in the normal style of close range naval battles because, unlike most ships, they had their cannon decks covered with a spiked fireproof roof, allowing the ship to charge into the heart of enemy navies without enemy sailors boarding. With these final, somewhat desperate attempts at defense by the Koreans, and the Japanese army in place at Nagoya the Imjin war was ready to commence.

On May, 23, 1592, with all his armies in place, and an almost defenseless Korea waiting, Toyotomi Hideyoshi ordered the Japanese armada to set sail. The three leaders of the three strike forces supposed to rush through Korea and meet up on the Chinese border were led by Hideyoshi's generals: Konishi Yukinaga, Kato Kiyomasa, and Kuroda Nagamasa. These three daimyo had no love lost for each other and were all in competition to see who could claim the most honor and get the largest chunk of Korea as his reward. As result when

these three leaders set sail they left early, before the arrival of the 300 warships needed to protect their troop transports.<sup>11</sup> Nevertheless, the underprepared Koreans panicked at the sight of the Japanese armada. When Pak Hong Admiral of the Left Kyongsong ships reported the advancing fleet, instead of advancing and destroying the undefended Japanese transports, he panicked and warned Busan, a vital sea port under his jurisdiction before scuttling his entire fleet. As a result the next day 18,700 Japanese under Konishi Yukinaga landed and took Busan effortlessly. At the same time Won Kyun, another admiral also panicked at the sight of Korean fishing boats, and scuttled all but four ships in his fleet, destroying 200 of the 300 ships in the Korean navy without a single engagement. As more and more troops arrived at the beachheads by Busan the Japanese began to rush north taking major fortresses from the Koreans with almost unheard of ease. At the battle of Sangju a hastily whipped up army of recruits led by top Korean general, Yi Il, was destroyed and Yi barely escaped with his life. In similar fashion the Japanese rushed through the Kyongsong province taking forts and cities with little to no defenses from fleeing Koreans. By May 29th, only one week after invasion, the entire Kyongsong province had been occupied, the Japanese were half of the way to Seoul and two thirds of the Korean fleet had been sunk by its own commanders.

The road to Seoul, the capital and the crowning jewel of Korea now lay wide open for the Japanese. However there was one obvious place the Koreans could consolidate their armies and stand a chance against Japanese, the Choryang pass, a narrow rocky and defensible pass on the Japanese route to Seoul.<sup>12</sup> Instead Sin Ip, the same Korean general who had dismissed the Japanese as short and bad shots before the war, gathered his army of 8,500 men at Chungju, a wide plain just beneath the pass where he could deploy his cavalry. The attempt was a failure. On June 6th Konishi Yukinaga's 18,500 strong army poured down from the mountains guns blazing, spooking the Korean army and cavalry, and slowly backing them into the Han River where nearly the entire army, including Sin Ip, was either captured or destroyed. On June 8 news arrived in Seoul of Sin Ip's defeat. Subsequently, King Sonjo and his court fled to Pyongyang and the city was left undefended for the Japanese, who occupied it on June, 12th, 1592, just 20 days since their arrival on Korean soil.

By now the Japanese had marched across half of Korea in a few short weeks and more and more reinforcements were arriving in Busan every day. The Koreans on the other hand were weak, disorganized, and demoralized after the fall of Seoul, and any chance of defeating the Japanese seemed impossible. On June 27th the Japanese began their march north from Seoul to Pyongyang with the three united forces of Konishi Yukinaga, Kato Kiyomasa and Kuroda Nagamasa. Despite successful defenses at the Imjin river<sup>13</sup> and later at the Taedong River the Koreans were no match for the Japanese and in both these places easily defensible locations fell to the Japanese due to Korean incompetence. With the fall of the Taedong, which was right in front of Pyongyang, the Koreans realized defending Pyongyang was hopeless, and once again fled, this time to the tiny outpost of Uiju, on the Chinese border. And so on July 24th, just three short months after the Japanese landed, Pyongyang along with its strategic positioning as a fortified city that could be used as a base, and massive rice stores fell into Japanese hands.

At this point, after taking Pyongyang the road to China for the Japanese was open. Taking Uiju and then swooping in to China would be a simple task for the Japanese. The Japanese commanders realized the need to stop the rapid advance due to the fact that they had left a string of troops behind them securing every capture point. This policy had reduced the Japanese vanguard from 30,000 to 20,000. Furthermore, although Japanese losses had been minimal, they had added up to substantial numbers. So the Japanese invasion halted at Pyongyang, and Yukinaga and his forces stopped in Busan waiting for the other 120,000 Japanese forces to finish occupying the Korean countryside to insure the stability of the supply line, and wait until the Japanese navy could scout out and prepare a naval supply line along Korea's western coast. The original Japanese plan had been to use the cumbersome land trade routes for supplying occupying forces and the faster sea route to supply the vanguard of the army. However Yi Sun-sin the Korean Admiral of the Left Cholla Province put a wrench in these plans. After ferrying the army over at the start of the invasion the Japanese navy, at this point still mainly composed of transports, began to fan out across the southern part of the Korean Peninsula. Sun-sin went into action and in a campaign starting June 13th, the day Seoul fell, he employed innovative tactics, including his *Kobukosun* boat, to destroy almost

100 Japanese ships before returning to port to resupply. This month long confrontation convinced the Japanese to retreat to Busan and wait for their battleships.

By August, Yi Sun-sin's navy had resupplied, but the Japanese battleships had finally arrived at Busan and vastly outnumbered Yi's tiny fleet. The now fully assembled Japanese fleet of 300 warships set out to defeat Yi's small fleet of around 50 warships. However Yi was ready. Between August 14th and 15th at the battles of Hasan-do and Anglo-po, Yi decimated the Japanese fleet. Once more the Japanese fleet was confined to Busan, and the route to Pyongyang from the Yellow Sea remained shut. The Japanese fleet would never leave Busan and was eventually destroyed by Yi on October 5th.

It was now obvious to the Japanese that there would be no supplies coming from the Yellow Sea, and therefore an attack on China at the moment was untenable. Konishi Yukinaga came up with a different plan; the Japanese would hold at Pyongyang, fortify it and let the Ming come to them. Konishi had destroyed a small Ming army in late August, but holding Pyongyang indefinitely was going to require many more troops, so Konishi requested the generals in south who were occupying Korea divert troops to his armies. Konishi's request was impossible to fulfil as the entire 120,000 man army currently occupying Korea was not enough to put down the *uibyong* and *sungbyong* guerrillas. The *uibyong* were often diverse and their members were usually a mix of aristocrats, civilians, and the remnants of the Korean army, while the *sungbyong* were usually made up of Buddhist, and occasionally Confucian monks. These guerrilla forces operated from the mountainous regions of Korea, descending in nighttime raids that disrupted supply lines, and more importantly worked to convince the Korean populace to keep resisting the Japanese. While the guerrilla themselves could never actually unseat the Japanese they did manage to take and hold forts in middle of Japanese controlled territory, and remained a serious threat to any Japanese army that tried to reinforce Pyongyang.

Because of the actions of the *uibyong* and the *sungbyong*, as well as the campaigns of Yi Sun-sin's fleet, the elite vanguard of the Japanese army, led by

Konishi Yukinaga remained bottled up in Pyongyang waiting for supplies. The Ming at this point had realized the actual threat of the Japanese to their borders and were prepared to act, but the Ming's objective was to get rid of a threat to their borders, not necessarily to go on a long drawn out campaign against an obviously well-equipped army. The Ming attempted to negotiate with the Japanese, but despite some early success, negotiations eventually broke down and on January 26th 1593 the Ming arrived in Korea with a force 35,000 strong under Li Rusong. On February 5th the joint Ming-Korean army arrived at Pyongyang, where they smashed the city walls with cannon and routed Konishi and his undersupplied and weakened force. But the Ming, unwilling to charge the city and completely finish the Japanese, likely at high cost to their own army, allowed the Japanese to retreat.

The Ming seized the initiative and raced south towards Seoul. As the Ming approached Seoul, LI decided to negotiate with the Japanese and allow them to retreat south instead of wasting troops in lengthy siege. The negotiations resulted, despite furious Korean rejections, in the Japanese being allowed to leave Seoul without a single soldier being attacked. On May 20th, for the first time in two years, Koreans reentered their capital, a now burnt out husk of its former glory, while, much to the anger of the revenge thirsty Koreans, 53,000 Japanese were allowed to escape. By June the Japanese retreat took them all the way back to Busan where they set up an entrenched ring of 17 forts around the city, and stayed there in a stalemate with the Korean/Ming forces for the next three years.

In the midst of this stalemate Ming and Japanese negotiations took place. These negotiations often excluded the Koreans and the Japanese were at one point offered the southern half of Korea. However Toyotomi Hideyoshi had not entirely given up his grand ideas of conquest and eventually let negotiations break down in order to send a new resupplied invasion to Korea. Hideyoshi's objectives for the second invasion were very different than his objectives for the first invasion. This time Hideyoshi realized that the Ming would have to be a goal for another time, this time Hideyoshi wished only to conquer the southern three provinces of Korea, and if that was unachievable show the Ming and Koreans a large force, scare them and go home. However Hideyoshi

realized that even with shortened goals the Korean guerillas and navy which had plagued his armies the first time would be back again. Given that in the second invasion Hideyoshi's goals were either to conquer a few provinces or terrorize the Ming and Korean leadership, Hideyoshi's solution for dealing with Korean guerillas was simple. Murder as much of the peasantry as possible, and quell any possible civilian uprising while terrorizing the leadership.

Getting rid of the Korean navy would take much more effort, as the Japanese warships were still heavily outclassed. Instead, Hideyoshi decided to cut off the head of the Korean navy by removing its commander, Yi Sun-sin, who had achieved an almost mythical status in Korea. Hideyoshi sent a double agent to the Korean court who revealed a large Japanese transport fleet was sitting in an indefensible strait. The Korean court accepted the spy's testimony and sent Yi to attack the fleet. Yi recognized the trap, refused to go, and Korean court ministers sensing a way to indirectly attack Prime Minister Ryu Seong-Nyong, a good friend of Yi's, had Yi arrested and tortured almost to death. Yi's replacement was the Won Kyun, who at the beginning of the war had been one of the admirals who had completely scuttled his fleet without ever engaging the Japanese.

With his biggest problem from the first invasion safely out of the way on September, 11th, 1597 Hideyoshi ordered his second invasion of 141,500 troops to commence. Earlier on August 20th the Japanese spy in the Korean court, who had gotten Yi Sun-sin arrested, returned with a report of a new Japanese fleet in a disadvantaged position. In response, the Korean court sent their new admiral, Won Kyun, after the supposed fleet. The resulting battles of Cholyong-do and Chilchonnyang were among the greatest disasters of the war. The fleet of almost 200 warships that Yi Sun-sin had carefully built was almost completely destroyed in a Japanese trap, except for 12 ships which had arrived late to the battle. The defeats at Cholyong-do and Chilchonnyang gave the Japanese open access to resupply all along the southern Korean coast and on September 11th the Japanese began to pour out of the Busan fort ring, destroying the paltry defenses the Koreans had hastily put up and the Ming forces had left behind. Once more the Japanese were incredibly efficient. In the span of a month all the key forts in the Cholla, Kyongsang and Chungchong provinces

had fallen and the Korean/Ming forces were scattered. This time the Japanese set about consolidating their gains and suppressing the Korean populace. It was now that the Japanese began to chop off the noses of Korean civilians in order to suppress the civilians and send Hideyoshi a physical sign of Japanese success.

Now that the Japanese had achieved their goals on land they knew that all they had to do was keep the Korean population silent and keep receiving supplies from Japan. However in October reports filtered in of a small fleet of 13 Korean warships still fighting. These 13 ships were the survivors of Chilchonnyang, plus another ship whose origin is unknown, and now they were back under the command of Yi Sun-sin. Yi recognized that his tiny fleet was perhaps the last hope of the Koreans; therefore he carefully planned the location of what would be possibly his last stand against the Japanese. The place he chose was Myongnyang Strait.<sup>14</sup>

With the help of the Ming, Yi won a smashing victory that drove the Japanese back to their stronghold at Busan once again. For the next half a year both sides were stuck in a similar stalemate to the one five years earlier at the end of the earlier invasion, but this time the Japanese were blockaded at sea by the Korean navy. On September 18th, a gigantic 100,000 strong Korean/Ming naval and land army attacked the Busan fort ring a second time. The Japanese mastermind of the war, Toyotomi Hideyoshi, ordered his army to return home and then, later that day, died. His generals kept news of his death quiet for almost two months while the Chinese and the Koreans attacked, and ultimately failed to take Busan. In November, after the Korean/Ming army retreated once more the Japanese announced Hideyoshi's death and approached the allies with a request to peacefully leave Korea. The Ming, who again did not wish to be in Korea any longer than necessary accepted, over complaints from the Koreans. In fact, Yi Sun-sin refused to let the Japanese leave peacefully and on December 15th in one of the last major battles of the war, the battle of Noryang strait, the Korean navy destroyed a Japanese fleet transporting 20,000 troops trying to escape to Busan and then south to Japan. However during the battle Yi Sun-sin who, as usual, was leading his men in his flagship at the front of his fleet was shot and killed by a stray musket shot.

With the Hideyoshi's death Japan fell back into a period of civil war that led to a new Shogun rising, Tokugawa Ieyasu, whose dynasty would lead Japan for over two centuries. Nonetheless, the Imjin War would be Japan's first imperialist endeavor, setting a precedent for Japanese brutality in future foreign excursions. The Imjin War ingrained in the minds of the Japanese that Korea was in its sphere of influence—a concept that many nineteenth and twentieth century Japanese foreign invasions would draw their source from. Additionally, many of the Korean prisoners were scholars, craftsmen, and doctors who introduced to Japan many of the technological, medical and agricultural advances it was lacking due to its highly isolationist policies which kept it out of the umbrella of Ming tribute. It also was the first time that Japan would significantly threaten Chinese political and military hegemony over the region. This was something so seemingly unthinkable beforehand, that China was able to use this fear on the part of other nations as a source of internal strength and international stability. After the Imjin War, this pillar of Chinese power collapsed. Indeed, the great financial burden of the war, along with other foreign interventions the Ming carried out in that decade, weakened Ming control in Manchuria. This would indirectly lead to the rise of the Qing Dynasty in China, founded by a Manchurian chieftain, Nurhachi. Regardless, the war still established China as the region's international policeman, who was willing to protect its tributary states.

The war would also serve to strengthen feelings of nationalism. It was used to instigate patriotic feelings in both China and Korea during Japanese invasions in later centuries. Indeed, historians often cite the Imjin War as one of Wanli Emperor's (the Ming ruler during the conflict) "Three Great Punitive Campaigns," representing the last time the Ming throne would be victorious on foreign soil. Furthermore, the war is often cited as a foundation of friendship between Korea and China, and adversely used as a justification for anti-Japanese views on the part of the Korea in regards to contemporary issues.

Although Korea had retained its sovereignty it suffered at a great cost. The amount of arable land was greatly reduced, which induced rebellion, famine and disease into the ensuing power struggle in Korea. The loss of many historical artifacts, archives, scientists and scholars led to a waning of Korean sci-

ence. Indeed many feel that the war was the greatest setback in Korean history, greater even than the Korean War.

The war is also an interesting case study in insurgencies. On the one hand, Korean rebels were the key to maintaining hope for independence, yet, they could not achieve any material success without significant support from the Ming. Even the naval successes of Yi were not enough to offset the Japanese invasion. It is clear that although the insurgents served to keep the hope of Korean freedom alive, they could not actually achieve their ultimate goal on their own. It is likely that had the Ming not stepped in, Japan would've successfully conquered Korea. As with most insurgencies, they draw their source of power from an ideology that cannot be matched with military prowess, yet, they ultimately fail to achieve military success on the mass scale.

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- 5 Ryu Seong-nyong, *Book of Corrections*, trans. Choi Byonghyon (Berkeley: Institute of East Asian Studies, 2002), 24.
- 6 Swope, *A Dragon's Head and a Serpent's Tail*: 72
- 7 Horace Underwood, "Korean Ships and Boats" (paper presented before the Royal Asiatic Society, London, June, 6, 1933)
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- 11 Hawley, *The Imjin War*: 135
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century, unapologetically exclusive in their policies of admission, hiring, and virtually every aspect of their identity. It may have been understood, even occasionally discussed, that Wilson was the first southern president since Reconstruction, that he had glorified the role of the Ku Klux Klan, and that he was opposed to advancing in any significant way the role of black Americans. Here is an example of Wilson's interpretation of the results of emancipation:

An extraordinary and very perilous state of affairs had been created in the South by the sudden and absolute emancipation of the Negroes, and it was not strange that the southern legislatures should deem it necessary to take extraordinary steps to guard against the manifest and pressing dangers which it entailed. Here was a vast "laboring, landless, homeless class, once slaves, now free; unpracticed in liberty, unschooled in self-control; never sobered by the discipline of self-support, never established in any habit of prudence; excited by a freedom they did not understand...insolent and aggressive; sick of work, covetous of pleasure,—host of dusky children untimely put out of school."<sup>2</sup>

A frequent response to this type of unapologetic and repugnant racism would be the exoneration of Wilson by situating him in his historical era. After all, why would one expect a historian, from a family deeply rooted in southern white supremacist culture, to have engaged in the kind of reflection that might have encouraged him to reevaluate his beliefs? Had a 21st century political leader been revealed as the author of this article, the responses would have been swift and negative, at least by political centrists. According to this argument, only the error of historical "presentism," judging public figures of the past according to our contemporary standards, could lead us to such an unrealistic standard of behavior. Wilson served as president of Princeton University. To tear his name from the school of government which embodies his highest principles as a leader seems to have an Orwellian chill to it. Inevitably, opponents of Wilson suggest that Jefferson, Washington, Adams, and both Roosevelts, would also have to be retired from public reverence.

Yet public honors are not an automatic right. As Americans' views on race and other issues have evolved, so have the standards for awarding leaders with

## *Woodrow Wilson and the Changing Status of the Past*

Dr. Emily Schneider

"Before the protests, I was not as aware of how the legacy of buildings and institutions can directly affect one's happiness."<sup>1</sup>

The past several months have seen several stories of national prominence publicizing the painful issues raised by the possible renaming of buildings at prominent institutions. Some of these buildings were named for historical figures whose legacies are being debated. Others are named for men whose exclusive contribution to our nation is unarguably one of oppression and exploitation. In the former category, most historians would place President Woodrow Wilson. His role in having attempted to transform the nature of international conflict by stubbornly and unsuccessfully promoting membership of the United States in the League of Nations has been interpreted as visionary, idealistic, naïve, or sabotaged by his own inability to compromise. Less well known by the general public has been his frank expression of ugly and distorted racist views in his historical writings, as well as his assertion of executive power to maintain and even widen segregation in government offices during his presidency.

Like other powerful figures with less than perfect records of progressive or humane actions, students, activists, and other Americans have been aggressively protesting his name on the Woodrow Wilson School of Diplomacy at Princeton. Both the school and the university had been, until late in the 20th

accolades. Perhaps more relevant is the fact that many American political leaders of the past have, at least to a limited degree, proved themselves capable of transcending their own limits of class, race, or gender. Even our Founding Fathers, sons of the 18th century Enlightenment, expressed misgivings about slavery, even as they financially benefited from it. In some cases, they condemned slavery strongly. This may qualify them as hypocrites, but their very hypocrisy implies an acknowledgement of the selfishness of their choices. Wilson was a man of the early 20th century. His contemporary, Theodore Roosevelt, famously invited the distinguished African American leader Booker T. Washington to dine at the White House with members of Roosevelt's family. While it is true that Washington was an acceptable, accommodating civil rights leader (perhaps somewhat more by the standards of our era than of his own), and that Roosevelt did not repeat this experiment, the president was still subject to harsh criticism for this gesture. Wilson, on the other hand, rudely dismissed another eminent African American, William Trotter, from a meeting at the White House. Trotter had requested the meeting with high expectations, hoping to enlist Wilson's support for dismantling segregation in offices of the federal government. Wilson became agitated by Trotter's requests and ended the meeting by swiftly dismissing Trotter, after claiming that he had offended him with his persistent argument for raising the status of African Americans in the government.<sup>3</sup>

Yale University is also undergoing shockwaves under circumstances similar to those at Princeton. In the case of Yale, students have objected to the retention of John C. Calhoun's name on an undergraduate residence. Calhoun, unlike Wilson, has a much less ambiguous past. He is known as one of the chief apologists for slavery, and ultimately, secession, in the tragic series of compromises that temporarily built our nation and later temporarily destroyed it. There are no qualifiers that redeem Calhoun from his status as an ardent and assertive spokesman for "the peculiar institution" of slavery. The very fact that his actions were so fiercely contested by many in the north belies the argument that only an anachronistic evaluation of his life could mistakenly claim that he violated moral standards of his own time.

These examples are increasingly frequent, but they are not new. An article

from the *Harvard Crimson* in 1963 debated the ethics of naming buildings at Harvard after A. Lawrence Lowell, a representative of a Boston Brahmin family and the president of Harvard when alleged anarchists Sacco and Vanzetti were executed for murder. Lowell chaired a committee investigating the case; he ultimately advised Massachusetts Governor Alvan Fuller against an appeal. The *Crimson* article conveys condescension towards immigrants and radicals, and yet it concludes that "This is the real tragedy of Sacco-Vanzetti: that the best of people with the best intentions managed to do the worst of deeds—kill two men who did not deserve to die."<sup>4</sup>

Given this highly charged climate, it is tempting to conclude that those who suggest or demand the removal of Wilson's, or even Calhoun's, name from the institutions which honored them, are unreasonable and that their opinions should be equated with extremism. In adopting this attitude, acceptance of the status quo becomes the default choice. Serious attempts to question the legacy of historical figures are defeated. Is it wrong to subject the contributions of these men to the process of historical inquiry? After all, although there are many more instances related to the naming of public places, such as parks, bridges, and roads, after heroes who have lost their luster, in the cases of Yale and Princeton, the conflict surrounds academic centers dedicated, by definition, to the pursuit of knowledge.

One student at a Princeton protest maintained that "having to identify yourself with the name of someone who did not build this place for you is unfair."<sup>5</sup> One problem, of course, with this argument is that elite universities such as Princeton were established as bastions of class, racial, and gender privilege. They fought against the tides of change for decades until finally, in the 1960s, they were compelled to open their doors to members of racial and ethnic groups, as well as to women, whose participation in the most influential spheres of American life they had overtly disdained. The young woman quoted in the article would be severely limited in her choice of college if she applied the standard of schools that would have welcomed her in the past.

Yet she still has the right to question that exclusion by serious, thoughtful, and informed dialogue, potentially followed by demands for change. As Christo-

pher Phelps argues in a recent article in *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, “History is a process of cognition and revision—literally, re-seeing—of the past...It must be sustained by evidence and held to the test of others’ scrutiny. To reconsider, to recast, is the essence of historical practice.” Although the balance of power may have shifted, allowing previously marginalized groups to participate in this process, there is nothing new about continuing to engage with the past, even when determining the fate of monumental names on libraries, dormitories, or schools of diplomacy. Phelps argues persuasively that:

History is one thing, memorials another. As tributes, memorials are selective affirmative representations. When a university names a building after someone or erects a statue to that person, it bestows honor and legitimacy. The imprimatur of an institution of higher education affords the subject respect, dignity, and authority... Memorials are not, by and large, erected after long and careful study of the past... What is erasure in one sense can in another and more important sense be an acknowledgement and validation of the past. When a building named for an arch-advocate of slavery is accorded another name, it pays respect to the lives of those whom he condemned to be owned.<sup>6</sup>

Woodrow Wilson himself, a historian by profession, reflected on the uses of the past. In “On the Writing of History,” he concluded that:

The picturesque writers of history have all along been right in theory: they have been wrong only in practice. It is a picture of the past we want—its express image and feature; but we want the true picture and not simply the theatrical manner...No great, no true historian would put false or adventitious colors into his narrative, or let a glamour rest where in fact it never was”<sup>7</sup>

The surprised undergraduate’s realization that the name of a building could “directly affect one’s happiness” is to a certain extent motivated by a degree of naiveté and self-centeredness. Furthermore, dialogue is not characterized by insults or threats, but by the exchange of ideas, especially at institutions of higher learning. Yet one positive result of struggling with issues of memory,

exclusion, privilege, and honor, should be, if not happiness, at least the conviction that as Americans, we need to confront our past. That past cannot be limited to the theatrical or glamorous image Wilson derides, the past of statues and institutional names. Dismissing those who raise uncomfortable aspects of the past as dogmatic or shrill extremists silences inquiry and dialogue.

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purposes of this essay, they thought that it would be useful to establish small scale socialist communities to prove their ideas both “possible” and “desirable.” This last idea led to several attempts at making socialist communities. Many of these experimental communities failed because one cannot build an entirely new way of life without an unshakeable sense of commitment and unity, which is what these communities often lacked.

### Henri de Saint-Simon

Count Henri de Saint-Simon (1760–1825) was born to a poor aristocratic family in Paris. Several years after the French Revolution, he turned to the study of science. The Britannica Academic website<sup>4</sup> cites his first published work, a letter in French where he “proposed that scientists take the place of priests in the social order.” He “believed that science and technology would solve humanity’s problems.” He later incorporated Christianity into his ideas, suggesting that religion should guide the aim to improve the conditions of the poorest class as quickly as possible.

Saint-Simon died in 1825, and it was not until 1828 that followers of his ideas started holding meetings in France. Though Saint-Simonian theology touched many thinkers, with even Friedrich Engels attributing to Saint-Simon “the breadth of view of a genius,” it did not inspire any practical attempts to build socialist communities. This was precisely due to its nature: Saint-Simon wanted to change the entire government, believing in large-scale organization—unlike Owen and Fourier. Such large scale reformation did not lend it itself to small scale ‘community experiments’ that Owen and Fourier organized. Nonetheless, although Saint-Simonians wanted to bring about large scale change, they “were not opposed to using existing political channels.”<sup>5</sup>

### Robert Owen

Robert Owen (1771–1858) was a Welsh manufacturer. His first experience at creating a community was when the partners of his firm, at his urging, pur-

## ***Applications of Utopian Socialism: Henri de Saint-Simon, Robert Owen, and Charles Fourier***

David Tanner ('18)

### Introduction

Karl Marx was not the first philosopher to conceive of the idea of communism or socialism; there was a plethora of intellectuals who came before him and thought about the problems of class struggle. Indeed, in *The Communist Manifesto* Marx criticized these early French and English socialist ideas, calling them “feudal Socialism: half lamentation, half lampoon...at times...striking the bourgeoisie to the very heart’s core; but always ludicrous in its effect...”<sup>1</sup> Marx called these ideas “Utopian”—too idealistic to ever be implemented or practiced. Marx’s criticism was directed at three main socialist thinkers: Henri de Saint-Simon, Charles Fourier, and Robert Owen.<sup>2</sup> These thinkers had some varied, even opposing ideas, but their common denominator was their will to plan “society [to] be radically reorganized to promote social harmony,” though not through revolutionary uprisings, like the Marxist Socialists. The basics agreed upon by different Utopian Socialists were expressed by Roger Pader as being summed up in three elements.<sup>3</sup> Firstly, they all believed that it is an overriding moral duty to create a society that acts upon a moral theory that would fulfill basic human needs (the definition of which changed depending on the thinker, as will be discussed later). The second common element was that “their proposals must be based on a social science closely modeled on the recently developed...natural sciences.” Finally, and most importantly for the

chased New Lanark mills. Owen opened up different schools and set the tone for the community. When he eventually joined a new firm that had social reformers in it, like Jeremy Bentham, a new period in his life began.

The Britannica Academic<sup>6</sup> summarizes the main belief in Owen's philosophy: man's character is formed by circumstances that he cannot control, therefore, it is of utmost importance to place man in circumstances where his character will develop for the better. Owen continued efforts to improve New Lanark, while developing ideas for other communities. He suggested that villages of "unity and cooperation" be made for the unemployed. The Britannica relates that in his view it would make sense to create villages accommodating 1,200 unemployed people on 1,000 acres in the form of a square, with a public kitchen and dining halls, where all work and profits were collective. There would be private apartments for families and children would live with their parents only until the age of three, which brings to mind the similar concept of a collective children's house found in early Israeli kibbutzim.

Perhaps Owen's greatest accomplishment was the socialist community he created based on his ideas. Named New Harmony and located in Indiana in the United States, Owen purchased the community in 1824<sup>7</sup>. He invited 800 people to join him in one of the first great utopian social experiments. Though many of the people who joined were committed to bringing about a successful socialist community, not all were so ideologically driven. Owen neither expected nor had the power to deal with "the lazy, incompetent and the unfit, who had flocked to the new community at his call"<sup>8</sup> Interestingly, this caused both the original believers in Owenite socialism to leave, as well as the lazy people too when they realized this was not the place for them, leaving an eclectic mix of people to define the community by 1827. They had accepted Owen's theories but were not really devoted to them. They consisted of teachers, explorers, feminists, and more. Owen had gone away temporary, spreading his ideas to others.

A Scottish educational theorist, William Maclure, was left in charge of the socialist hamlet while Owen was away. Maclure opened up a variety of schools with different curricula, though some were hesitant to enroll. The arts were

emphasized in these schools; Banta describes how "theatricals, concerts, and entertainments were constant, but they did not interfere with the more important projects of research, study, writing, and educating the young and old." The School Press of New Harmony printed various books, classics and new editions alike, and the New Harmony *Gazette* advocated "women's rights, easy divorce, the abolition of slavery" and other changes towards the established ideas. There were many free libraries and a woman's club. Despite all of these positive things, the communal manufacturing power was not doing well and the community collapsed. Soon the community was divided into several smaller communities, which in turn divided until it could no longer be said that there was any more "harmony".<sup>9</sup> According to Owen's son, Robert Dale Owen, the cause for the failure of New Harmony was the lack of devotion by its members and the heterogenous mixture of people it attracted. Clayton notes that this symptom is common to all similar attempts at utopian societies. Its fall was also caused by financial discomfort—Owen lost 80% of his fortune before pulling out of the community, as well as a lack of real communal unity on key issues such as the form of government that should be instituted. Additionally Owen's dislike for religion in his early years which was not shared by all members, was also a source of division. In less than three years, the utopian vision for New Harmony was gone.

There were several other Owenite communities attempted in the United Kingdom. Three of them were without Owen's leadership: Orbiston (near Glasgow), Lanarkshire in 1826–27, led by Abram Combe which collapsed shortly after his death in 1827; Spa Fields, in the London Borough of Islington in 1821–24, led by George Mudie, which actually showed promise because of the cooperation of the 200 families that lived there, and Ralahine, County Cork in Ireland in 1831–33, a very small experiment (of only a few dozen people) that failed due to the reckless monetary habits of its leader. These names have been relegated to the dustbins of history, because their attempts were neither successful nor particularly special in any way except for their rareness.

One final attempt which involved Owen himself was the community of Harmony Hall in Queenwood, Hampshire, which ultimately folded due to lack of funds. The 533 acres of land was bought by the Home Colonization Society, a

socialist organization, on which 57 people came to live in 1840. A great amount of money was spent on the buildings and manufacturing machinery, but the financial strain proved too great to bear.

There were a number of tiny Owenite attempts in the United States and elsewhere (there was one attempt in Canada) in the 1820's. The common denominator between these attempts were that they were performed on a very small scale, and were only loosely based on Owen's ideas and were commonly adapted to the ideas of the community. Most failed fairly quickly, usually within about 3 years or less.

Owen's ideas never succeeded on a practical level, and the question to be asked is whether it was the technical details mentioned previously which cause the failures, or some flaw inherent in Owen's ideas. Most likely it was a combination—the vaguely defined ideas Owen developed lacked a central belief system that brought the member's together, which is needed for a community to flourish. As a result, people felt estranged from each other, a common thing in socialist communes. It was likely this separation between the members of the community that inevitably led to the failure of the Owenite ideal.

### Charles Fourier

François-Marie-Charles Fourier (1772–1837) was a French social theorist who would have a great impact on Utopian Socialist thought and society in general. Fourier expressed his ideas through his writing. He was against the ideas of his socialist contemporaries, opposing both the scientific technocracy of Saint Simon and the cycle of failure that Robert Owen's communities had endured, as attested to by the title of one of his works, "Snares and Quackery of the Sects of St. Simon and of Owen".<sup>10</sup> As opposed to Saint Simon, Fourier held of making communities based off his ideas, like Owen. Fourier held many radical opinions, some of which would later become accepted in modern society, such as his positive views on women's rights and sexual freedom. Some, however, were decidedly not, such as his rabid anti-Semitism.<sup>11</sup> He was also against the abolition of property, a belief held by some Socialists, and thought that poverty,

not inequality of classes or peoples, was the cause of societal disorder—which made him fairly unorthodox in the eyes of his socialist contemporaries.

Fourier's politico-economic theories really began due to an incident he witnessed in 1799; after a famine, he had been commissioned to secretly discard some rice, because having more available would reduce its value. This utter waste and manipulation of people by the capitalist system led him to formulate his theories. The major idea of Fourier was the concept of a phalange (or phalanx), defined by the Britannica Academic as an "cooperative agricultural community" consisting of about 1,500 people each forming an "independent economic group" which he believed was a fairer alternative than capitalism to distribute wealth evenly. In his proposal, phalanges could be introduced into any political system. People in the phalange would be rewarded based on their productivity.

Fourier's ideas were set into action in communities built in the US and France. The Brook Farm experiment in West Roxbury, Massachusetts (1841–47) was an 175-acre farm organized by George Ripley, once a Unitarian minister, and his wife Sophia. Every child was entitled to an education in Brook Farm's excellent school, which was heavily integrated with farming.<sup>12</sup> Brook Farm attracted intellectuals and craftsmen, and it provided basic necessities to its residents at actual prices. A weekly magazine, *The Harbinger*, discussed social and economic issues. The idea of its founder was to form a perfect society based on their Christian values. The community erected a large communal building, the "phalanstery," which was uninsured and was totally consumed by a devastating fire. The community had a general sense of solidarity, unlike Owen's communities, and pushed on for a few years, but it never recovered financially from the fire—it closed its doors in 1847.

Quite similar to the trend of Owenite communities in the US, during the 1840's it became popular to establish small communities based on Fourierism in the US. Of approximately 40 such communities, the most famous and long-lived was the North American Phalanx (1843–56) at West Bank, New Jersey by Albert Brisbane, a disciple of Fourier who was largely responsible for transmitting his ideas to the United States.<sup>13</sup> Thousands of people were interested in

joining, and it was moderately successful for seven years. Its members rejected the “bald atheism” that “asserts human nature to be a failure.”<sup>14</sup> However, the members were not all of one religious persuasion, and outward showing of religion was not usual. At first, the community was tight-knit, but work was hard, and some were slacking off. The intellectual aspect of education (as opposed to the practical aspect) was being increasingly neglected. Tensions within the community built up, until a disastrous fire made the community destitute and forced it to close.

Another notable Fourierist experiment was the Wisconsin Phalanx, also known as Ceresco, in Fond du Lac County, Wisconsin (1844–50). This phalanx was unique for having more profit than debt at the time of its dissolution. Headed by Warren Chase from Vermont, this community was decidedly “anti-church,” and its “moral latitudinarianism” led some to regard it as a “nest of free-love heretics.” Additionally, his devotion to “the doctrine of spiritualism” led to some to regard Chase as “insane.” In truth, Chase was a very whimsical leader who probably meant most of what he said tongue-in-cheek. The cause of the community’s failure was partially due to its lack of success at unitary living, albeit retaining familial divisions, as attested to by Chase himself. However, there are no clear answers as to exactly why the community chose to dissolve itself at the time that it did and what other factors impacted the community negatively. John Noyes, author of a *History of American Socialisms* writes,<sup>15</sup>

[Overall], the coroner’s verdict in this case must be—‘Died, not by any of the common diseases of Associations, such as poverty, dissensions, lack of wisdom, morality or religion, but by deliberate suicide, for reasons not fully disclosed.

## Conclusion

As has been demonstrated, there were no lack of Socialist experiments. There is no one history of all such small communities, for they are both so similar to each other and so utterly unimportant as to render such a history impractical

and useless. Certain trends do emerge though, when examining the communities in a general sense. The cause for their failure can usually be attributed either to lack of funds, dissension among the members, or a devastating fire. Clearly Owen and Fourier were proven wrong; in the form experimented with, establishing a lasting community based on Utopian Socialism in small isolated area is impossible. To make an entirely new way of life needs an unshakeable infrastructure which almost by definition cannot exist with small experiments.

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## END NOTES

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***Left-Wing Nietzscheans:  
The Politics of German Expressionism, 1910–1920***

Dr. Seth Taylor

Three quarters of a century have passed since the end of the Second World War and still no consensus has been reached regarding the role of Nietzsche's philosophy in the development of National Socialism in Germany. For critics of the philosopher, Nietzsche's immoralism and his attacks on modern culture justified the aims of German imperialists during the First World War and played a pivotal role in those cultural developments in Germany which led to Fascism. His irrational philosophy of life led to despair regarding the possibility of achieving objective knowledge of the world, while his elitist notion of the Übermensch invited authoritarian answers to that despair. The most untiring proponent of this position between the wars was the Marxist philosopher, Georg Lukács. While this view of Nietzsche has been severely criticized in the postwar period, it nevertheless continues to find adherents.

Today Nietzsche's defenders far outnumber his critics. Yet even when they portray Nietzsche as indifferent to politics, or actually against Wilhelmine imperialism, their views do nothing to clarify the role of Nietzsche's philosophy in German history. It was, after all, Nietzsche's conservative followers in Wilhelmine and Weimar Germany, not his contemporary defenders, who first asserted the unpolitical character of Nietzsche's philosophy. For Nietzsche's critics, his philosophy served as the affirmation of an unpolitical tradition which at best justified middle class accommodation to the militaristic policies



of Germany's ruling powers. In its most pernicious form, this unpolitical tradition, combined with Nietzsche's irrationalist philosophy of life and criticisms of modern culture, became part of what historians refer to as Germany's "conservative revolution" against modernity.

Not all historians of Germany's conservative revolution claim an unequivocal link between Nietzsche's philosophy and the anti-western and anti-modernist movements which sprouted in Germany during the First World War. Still, Nietzsche's association with the right remains if only because the numerous studies tracing the ideological roots of National Socialism have highlighted the right-wing reception of Nietzsche's vitalist philosophy and cultural critique while few studies have suggested the existence of a Nietzschean left. German Expressionism, an artistic and political movement between 1910 and 1920 represents the climax of a left-wing Nietzschean tradition in Germany and is thus the focal point of this brief study.

For the Expressionists, Nietzsche's critique of culture was not directed against the west, as it was for the right, but against German authoritarianism and militarism. Nietzsche's immoralism likewise became the substance of a rebellion by young people against the authoritarian culture where moral virtue had long been the catchphrase for Prussian predilections. Even Nietzsche's vitalist philosophy was not an invitation to imperialism, as Nietzsche's critics have suggested, but a remedy for a failed rational tradition which has lost its focus on ethical questions and become a mere instrument in the advancement of science and the maintenance of the political status quo.

The ideal place to begin an examination of Nietzsche's influence on the left is in the columns of Expressionism's most radical and popular periodical, *Die Aktion*. Founded in 1911 by Franz Pfemfert, *Die Aktion* received contributions from a wide range of the literary intelligentsia. In fact, as Pfemfert wrote in the first issue, *Die Aktion* was open to all ideas so long as they stood against Wilhelmine culture.

"Die Aktion favors...the idea of a great German left...and would like to

restore the long forbidden word *Kulturkampf* (and not only in the clerical sense) to its old glamour."

Even in this programmatic note, the Expressionist character of *Die Aktion* is obvious despite a clear commitment to politics. By linking politics to *Kulturkampf*, Pfemfert sought the roots of German militarism and authoritarianism, not in its political or class structure, but in its culture.

Nietzsche's cultural critique was one of the most important weapons in his struggle against German culture. For Pfemfert, the most important part of that critique was Nietzsche's view of nationalism. Thus, after the centennial celebration of the 1813 German victory over Napoleon at Leipzig, Pfemfert referred to the battle as "nothing more than a slave uprising against freedom and the absolute will to patriotic servitude, to bondage, as Nietzsche called the whole thing". This theme received more extensive treatment by Pfemfert's friend, Otto Corbach, who put Napoleon, 18th century German literary figures and Nietzsche on the side of the Enlightenment, a united Europe and in opposition to Prussian bureaucracy and that part of the bourgeoisie which "flocked to the flag of an artificial nationalism around throne and altar." Far from seeing Nietzsche in opposition to the Enlightenment, as many of his critics have, Corbach admonished Germany with Nietzsche's own critique of German hostility to the Enlightenment.

The whole great tendency of the Germans was against the Enlightenment and the revolution in society which was crudely misunderstood as its consequence. Piety towards everything that exists sought to translate itself into piety towards everything that had never existed, to the end that heart and spirit might once more become full with no room left for future and novel goals.

In another article directed against the state, Corbach's reliance on Nietzsche highlights how the latter's critique of Christianity informed *Die Aktion's* anarchist position. Antiquity consisted of free, "self-glorifying" people who were conquered by the Christian mob. Armed with a morality which labeled everything evil in the world that asserted itself, the Christian state conquered for

the benefit of a few cunning men, while oppressing the many.

As opposed to Christian morality, *Die Aktion* promoted the Expressionist notion of *Geist*. *Geist* is usually translated as spirit but, for the Expressionists, the term had evolved a new meaning intimately related to Nietzsche's vitalist philosophy. In an essay brimming with Nietzschean terminology, Iwan Goll observed that the *Geist* is the creative part of life struggling against all that is old and decayed. "He is against the father who is name but no longer wills, against laws which are only written but no longer will. Those without *Geist* are the parasites...whose first word is morality. They distinguish between good and evil only to justify themselves. The *Geist* on the other hand knows no evil. He is an optimist who can only love."

Here is a group in pre-Nazi Germany which did not interpret Nietzsche "immoralism" as a license for barbarism. In fact, Goll understood that Nietzsche had seen *ressentiment* as the foundation of society's moral values. Those without *Geist*, Goll noted, "hate because they feel weaker; they must kill, wage war and invent evil...They are the fathers, the blind, the slaves. To this Goliath, there is always a David, the young *Geist*".

The question, of course, is whether a movement which considers itself to be a *geistig* elite might not be labeled a right-wing movement and not a left-wing movement. Elitism has been the most controversial criticism leveled against, not only Nietzsche, but against Expressionism as well, particularly the most politically inclined wing, Kurt Hiller's Activist movement. That controversy began with Georg Lukács's virulent attack on Expressionism in 1934 which singled out Hiller for drawing a "professedly extreme left section of the intelligentsia towards fascism". Since Lukács's wrote, Hiller has had both his critics and defenders.

Hiller began the Activist Movement in 1914 in an attempt to mobilize Germany's left-wing intellectuals against the war and the expansionist policies of the German government. In an article in the first volume of the *Ziel-Jahrbücher*, the organ of the Activist Movement, Hiller explained the necessity of Activist elitism. In his view, Christianity and the organized lies of the privileged have

crippled the instincts so that the average person is no longer capable of experiencing the empirical world as bad. Instead of bread, the privileged have fed the people metaphysics as a way of pacifying them. Other parties have demonstrated their bankruptcy through support of the war and allegiance to mere economic interests. Only the *Geist* is capable of representing the broad interests of the people.

There is nothing coercive in Hiller's aristocratic notion of *Geist*. He simply assumed that a league of *Geist* would win such respect among the people that the authorities would be unable to rule without consulting this league of wise men. In Hiller's utopian sketch of an Activist government, which he based on an aphoristic form of Nietzsche's *Human All Too Human*, the *Geist* in each region of the country would appoint each other to this league, forming eventually, with the support of the people, an upper house in a bicameral legislature. Their task would be to sketch a general program of action for the lower house, which Hiller assumed would include the elimination of war and military conscription, a rational economic order, a libertarian criminal code, and a system of education which encouraged creativity. The lower house, elected by universal suffrage, would preside over material matters related to the institution of economic socialism.

There is, then, nothing exploitative in Hiller's notion of *Geist*. He himself distinguished his aristocracy of "type" from Houston Stewart Chamberlain's aristocracy of an "estate." Hiller's type was, of course, the *Geist*, who ruled not out of desire for gain but because of a duty to improve the world, similar to the philosopher kings of Plato's republic. *Geistig* people, Hiller wrote, are not domineering by nature and, by conviction, they are the enemies of domination. To rule means to them, not desire, but burden...Until now, they have evaded their fate; now they must assume it..Otherwise, the world will not be redeemed.

Most importantly, Hiller derived his concept of "aristocratism" from Nietzsche, for whom the *Geist* "rules not because they want to but because they are". All the attributes of *Geist* are justified on Nietzschean grounds as well. The resort to weapons is the way of the slave; pacifism demonstrates genuine power. In-

teresting in this respect is Hiller's references to the concept of sublimation. Walter Kaufmann has shown how the concept of sublimation, the key for Nietzsche to the control of the will, is almost entirely absent from the Nietzsche literature prior to the end of World War II.

For Hiller, atavistic drives of aggression had to be replaced by "sublimated struggle: the competitive agon of bodies and the contentions and contests of *geistig* people". Hiller certainly took this concept from Nietzsche and the evidence is not simply the mention of the Greek agon. Nietzsche was the first to use the word sublimation in the way Hiller used it and the way we use it today. In general, according to Hiller's interpretation of Nietzsche, the superiority of a powerful person is measured by his ability to *refrain* from abusing his power.

Even the Activist revolt against reason differed from the irrationalism of the right. Hiller distinguished between the rational faculty (*Verstand*) of 19th century positivism and the "Ratio" of Activism which goes beyond the so-called objectivity of rationalism to the appraisal of moral values and the assertion of ethical goals. The source of this "Ratio" was not scientific insight, but the will. "Its deepest essence is not mathematically graspable, but mystical....The impulse to good messianic world-transforming action remains dark and defies justification".

Hiller's new rationalism then, like irrationalism, had mystical origins. It differed from irrationalism, though in that it in no way did away with reason. Hiller wrote:

But a better organ of knowledge than reason is not given to the inhabitants of earth. Ever vague intuition escaping all control, which in regular intervals of the history of philosophy extols an approach to the absolute which is deeper than thinking (the most recent irrationalism) means in truth only bad thinking.

Furthermore, the Activists associated Nietzsche not with irrationalism but with their own new type of rationalism. Max Brod, in a contribution to Ziel, counted Nietzsche's tendency to contradict himself within his writings as an

example of Activism's new rationalism, which stood between the old rationalism and the current irrationalism. Both the old rationalism and irrationalism are forms of capitulation before contradictions, the former declaring that reason has reached its limit, the latter flying off into an infinite which is inexpressible in words. The new "truly noble" rationalism illuminates a problem as far as possible but resists the temptation to mystify questions it cannot answer. Moreover, Brod observed that irrationalism was being used in Germany to promote very practical goals such as Germany's territorial demands in the war. He feared that the youth movement was falling prey to this unhealthy doctrine.

The point is not that the Activists' reading of Nietzsche was necessarily the correct understanding of that philosopher, but it was a humanistic one. The Activists, and Expressionists in general, saw in Nietzsche's philosophy the material to work against the authoritarian and militaristic trends in German culture that were leading to Fascism even as the representatives of those trends were using Nietzsche for their own purposes as well. In fact, throughout the First World War, when a right-wing version of Nietzsche's philosophy began to emerge in force, a smaller war raged in the journals of the literary intelligentsia over Nietzsche's legacy.

In an article in *Die Aktion* from 1915, *Die Deutschsprechung Friedrich Nietzsches*, Franz Pfemfert challenged the new patriotic Nietzsche created by the philosopher's sister, the scholar, Werner Sombart and other academics. "This Germanized Nietzsche, this fabrication of a Nietzsche-German...that friend is the most incomprehensible thing." To counter this patriotic version of Nietzsche, Pfemfert provided a list of quotations from *Ecce Homo* to illustrate Nietzsche's disdain for the German and his unqualified internationalism. He deliberately chose *Ecce Homo* as Nietzsche's "most valid and final work" since Sombart had excused anti-German statements from the earlier works as the "sins of youth".

One of Nietzsche's most interesting defenders was Wilhelm Herzog, the editor of the socialist journal, *Das Forum*. In an article of October 1919, *Nietzsche und die Deutschen*, Herzog went further than Pfemfert's defense of Nietzsche

as the “good European” and attempted to place him on the side of the Revolution of 1919.

Nietzsche was no defender of the Communist Manifesto, much more the sharpest antithesis of the socialist viewpoint. But he was a revolutionary, more clever, principled, unsparing, knowledgeable and critical of bourgeois *society* than many of the Social Democratic leaders. He dissected this bourgeois society, its culture, its values, its beliefs, its patriotism, its morality; he unmasked, he mocked its mendacity, its narrow intellect, its arrogance, its hostility to Geist...He created the vision of the *Übermensch* while his time created the foundation for the *Untermensch*, for the beast whose degeneracy and excesses we are now experiencing.

Kurt Hiller’s defense of Nietzsche is perhaps the most illuminating since it highlighted the fundamental issue separating the Nietzschean right from the Nietzschean left: Nietzsche’s own attitude toward political activism. His defense came in response to Thomas Mann’s attack on the Activist Movement in which Thomas’s brother, Heinrich, played a leading role. In an article in *Die Neue Rundschau* of 1916, Thomas protested the Activist’s politicization of both Germany and Nietzsche. The Activists, according to Mann, want to politicize Germany in order to absorb all facets of life into the state. In pursuit of their goal, the Activists politicize art, “as if art was not simply a concern of the solitary soul, of Protestantism and God’s immediacy”.

Mann later incorporated this article into a large work, *Reflections of an Unpolitical Mann* (1918), which presents a classic interpretation of Nietzsche as a conservative partisan of Germany’s “special way”, the conservative path away from western liberal values. According to this view, Nietzsche had contempt for the French Enlightenment while he criticized Germany out of love. He preferred the “honest but gloomy” 19th century to the 18th, which Mann described as embodying the same reformist principles as Activism. Finally, Nietzsche’s true origins were in German Romanticism. He was, as he called himself, “the last unpolitical German”.

Mann actually misquoted Nietzsche here, as the historian Peter Bergmann has

pointed out. Nietzsche called himself an antipolitical, not unpolitical, German. The difference between the two terms, according to Bergmann, was that while Nietzsche rejected politics in favor of culture, he was quite ready to take a political position against the state when the latter interfered in the cultural life of the nation.

Kurt Hiller made a similar point about both Nietzsche and the Activist Movement in his response to Mann’s initial article. The Activists were not attempting to absorb the nation into the state, as Mann charged. The goal is to free the human being from the power of the state to which, in contemporary Germany, he now stands in bondage. As for Mann’s conception of a romantic, unpolitical Nietzsche, Hiller responded:

Thomas Mann quotes him. He called himself the last unpolitical German.... But the politics which made Nietzsche nauseous was the business of party flatheads and editorialists; it was precisely the absence of *Geist* in political life which...tortured him, as much as the lack of *Geist* in contemporary philosophy unnerved him. Yet, his concept of *Geist* is the most political which can be imagined....Every struggle for the introduction of a goal (*Ziel*) into philosophy...every evaluating, obligating and creative thinking, in short all Activism derives immediately, in not entirely consciously, from Nietzsche....And if he today had to choose between Thomas and Heinrich, my humble self-guarantees it: he would not waver.

birth pangs of meaninglessness, psychosis and irrationality, or at least before it had to confront it.

### **The Roots of The Theater of the Absurd and its Limits:**

Much like any postmodernist movement, Absurdism does its best to escape neat categories and definitions and its founders and protectors refuse to see it along a historical or cultural trajectory. Its founders also chose not to avail themselves of the opportunity to be self-defined, in the manner that the Bauhaus and Marxists did, through Manifestos and periodicals. It is for this reason that absurdist writers are generally viewed through the prism of another. In his 1962 book *The Theater of The Absurd*, Martin Esslin, a Hungarian critic, put forth a paradigm with which to understand absurdist writings, which is nearly universally accepted.

This acceptance is important to note for its rarity within the context of modernist and postmodernist criticism and thought, no doubt because such works lend themselves, almost definitionally, to subjectivism and relativism. Absurdism is most likely an exception to this rule because its goals are specific, its conclusions, while morbid, are definite. In this way, Absurdism is more concrete in its philosophy of irrationality, more sure in the need for skepticism and uncertainty. Yet, even Esslin admits the futility of fully defining a movement so rooted in the irrational, stating:

a term like The Theatre of Absurd is a working hypothesis; a device to make certain fundamental traits which seem to be present in the works of a number of dramatists accessible to discussion by tracing the features they have in common, that and no more (p. 10)."

This sentiment was echoed by Arnold P. Hinchliffe, who wrote that:

Such a label is useful not as a blinding classification but to help us gain insight into a work of art. Once defined and understood, such a term helps us to evaluate works of previous epochs.

## ***Aristophanes, The Queen of Hearts, and the Eternal Wait for Meaning: The Theater of the Absurd***

Yehuda Goldberg ('17)

### **Introduction:**

Any meaningful discussion or treatment of Absurdism as a distinct philosophical and literary form, must be predicated upon a definition of Absurdism that is sufficiently broad as to do the movement justice, yet not so expansive that it borders on the meaningless. This is a task in of itself, yet, we need not search for such a definition because Camus, perhaps the most pivotal character in the absurdist literary movement, has already eloquently defined Absurdism:

A world that can be explained by reasoning, however faulty, is a familiar world. But in a universe that is suddenly deprived of illusions and of light, man feels a stranger. His is an irremediable exile, because he is deprived of memories of a lost homeland as much as he lacks the hope of a promised land to come. This divorce between man and his life, the actor and his setting, truly constitutes the feeling of absurdity." (as quoted in Esslin, 2001, p. 23.)

Camus views absurdity as a natural response to the feeling of catharsis and spiritual malaise, or as Camus often put it "nostalgia," nostalgia for the days when the world was at a more simplistic stage, before it had to deal with the

Thus, it would seem necessary, at least in part, to understand Esslin's critique and analysis of aspects of Absurdism as only a piece in the broader puzzle, a surgical treatment of a rich and complex movement. Part of this complexity comes from the fact that outside of the realm of literary analysis, Absurdism is not fully recognizably distinct or different from other movements in postmodernism, namely symbolism, psychoanalysis and existentialism. The influence that these movements had on Absurdism is immeasurable, and any analysis of Absurdism is not complete without recognition of the historical and philosophical underpinnings that encouraged and influenced The Theater of The Absurd.

### **Greek Absurd Theater:**

While a predominantly modern phenomenon, both the theory and rhetoric of absurd drama has ancient roots in Greece, particularly in, the works of Aristophanes. This absurd tendency, in which authors are viewed as part of broader metaphor for mankind trapped in a meaningless existence was further developed in Rome as Menippean satire, a tradition of literature depicting "a world upside down."

As Douglas MacDowell notes in his introduction to *The Wasps*, throughout Aristophanes' work, absurd humor and plot is used with a striking level of frequency. One example of this is the costume worn by the god Dionysus in *The Frogs*. Each element of his dress is a logical conclusion taken to an extreme. To indicate his divinity, he wears "a woman's saffron-colored tunic because effeminacy is an aspect of his divinity, he wears buskin boots because he is interested in reviving the art of tragedy, and a lion skin cape because, like Heracles, his mission leads him into Hades." Perhaps more intrinsically, many aspects of the plot of *The Knights* involve absurd and odd situations. Yet, Aristophanes is not the only ancient Greek dramatist regarded as absurdist; both Aeschylus and Sophocles are considered to be absurdist to some degree. According to Jan Kott:

In the entire history of drama there are only two works in which the hero cannot leave his plays and must remain motionless from the begin-

ning to the end of the play. The first is *Prometheus Bound*. In the second, Beckett's *Happy Days*, the heroine Winnie is buried up to her waist in a mound of earth; later she sinks to her neck... Winnie goes on laughing. She laughs like Camus' Sisyphus when the rock at the top of the mountain slips from his hands and falls into the abyss. Winnie in Beckett's *Happy Days* is happy to the very end (p. 80)

This literary technique, where the absurdity and irrationality of the human condition is expressed through happiness and laughter, even in the most unsettling of situations, is a common thread between the Greeks and absurdist. Additionally, both the absurdist and the masters of Greek tragedy were profoundly influenced by Nihilism, a philosophical premise of which Absurdism is but one component. Indeed, ancient Greek Nihilism and postwar Modernism are very similar in their approach to the quest for meaning, and it is no surprise that the literary works spawned during that period should indicate this parallelism.

### **Modern Precursors:**

Throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the idea of Positivism was criticized as a result of the rise of scientific determinism and eventually devastating and harrowing losses in World War I. Some have suggested that pre-war Positivism may have actually impacted the extreme anger and pessimism that followed World War One. As a result, a movement of spiritual Nihilism and pessimism began to develop in the philosophical and artistic communities known as Irrationalism. This movement had many important leaders, and took many forms. A proper summary of Irrationalism would far transcend the scope of this article, so I will discuss each major figure in the history of Irrationalism only briefly.

Perhaps the greatest critic of the Western tradition was Friedrich Nietzsche, who believed that man must live to gain power and get to know himself. The normal man cannot live in a world that makes no sense, a world which is in a sense absurd, so in his weakness, he creates a set structure to give himself the

impression of transcendence. In contrast to this approach, absurdists offer no alternative to the pain wrenching meaninglessness that the philosophically inclined man living a well examined life will no doubt feel, rather, they embrace it. While the idea of basic spiritual nihilism can be found in Nietzsche, Nietzsche does find some meaning in the world, some truth amidst a universe of lies: the power of knowing oneself.

Nietzsche also had a noticeable influence on the absurdists in a different way. He often wrote that like his alter ego, Zarathustra, he was not to be understood until much later, perhaps deep into the twentieth century. Many absurdists also felt that, in line with Kandinsky's "Art for the Artist" philosophy, they need not write for contemporary audiences, their works would perhaps only be understood later, when man had become more philosophically attuned and developed. Indeed, literary critic Peter Gay, often noted that it is important to note that throughout the period of modernism—while the movement proved to be revolutionary, it was by no means democratic, in fact, in most ways it was wholly elitist in its approach and goals.

Another major influence on the field of Absurdism was Sigmund Freud. This parallel was established by Graham Frankland in his essay "Freud's Literary Culture," which discusses the origins of psychoanalysis as a method of literary criticism. Psychoanalysis is the bridge between psychiatry and psychology. Freud argued that mental disturbances are the results of an unconscious mental conflict that is happening in one's mind. Freud calls this the psyche. The psyche has three parts. First is the id, which is the Latinized form of German for "it." This part drives our instincts and impulses; it tells us to do what we want to do. The second part is the ego, Latinized form of German for "I." This is the conscious mind, the location of the battle between the exterior world and the id. The ego either tries to suppress the id, or, if it can, modify the exterior world so that the id can be fulfilled. When the ego cannot reconcile the id and the exterior world, a neurosis (such as depression) results.

Freud also developed the idea of two types of mental illness. First was neurosis, which is less extreme. In this, the subject is still part of the real world. This can be helped by therapy and psychoanalysis. Psychosis, however, means the

person no longer grasps reality, and cannot be helped. Later, absurdists were to use these ideas as the basis for their perceptions of humanity and the human condition. They would interpret the meaninglessness of life through the medium of physiological insanity and fantasy. This is perhaps why absurdists often chose to focus on dreams as the most profound expression of the irrational, as they indicate that deep down, below his overpowering weakness and devotion to reason, man is ultimately just an irrational animal.

### **Social Figures:**

With the exception of Camus, who we will discuss later in this essay, the social theorist who had the most profound impact on Absurdism was Antonin Artaud (1896–1948). Artaud rejected realism in the theatre and called for a return to myth and magic and to the exposure of the deepest conflicts within the human mind. As one scholar put it:

He demanded a theatre that would produce collective archetypes and create a modern mythology. It was no longer possible, he insisted, to keep using traditional art forms and standards that had ceased being convincing and lost their validity.

Although Artaud would not live to see its development, The Theatre of the Absurd was heavily influenced by his thought. Indeed, Artaud's disdain for Realist Theater was actualized through what Ionesco often called "anti-theatre." It used mythology, symbolism, and involved very little plot, yet reflected upon broad themes, and most importantly, more often than not, the dialogue often seemed to be complete gibberish.

Another important social critic who influenced The Theater of the Absurd was Durkheim, author of the work *Suicide*. While he agreed with Camus that there were no absolute values or ultimate meaning to life, he did not necessarily agree that giving into to that knowledge and fully accepting, even relishing it, was positive. Instead, he said that the loss of values was leading to anomy (depression) and suicide.

The revolutionary artistic movement, Dada, also bears noting as it is in many ways the artistic equivalent of the Theater of The Absurd. The Dada were a movement made up primarily of WWI draft dodgers who fled to Switzerland. Decrying the absurdity of life and the tyrannical and oppressive Western culture that sought to drench all in pseudo-spiritual experiences and ideas, they did their best to indicate the absurdity of life in the most shocking and material way possible, often resorting to crude and unorthodox methods. They famously invented sound poetry, poetry without any words and drew the Mona Lisa with a mustache, mocking the greatest representation of Western art.

Perhaps the most universally acknowledged literary precursor to the Theatre of the Absurd is Alfred Jarry's *Ubu Roi*, a frightful work that makes use of confusing and extended existential metaphors. As Esslin puts it,

a play [*Ubu Roi*] that had only two performances in its first run and evoked a torrent of abuse, appears in the light of subsequent developments as a landmark and forerunner to the theater of the absurd.

Leonard Pronko, goes even further, stating that:

*Ubu* plays straight forward to the works of today's avant-garde in France and particularly the Theater of Ionesco, the apprehensive laughter which *Ubu* elicits is the same as the laughter which explodes today in theaters where *Waiting for Godot* and *The Lesson* are performed.

### Major Figures:

While Ellison lists several figures as the major contributors to the Theater of The Absurd, (Eugène Ionesco, Samuel Beckett, Jean Genet, Arthur Adamov, Harold Pinter, Tom Stoppard, Albert Camus), in this essay, I will only be focusing on two important writers. The first will be the famed Algerian absurdist, and author of *The Myth of Sisyphus*, Albert Camus. The second will be the American writer, Samuel Beckett, writer of *Waiting for Godot*.

### Camus:

Albert Camus was born on November 7th, 1913, in Mondovi, Algeria. His childhood was a series of misfortunes. First, his father died, his mother was impoverished and he lived with his dying grandmother and paralyzed uncle. In 1940, he began teaching in Oran. Later that year, he was to write drafts of *The Stranger*, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, and *The Plague*, his most important works. In 1941, Camus traveled to France and joined the French Resistance, where he became the editor of *Combat*, a position in which he cemented his view on the sacred nature of human life. After this time, he began to write novels and finally edited and published his great works. In 1949, after becoming sick, he lived for two years in seclusion, writing and publishing political essays which led to the publishing of *The Rebel*, his first major philosophical work. In 1956, Camus wrote a novel, *The Fall*. The next year he was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature. He died in 1960, in France.

While much of Camus work is a key part of the absurdist cannon, I will only reflect upon his primary work, *The Myth of Sisyphus*. In this work, he encouraged first and foremost free and uninfluenced thought, saying that "Thinking is learning all over again how to see, directing one's consciousness, making of every image a privileged place."

*The Myth of Sisyphus* is the Greek story of a man who was tormented to roll a rock up a hill, for all eternity, only to find that it rolls back down again once he has rolled it up. Why does he receive this punishment? Because he believed that he was capable of outsmarting the gods. Who was Sisyphus? Camus wittily notes that "If one believes Homer, Sisyphus was the wisest and most prudent of mortals. According to another tradition, however, he was disposed to practice the profession of highwayman. I see no contradiction in this." Camus sees Sisyphus's feeling of superiority, and ultimate punishment as a profound metaphor for the human condition. Despite being but a speck in the broader universe, man feels that he is wise and special. In truth however, men live lives of meaningless labor, pushing up a boulder only to see it fall back down.

Due to this premise, Camus begins the first essay with the question of whether



or not life's worth living. After beginning with the assumption that life has no meaning and is not worth living, Camus deals with the idea of suicide. He states, "killing yourself amounts to confessing that ...[life] is not worth the trouble, a man who commits suicide recognizes the absence of any profound reason for living, the insane character of that daily agitation, and the uselessness of suffering."

However, despite offering suicide as an original option, Camus ultimately rejects suicide as immoral. He also discusses this idea through the story of Sisyphus who was an "absurd hero, as much through his passions as through his torture." Camus notes that life, while not inherently meaningful, has another purpose. As Camus cryptically writes "There is no sun without the shadow, and it is essential to know the night. The absurd man says yes and his efforts will henceforth be unceasing." Ultimately, life is cyclical, part of nature. Camus urges the reader not to fight this flow and seek "the daylight," rather, be at peace with the night, the absurdity of life.

Camus imagines that if Sisyphus can accept the absurdity and futility of life, then he will feel happy and fulfilled, writing:

I leave Sisyphus at the foot of the mountain! One always finds one's burden again. But Sisyphus teaches the higher fidelity that negates the gods and raises rocks. He too concludes that all is well. This universe henceforth without a master seems to him neither sterile nor futile. Each atom of that stone, each mineral flake of that night filled mountain, in itself forms a world. The struggle itself toward the heights is enough to fill a man's heart. One must imagine Sisyphus happy.

This all ties into Camus broader perception of absurdity. In her work entitled "Discussion of the Absurd in Albert Camus Novels Essays and Journals," Melissa Payne discusses the journey that man takes to find meaning and notice absurdity:

As man tries to understand the world and find "clarity" or in this unintelligible and limited universe, man's fate henceforth assumes its mean-

ing .... in his recovered and now studied lucidity, the feeling of the Absurd becomes clear and definite." Man realizes that he is linked to the world only through the absurd and always will be linked because of his "irrational and ... wild longing for clarity ... [that] echoes in the human heart." Camus states that when man is aware of the absurd "it becomes a passion". He is forever trying to reconcile the absurdity of the confrontation of the "human nostalgia" (the longing for happiness and reason) with the "unreasonable silence of the world."

While this provides a framework for understanding man's journey through realizing the truth of absurdity and irrationalism, it does not provide insight into the essential nature of what Absurdism is, and how it relates to man. That answer is given by Camus in the end of *The Myth of Sisyphus*, he writes that Absurdism is when: "In a universe suddenly divested of illusions and lights, man feels an alien, a stranger. His exile is without remedy since he is deprived of the memory of a lost home or the hope of a promised land. This divorce between man and his life ... is properly the feeling of absurdity." Man confronts absurdity when he becomes cognizant of the great futility of the human effort to create meaning in his life. Furthermore, the endless shortcomings of all of man's meaning-offering theories are so unresolvable that ultimately the only conclusion that a thoughtful man must have is that the cosmos is in fact absurd. To Camus, man must ultimately embrace this absurdity.

### **Beckett:**

Samuel Beckett was born on April 13, 1906, near Dublin, Ireland. His childhood and younger years were filled with depression and solitude, similar to those experienced by Camus.

In 1937, Beckett settle down in Paris. It is here that a famous and instructive story is told about Beckett. One day, he was stabbed in the street by a man he did not know. While recovering, he found his attacker in prison and demanded to know why he had stabbed him. The man, solemnly answered "Je ne sais pas, Monsieur" (I don't know, sir). The absurdity of the man's actions and his

emptiness became models for Beckett's writing in the future.

Later, after World War Two, he went on to write his most famous works, including *Eleutheria*, *Waiting for Godot*, *Endgame*, *Malloy*, *Malone Dies*, *The Unnamable*, and *Mercier et Camier*. His first play, *Eleutheria*, revolves around a young man's efforts to escape from his family and place in society. This type of hero is typical for Post-Modernist literature and did little to deviate from other works. His first real success came on January 5th, 1953, when *Waiting for Godot* premiered at the Théâtre de Babylone. Although, many critics decried the play where "nothing happens," *Waiting for Godot* was undoubtedly a success, running for four hundred performances at the Théâtre de Babylone. This began Beckett's successful career, which was marked with such triumphs as *Endgame* and others.

Despite a wildly successful career, at the end, Beckett viewed his literary career with pessimism writing that each word seemed to him "an unnecessary stain on silence and nothingness."

Ultimately, Beckett is remembered as one of the key leaders and indeed founders of The Theater of the Absurd. Perhaps most importantly, he not only believed in the Absurdism of life, but lived "an absurd life" as well. As Ashkan Shobeiri, author of *Samuel Beckett's Absurdism: Pessimism or Optimism?* writes:

Samuel Beckett, as one of the towering absurdists, represents the absurdity of the human situation both in the form and content of *Waiting for Godot* and *Endgame* truly artistically. In fact, Absurdism in Beckett's literary works is an echo of the sordid atmosphere of the conditions which engulf Europe during World War II. However, for some critics and commentators Beckett's representation of the absurd is not only limited to the horrifying atmosphere of the Europe, yet his artistic representation of the desolated postwar Europeans, in his aforesaid masterpieces, are a well match with the purposelessness, senselessness, and absurdity of the universe.

### Language:

Dr Jan Culik tries to paraphrase the goal of Absurdism, stating that

Absurd Theatre can be seen as an attempt to restore the importance of myth and ritual to our age, by making man aware of the ultimate realities of his condition, by instilling in him again the lost sense of cosmic wonder and primeval anguish. The Absurd Theatre hopes to achieve this by shocking man out of an existence that has become trite, mechanical and complacent. It is felt that there is mystical experience in confronting the limits of human condition." Culik feels that words do not suffice to express the essence of human experience. Much of the Theatre of the Absurd was a battle against language, trying to show its fallibility and erratic tendencies and utter unreliable as a source of truth and even communication.

The language in absurdist plays is also meant to be a critique not only of language itself, but of the language of modern society. The diverse and revolutionary language patterns and disregard for grammar are a call for authenticity and organic language. According to Athol Fugard:<sup>1</sup>

The Theatre of the Absurd tries to make people aware of the possibility of going beyond everyday speech conventions and communicating more authentically by ridiculing conventionalized and stereotyped speech patterns. Silence forms part of this ridicule. An analysis of absurd plays illustrates that they use conventionalized speech, clichés, slogans and technical jargon, which they distort, parody and break down.

Indeed in absurd theatre, there is almost an intense reversal of all the conventions of non-absurdist theatre. The characters are trapped not in social contexts, but rather their own human condition. The play itself is also part of the maze that the actors find themselves trapped in.<sup>2</sup> As pointed out by Arnold P. Hinchliffe,

...the central action of this kind of play, action no longer inherent in a plot

(plots in Absurd dramas are usually quite static), but in the unfolding of a poetic image. Such images [...] lack clarity but strongly represent the loss of clear and well defined systems of beliefs. Man finds himself faced with a frightening and illogical universe, in which the means of communication, language is also suspected (and therefore the well-made play with its real conversation is also suspected.)<sup>3</sup>

In the world of Absurdism, “language is useless, for [it] create[s] a mythical universe peopled by lonely creatures who struggle vainly to express the inexpressible.” The goal of absurdist playwrights is to demonstrate the uselessness of language and the inability to express descriptions of the human condition. Hence, clichés, meaningless conversations, long silences, stereotypical conversations are used to undermine the idea of language as a tool for communication. In doing this, the Theatre of the Absurd is also making people aware of the possibility of going beyond everyday speech conventions and communicating more authentically.

#### **Plot, Time, and Characters in the The Theater of the Absurd:**

The literary mechanism known as “static plot” is perhaps the most common plot used by absurd writers, who tend to prefer “a series of concrete stage images” to actual plot, characterization, and concrete conclusions. Many literary critics have argued that essentially “time does not exist in the Theatre of the Absurd.” After all, in a Post-Einstein world time is subjective, simply an expression of our limited experience. Consequently, time is rarely specified in The Theater of the Absurd, giving the viewer a feel of the magnitude and eternity of existence. The lack of specified time allows the viewer to glimpse out into the void before and after the events that they can perceive and gives the impression that every event has happened before and will happen again. As Birkett puts it, “The characters are trapped in a world where time is both brief and eternally repetitive.”<sup>4</sup>

The characters in The Theater of the Absurd also provide credence to the Absurdist worldview of Nihilism and moral void. Indeed, according to Esslin:

“protagonists in absurdist plays are tramps portrayed as shabby survivors, whose physical and mental faculties are in decay and who are permanently squirming and teetering on the edge of disaster.”<sup>5</sup> Others describe the characters as “exist[ing] in a terrible dreamlike vacuum, overcome by an overwhelming sense of bewilderment and grief, grotesquely attempting some form of communication, then crawling on, endlessly.” This is the description of a man whose meaning in life has been snatched away and who is forced to confront the cold hard reality of life. In short, it is the description of the archetypal absurdist hero.

#### **Conclusion:**

What was the impact that Absurd poets and thinkers had on our civilization? Where does their legacy lie? Where do Beckett’s *Godot* or Lewis Carroll’s *Queen of Hearts* stand among the characters of the western literary canon? No doubt, most absurdist would have argued that their impact has been very little, as the majority of mankind still believes that a search for meaning is a key aspect of what makes us human. Some, such as Edward Albee, celebrate Absurdism only for its literary or theatrical contributions. Others, view Absurdism only within a paradigm of mankind’s historical trajectory, viewing it simply as a response to post-war pessimism, a fleeting need to accept and funnel our pain that resulted from the devastating war. The clearest impact of Absurdism was the artistic license it gave to future playwrights. It essentially gave writers the justification to write about nothing, and use their entire literary arsenal to express this nothingness in the most excruciating and motionless way.

All in all, absurdist literature represented man’s willingness to give into the abstract and irrational. It was a celebration of the “slow suicide” that Wilde said was the life of the poet and writer. Its works stand as a cathedral, a monument, to the paradoxical and absurd, forever causing generations to reflect upon and reevaluate their place in the universe. Moreover, it is the literary expression of the subtle beauty that lies in the absurd and fantastical, after all, as Dr Culik puts it, “Rationalist thought, like language, only deals with

the superficial aspects of things. Nonsense, on the other hand, opens up a glimpse of the infinite.”

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END NOTES

- 1 Features of Theatre of the Absurd in Boesman and Lena
- 2 Cahn, 1979, pp. 36–39
- 3 Hinchliffe, 1967, p. 31
- 4 Birkett (1987:40)
- 5 Birkett (1987:40)

### *The Jewish Renaissance*

Joel Pinsker

The idea of Jewish renewal, or renaissance, as a modern expression and realization of peoplehood grew to prominence in the era of Jewish emancipation and nationalism in Europe. Nineteenth and twentieth century theorists of Jewish identity, from those favoring integration to those calling for Jewish autonomy or the establishment of a distinct polity, contended variously over the meaning and necessity of Jewish renewal. The possibility of redemption for Jews as individuals, as a religious-cultural entity, and as a national entity was hotly debated amid great political paradigm shifts, from the time of Moses Mendelssohn and the *Haskalah* to the rise of the autonomist and Zionist movements in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. An examination of the writings of Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch, the international socialist-turned-*proto-Zionist* Moses Hess, and the Viennese-born cultural Zionist Martin Buber elucidates an essential turning point in the conceptual evolution of Jewish renaissance, a turning point that would prove key to the conceptual framework within which Jewish national and autonomous movements emerged.

Long before modern notions of secular Zionism arose, there was the *Haskalah*, or Jewish Enlightenment, of the 18th and early 19th centuries. This movement was an attempt, in Germany and in Eastern Europe, at an early form of multiculturalism vis-à-vis Jews. It was both radically integrationist and particularist in its approach to the Jewish question, rather than assimilationist or sepa-

ratist. Martin Buber (1878–1965) argued in 1903 that both *haskalah* and Chasidism had been examples of Jewish renaissance during the 18th and early 19th centuries, as European states moved toward emancipation for Jews, albeit at the expense of the relative communal autonomy Jews had been granted under pre-modern political systems.<sup>1</sup> Buber held that *Haskalah* had brought new emphasis on original thought into an ossified religion, seeking to reinvigorate Judaism with modern Enlightenment values of human progress and secular education. For Buber, the maskilim offered a renewed conception of Jewish identity that both challenged traditional, strictly separatist notions of Jewish particularity and re-asserted Jewish distinctiveness as the expression of a cultural sphere within European culture.<sup>2</sup> Buber offered Chasidism as the other trend of Jewish Renaissance. He argued that it had sought to inject emotive reverence into a Judaism that had become dulled by an “ornate, distorted and perverted” focus on Jewish law, devoid of feeling—what we might classify as the Misnagedim.<sup>3</sup>

Neither of these examples of Jewish renaissance, if we accept Buber’s application of the term, was political, strictly speaking, though they were both concerned with how Jews could be both Jews and citizens in the emerging modern political structure. The *Haskalah* movement, however, was radically integrationist, seeking as it did the renewed Jewish individual at the expense of the pre-modern, corporative Jewish structure. As David Biale has argued, it is hard to call this position truly apolitical, since “For the *maskilim* the state was to be invested with full sovereignty and the Jewish community rendered politically impotent.”<sup>4</sup> For all its emphasis on individual over corporate Jewishness, however, *Haskalah* did seek to refashion a distinctly Jewish identity by hearkening to the categories of a particularistic Jewish past and applying them to the present, even reviving Hebrew as a modern literary language. As Buber argued, “The *Haskalah* wanted to Europeanize the Jews, but it did not intend their denationalization...[it] served as a means for the intellectual regeneration of the Jewish people.”<sup>5</sup> Jewishness as a cultural, intellectual and linguistic legacy—not merely a set of religious rituals, and certainly not a long-dormant polity in need of resurrection—was arguably the *Haskalah*’s most significant contribution to the evolution of Jewish identity. Yet equally significant as its anti-assimilationist stance (if not primarily, as Biale argues),

were the movement’s integrationist politics. Judah Leib Gordon, a Russian Hebrew poet associated with the *Haskalah*, dramatically articulated this in “*Awake, My People!*” arguing that Russia itself was the Jews’ “Eden,” and had in fact “open[ed] its gates” to them in solidarity and civic brotherhood.<sup>6</sup> In its combination of both Enlightenment-derived and romantic sensibilities regarding Jews’ social emergence as both Jews and Europeans, then, the movement’s purveyors saw little, if any, contradiction. As Gideon Shimoni has argued, “*Haskala* served in some ways...to facilitate Jewish assimilation, and in other ways as a vehicle for modernizing the Jewish collectivity in order to rehabilitate and foster it.”<sup>7</sup>

The Chasidim’s advocacy of a more robust Orthodox Judaism as a means to recapture and revive Jewishness and the *maskilim*’s call for modern education and involvement in modernity by Jews were combined in the writings of Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch (1808–1888).<sup>8</sup> His appeal to Jews echoed that of Mendelssohn, calling both for adherence to tradition and for an embrace of modernity. For Hirsch, this was an ideal response to the quandary of Jewish identity in the midst of the 19th century’s increasingly national, rather than merely dynastic-feudal, European state. This transition was particularly marked in Hirsch’s own lifetime, which spanned the 1815 Peace of Vienna, the 1848 “Springtime of Peoples,” and the unification of Germany under Bismarck. Hirsch posited that the efforts toward religious “reform,” as promoted by his Frankfurt contemporaries claiming the mantle of *Haskalah*, were wrongheaded. Himself a promoter of secular education and modern acculturation for Jews, Hirsch’s preference was for “progress allied to Religion,” rather than the other way around.<sup>9</sup> He argued that Judaism’s essence was indivisible from the Torah’s commandments, and could not simply be attributed to a disembodied, Platonic religiosity underlying them.<sup>10</sup> Religious reformers, in their attempts to dilute Jewish tradition for the sake of modernization, validated German gentile notions of Jewish backwardness.<sup>11</sup> Hirsch castigated such reformists for their claim that the seminal *Haskalah* thinker, Moses Mendelssohn, would have condoned their “progressive” approach:

Calmly, in his mild, reflective manner, he would come upon the rubble you have left and say: “...We are allowed to reflect on the law, attempt to

ascertain its spirit ... [but] awe before God draws a line between speculation and practice which no conscientious person may cross.<sup>12</sup>

He further reminds his reformist contemporaries that it was Mendelssohn who had proclaimed, “Belief makes you human; only the law makes you a Jew.”<sup>13</sup>

Moses Hess (1812–1875) bridged the divide between a purely integrationist approach toward Jewish life and a revivalist, nationalist one in the course of his own life. For most of his life an ardent secularist, he ultimately came to the same conclusion Hirsch did about the threat posed to Judaism by religious reform. While Hirsch believed secular, German education alongside traditional Jewish education was the solution for Jewish renewal, Hess held that, in addition to reclaiming the faith, “only a *national* renaissance can endow the religious genius of the Jews...with new strength and raise its soul once again to the level of *prophetic inspiration*.”<sup>14</sup> The emergence of a Jewish nation-state was thus, for Hess, essential to renaissance, in stark contrast to the integrationism of the *haskalah*. Writing four decades later, Martin Buber would place the new impulse toward Jewish national renewal in the context of the earlier national movements in Europe. Like the pre-Bismarkian, liberal nationalists of the mid-19th century, he saw these movements not merely as a matter of ethnic self-aggrandizement but of revival: “A push for possession and for the power of territorial expansion of nations is not at hand...it is [rather] the self-reflection of the souls of peoples.”<sup>15</sup> Buber distinguished this universal, humanistic form of national realization from the chauvinistic variety, much in the manner of Moses Hess’s dream of a socialist world comprised of distinct but cooperating peoples, with unabashed German-Romantic fervor: “What is longed for is the unconscious development of national psyches made conscious...Goethe’s dream of a world literature takes on new forms: only when every people speaks from its essence can the whole of humanity be enriched.”<sup>16</sup>

Martin Buber’s conception of the sort of Jewish self-realization necessary for nationhood contained within it the spirit of Mendelssohn’s ideas for Jewish renewal, though anything approaching political nationhood had been far from the minds of any maskilim. To understand the evolution of the concept of re-

naissance—from *Haskalah*’s offer of modernity and enlightenment for Jews as the path to emancipation, to the ultimate rejection of the reformist assimilationism it had once inspired—it is instructive to examine the similarities and differences between Hess and Hirsch, between their shared diagnoses of Jewish hardship and wildly different prescriptions for its relief. In this distinction one can find a seed of the Jewish nationalist and autonomist movements of the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

The secular Hess, having long disavowed any claim to Jewishness, ultimately became inimical to Jewish advocates of assimilation. Among them he counted the same ascendant religious reformists of his time that the pious Hirsch had castigated and worked against. For Hess, ultimately, as for Hirsch, Jewishness was found in its religious tradition, and this tradition was, contra the reformers, synonymous with universal human redemption, not a hindrance to it.<sup>17</sup> In other words, Jews could not solve the problem of their acceptance in European society by being “less Jewish.” For both thinkers, the solution began with an embrace of Jewish tradition. Moses Hess’s call for this embrace contained a key distinction from his earlier full-on socialism: that of separatism. He remained to the end an internationalist, but one who, like Buber, held that national realization was an essential component of universal brotherhood:

...the national essence of Judaism not only does not exclude universalism and modernity; the latter are its natural consequence. If I nonetheless emphasize the national root of Judaism more than its Universalist blooms, that is because in our time people are all too eager to gather and decorate themselves with the pretty flowers of cultural heritage rather than to cultivate them in the soil in which they can grow<sup>18</sup>

It is in that last turn regarding “soil” where Moses Hess departed significantly from Samson Raphael Hirsch. Hirsch shared with Hess the views that 1) adherence to Judaism was conducive to universalism;<sup>19</sup> 2) Judaism was communal and not mere confessional allegiance, and 3) attempts at assimilation only exacerbated Jews’ failing attempts at acceptance by European society. But very unlike the latter-day, nationalist Hess, Hirsch thought reinvigorated adherence to Jewish tradition, vis-à-vis (3), would actually ameliorate the accep-

tance problem. Hirsch went so far as to suggest that “most of the circumstances that nowadays bar the Jews from so many career paths would disappear” if they would cease their attempts at reforming Judaism.<sup>20</sup> Hess, however, by the time he had written *Rome and Jerusalem*, had given up the idea that Jews could do anything at all to relieve their persecution, as long as they remained without their own land.

Of these two thinkers, only Hess discerned a key element of the distinctive character of modern (for Hess, most importantly German) anti-Semitism, one which, for Hess, had a kernel of truth, and whose denial by Jews was fatal: its alleged national-racial component. Hess’s view of Jewishness thus mirrored both his milieu’s romantic-nationalist essentialism and, to some extent, its frequently anti-Semitic fatalism. To Hess, what distinguished Judaism from mere confessional choice, which Hirsch was able to proclaim and expound upon but not quite name (“Judaism is not a religion...it is not a feature of life...to be a Jew is the sum of all of our obligations in life”<sup>21</sup>), was its inescapably *national* character, something ineffable and intrinsic, not imagined: “Reform, conversion, education and emancipation—none of these open the gates of society to the German Jew; hence his desire to deny his racial origin...as long as the Jew denies his nationality,...his false position must become ever more intolerable.”<sup>22</sup> For Hirsch, adherence to his supra-religious vision of Judaism would suffice to end the Jews’ suffering. For Hess, the tangible, ontological nature of Judaism—really, of Jewishness—was irreconcilable with Germanness. While his essentialism took its cue from Goethe, Schiller and Schopenhauer, his pessimism about Europeans’ acceptance of Jews had the tenor of his generation’s preoccupation with the notion of race.

Moses Hess, and later Martin Buber, would take the ideological fixation on the puzzle of Jewishness they shared with Hirsch and follow their nationalist contemporaries in devotion to national renaissance. It was indeed more than a religion to both of them; it was the sum of their obligations. Jewish revival would be a process, restoring the spiritual center of the Jewish people in Palestine. Though while both were deeply convinced of the inexorable reality of anti-Semitism, their *Zionism* was not centered on the European anti-Semitism they knew. Their respective visions were aimed at Jews, with Jewish self-real-

ization in mind. Buber, in fact, thought the sort of Zionism motivated mainly by anti-Semitism was “the most vulgar,”<sup>23</sup> even if this sensibility could to some extent be put to good use. For him, creative rediscovery of the “soul” of the Jewish people was primary: “Creativity! The Zionist who feels and lives by the utter holiness of this word seems to me to stand at the apex.”<sup>24</sup>

In Eastern Europe, meanwhile, Leo Pinsker, after a longtime commitment to Jewish assimilation within the Russian Empire, had argued in his tract *Autoemancipation* (1882) that the Jews were in fact, without land, a disembodied “ghost” of a true nation, one that would always be persecuted as long as it wandered among the other, complete ones.<sup>25</sup> For Pinsker, in the wake of horrific anti-Jewish violence and legislation following the ascendance of Tsar Alexander III, a resurgence of Jewish creativity and culture toward the restoration of a spiritual center in Palestine was simply impractical, and not a worthy goal, given the Jews’ circumstances as he saw them: “...we should not, of all things, dream of resurrecting ancient Judea...our task, should it ever be accomplished, is a modest one; it is alone difficult enough. A *holy* land should not be the goal of our efforts now, but rather our *own* land.”<sup>26</sup>

The ideological conflicts that would ensue between this political-survivalist (for Buber, “vulgar”) approach to Jewish renewal and the more cultural-spiritual ones Hirsch, Hess and Buber variously favored would come to inform debates within the Jewish nationalist movement as it developed in the first decades of the 20th century, in both its Zionist and autonomist forms. Bundists such as Vladimir Medem viewed Zionism and the revival of Hebrew as mere “literary fancy,” but his own regional, Yiddish-speaking milieu as one imbued with “an ingrained living Jewishness,” intimately tied to urgent class-consciousness.<sup>27</sup> Other autonomists were arguably more renaissance-oriented, not least the seminal Simon Dubnow, who sought the “development of the Jewish personality” through a programmatic cultural and spiritual recalibration of Jews’ place and function in the Diaspora.<sup>28</sup> Among Zionists, Ahad Ha’am defended a deeply romantic and politically antipathetic “spiritual Zionism,” warning against the pitfalls of merely establishing a *Judenstaat*—a mere “state of Jews”—without a developed sense of Jewish identity. He contraposed this view to the urgency of Herzl and Nordau.<sup>29</sup>

It is tempting to argue that one side or the other of this divide ultimately “won” when a Jewish state was finally established. The commitment to *Eretz Israel* (one not strongly held by the more radical Herzlian Zionists) and to cultural renaissance was certainly vindicated on the path Zionism ultimately took. One can plausibly contend, with David Vital, that the push for Jewish “internal rehabilitation” by Ahad Ha’am and the Hibbat Zion movement ultimately prevailed over Herzlian agitation, as “the task of *rescue* was beyond their meager powers and resources.”<sup>30</sup> That said, the 1910s’ shift to more urgent and implicitly political, *aliyah*-oriented “practical Zionism” eventually meant that the bitterly contested and hard-won strip of land on the Mediterranean, and the modern state built upon it, would provide the urgent refuge from European anti-Semitism Buber had rejected as so much vulgarity. Hirsch’s elusive essence of Judaism and Jewishness would continue to be contested in a polity formed and informed by both romantic-cultural and liberal-nationalist currents, outside of—yet infused with—the spirit of his worldview.

## END NOTES

- 1 David Biale, *Power and Powerlessness in Jewish History* (New York: Schocken, 1986), 109–112
- 2 Martin Buber, “On the [Jewish] Renaissance,” in *The Martin Buber Reader*, Asher Beimann ed., (Palgrave, 2002), 140–141.
- 3 Ibid., 139–140.
- 4 Biale, *Power and Powerlessness in Jewish History*, p. 104
- 5 Buber, “On the [Jewish] Renaissance,” 141.
- 6 Judah Leib Gordon, “Awake, My People!” in *The Jew in the Modern World: A Documentary History* 2nd ed., eds. Paul Mendes Flohr and Jehuda Reinharz, (OUP, 1995)
- 7 Gideon Shimoni, *The Zionist Ideology* (Brandeis UP, 1995), 15.
- 8 To be sure, the theological differences between Chasidism’s emotive mysticism and Hirsch’s more traditional approach are manifold, and are a topic for another paper.
- 9 Samson Raphael Hirsch, *Die Religion im Bunde mit dem Fortschritt, von einem Schwarzen* (Frankfurt am Main: Reinhold Baist, 1854), 15.

- 10 Ibid., 7.
- 11 Ibid., 6.
- 12 Ibid., 20: “Ruhig in seiner mild bedächtigen Weiße träte er an eure Trümmer hinan, und spräche: ‘...Es ist uns erlaubt, über das Gesetz nachzudenken, seinen Geist zu erforschen...die Ehrfurcht vor Gott zieht eine Gränze zwischen Speculation und Ausübung, die kein Gewissenhafter überschreiten darf.’”
- 13 Ibid., 9.
- 14 Moses Hess, “Rome and Jerusalem,” in *The Zionist Idea*, Arthur Hertzberg ed., (JPS, 1997), 123.
- 15 Martin Buber, “Jüdische Renaissance,” in *Die Jüdische Bewegung: Gesammelte Aufsätze und Ansprachen 1900-1915*, ed. Martin Buber (Berlin: Jüdischer Verlag, 1916), 8 (Hereafter cited as *Die Jüdische Bewegung*).
- 16 Ibid.
- 17 Hirsch, *Die Religion im Bunde mit dem Fortschritt, von einem Schwarzen*, 16.
- 18 Hess, “Rome and Jerusalem,” 128. Isaiah Berlin also notes: “For Hess, the Jewish religion...does recognize the principle of nationality, but...excludes chauvinistic nationalism, such as that of Prussia...yet equally it leaves no room for...denying even the just claims of nationality...The first condition of true internationalism is that there should be nationalities.” From “The Life and Opinions of Moses Hess,” in *Essential Papers on Jews and the Left*, ed. Ezra Mendelsohn (New York: NYU, 1997), 44
- 19 Hirsch, *Die Religion im Bunde mit dem Fortschritt, von einem Schwarzen*, 16–17: “Jemehr der Jude Jude ist, um so universeller werden seine Anschauungen und seine Bestrebungen sein, um so weniger fremd wird...Civilisation und Bildung...”
- 20 Ibid., 17.
- 21 Hirsch, *Die Religion im Bunde mit dem Fortschritt, von einem Schwarzen*, 16.
- 22 Hess, “Rome and Jerusalem,” 120–121.
- 23 Buber, “Wege zum Zionismus,” in *Die Jüdische Bewegung*, 39.
- 24 Ibid., 42
- 25 Leo Pinsker, *Autoemanzipation: Mahnruf an seine Stammesgenossen von einem russischen Juden* (Brünn: Jüdischer Buch- und Kunstverlag, 1913, second edition), 10.
- 26 Ibid., 22.
- 27 Vladimir Medem, “The Youth of a Bundist,” in *The Golden Tradition: Jewish Life and Thought in Eastern Europe*, ed. Lucy S. Dawidowicz (Syracuse: SUP, 1996), 433–434.
- 28 Simon Dubnow, “Autonomism, the Basis of the National Program,” in *Simon Dubnow, Nationalism and History*, trans. Koppel S. Pinson (New York: Atheneum, 1970), 143.



- 29 Shlomo Avineri, *The Making of Modern Zionism: Intellectual Origins of the Jewish State* (New York: Basic Books, 1981), 113–116.
- 30 David Vital, “The Afflictions of the Jews and the Afflictions of Zionism: The Meaning and Consequences of the ‘Uganda’ Controversy,” in *Essential Papers on Zionism* (New York: NYU, 1996), 130–131

## ***The Language Game of Torah: the Rambam and Ludwig Wittgenstein***

Noam Josse ('17)

### **Introduction**

On the surface the Rambam and the philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein do not seem to share much in common. The Rambam was one of the great Jewish Rishonim of the medieval period, bothered by problems of Jewish faith and scientific rationalism, whereas Ludwig Wittgenstein was a philosopher of the twentieth century who was mostly bothered by the use of language and its *mistaken* application to philosophy. In fact, Wittgenstein, who claimed that “philosophy is a battle against the bewitchment of our intelligence by means of language,” criticized certain medieval philosophers for creating apparent ‘labels’ for all manner of metaphysical entities.

It is however interesting that the Rambam’s contextual reading of Tanakh in fact may come close to some of Wittgenstein’s concepts, such as that of the ‘language games.’ Both in the philosophy of Wittgenstein and the Torah interpretation of the Rambam, many problems arise related to language and its often misapplied meaning.

### **The Rambam’s Approach to Bible Interpretation**

In the first book of the *Moreh Nevuchim* the Rambam sets out his approach to interpretation of Tanakh and dispels the notion that many people of his time

had, namely that God was a physical, tangible being. Indeed 34 of the 49 chapters in the first volume of *Guide to the Perplexed* handle the proper meaning of specific words in Tanakh.<sup>1</sup> In his introduction to the *Guide*, the Rambam explains that his goal in writing a work of philosophy is to enlighten the religious Jew who “finds it difficult to accept the literal interpretation of the Torah” because these words seem to contradict his “true belief.”<sup>2</sup>

The Rambam is primarily discussing the problem of God’s incorporeality—if God is nonphysical how can Tanakh refer to his arm and make other such physical references. As the Rambam explains, the Torah and the prophets wish to express ideas and principles that deal with the infinite, beyond the confines of time and space. If these ideas were expressed in anyway apart from a simile, allegory, or metaphor they would be incomprehensible to the finite man. Hence, the Torah and the prophets used these literary devices to give over certain messages, and it is the Rambam’s goal to elucidate these “pearl[s] lost in a dark room full of furniture.”<sup>3</sup> More importantly, if these words and phrases were interpreted literally, or as they commonly are, they would create anthropomorphisms of God, which is in direct contradiction with the principle of God’s incorporeality. Hence the Rambam proposes that when a word in Tanakh which would commonly have physical connotation is placed in reference to God or idea and which would subsequently lead to an anthropomorphization of God or the idea being expressed, it should be read metaphorically. Apart from this, the Rambam does not set out more anymore ‘rules’ on how to interpret words, rather he attempts to elucidate an interpretation of words in the Tanakh that do not yield any contradictions or problems as mentioned, but rather serves to deepen our understanding of Hashem. This is the ‘rule’ of the Rambam as it were—to avoid anthropomorphisms of God.

For example, the word *image*, which would normally mean natural form, in fact has a different meaning in Tanakh. In *Tehillim*, King David tells God that “You despise their (the wicked’s) *image*.”<sup>4</sup> Surely Hashem cannot despise the shape of someone’s body, but rather their soul or intellect. It is clear that *image* therefore refers to soul or intellect, not physical form. Hence, in *Bereishit*, where it is written that “In the image of Hashem, He created him,”<sup>5</sup> the Torah does not mean that Hashem created man in His own shape, as Hashem has no

shape, but rather that man was created out of a metaphysical aspect of God. Another example of where the Torah cannot be read literally is when the Torah calls Hashem the “Rock.” The Rambam points out that in *Sefer Yeshayah* it says “Look to the rock you were hewn from.”<sup>6</sup> This does not mean a literal rock but rather a source or origin.<sup>7</sup> This is why after this verse in *Yeshayah*, the verse continues on to say one should “Look to Abraham your father.” It is with this understanding of the word ‘rock’ that we must read verses where Hashem, or a patriarch like Abraham is referred to as a rock: “The deeds of the Rock are perfect,”<sup>8</sup> “You thus ignored the Rock who bored you.”<sup>9</sup>

With this approach the Rambam hoped to better guide his readers in how to read Tanakh and avoid the theological contradictions that literal readings often yielded. He did not particularly set up rules on how to interpret Tanakh or solve contradictions. Indeed he almost always backs up every single interpretation of a particular word in a certain context by proofs from other places within Tanakh, where if the same interpretation was used, would yield a much more clear reading. However, what does emerge is the specific definition of various words in Tanakh, and what they mean exactly when they are in certain contexts. Consequently, there is a certain ‘rule’ in the Rambam’s interpretation—words are defined by their context. Words that are in reference to or in the context of Hashem carry a metaphorical, or allegorical meaning. One cannot make sense of these words in a literal or physical sense without avoiding contradictions, so to dissolve these problems, we must understand the words differently in the first place—with a certain mindset, one different than if these words were *not* in the context or in reference to Hashem. With this mindset, the problems will not arise in the first place, and the true meaning of the words will become clear. Hashem’s presence in the language, imbues the language with new meaning, and to avoid problems and gain the deeper meaning of the words, we must be cognizant of this new context.

### Ludwig Wittgenstein

Ludwig Wittgenstein was a twentieth century, western philosopher, commonly considered the greatest secular philosopher of that century. Born in Austria

in 1889 to a very wealthy family, Wittgenstein would go on to study at University of Cambridge under the philosopher Bertrand Russell. When WWI broke out, Wittgenstein served in the Austro-Hungarian Army. During the war he wrote the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* (*Tractates of Logical Philosophy*). After the war he would hold various educational positions. He radically revised his early philosophy as he grew older, expressing it solely in unpublished lectures and notes. He died in 1951. He compiled his notes into the *Blue and Brown Books*, and the unfinished script of his later philosophy was published posthumously in the *Philosophical Investigations*—the most important expression of his later ideas. It was indeed a wholesale rejection of his earlier thoughts expressed in the *Tractates*. We will delve briefly into Wittgenstein’s later philosophy as this is the one which is more relevant to the Rambam.

### Wittgenstein’s Philosophy: The Philosophy of Language Games

Perhaps the best way to explain Wittgenstein’s philosophy is by explaining his philosophy through examples.

In a classroom a teacher might look to attract the attention of the students by asking a question about the language a student uses. A student might use the word the human “will” and the teacher will ask the student what exactly he means—what is the “will”? Is it a certain idea relating to humans’ ability to act out of their own volition, defined by our communal use of language—there may be no entirely clear answer? This is exactly the type of questioning that Wittgenstein felt had created all the problems of philosophy. Wittgenstein would have responded to the teacher saying: “Before you asked us this question, we all knew perfectly well what the ‘will’ was; it was only after you asked the question that doubt arose.” Wittgenstein would have told the teacher to *look* at how we generally *use* the word ‘will’, not *think* about what the word labeled or pictured. Before determining the meaning of a word, we should in fact observe its common use, and the use of the word itself will give us the best insight into what exactly we meant by the word. The way in which the word was *used* and in what social context it was said is far more illuminating than puzzling over exactly what the word labels.

To Wittgenstein language is about context—to a certain extent, the way we use words is the way those words are defined. To take another example: the word ‘game’ is certainly hard to define. Is a game something that involves rules, or competition, or fun, or multiple players, etc.—there are countless explanations of what a game could be and there is probably no one thing that is true of all things that we call ‘games’. Hence attempting to define what exactly a ‘game’ is by finding certain common elements in a universal label, is futile. Rather, we understand what the word ‘game’ means by the context it is placed in. That is, if someone were to use the word game in a sentence, for instance: “Do you want to go to a baseball game”—it would be perfectly clear what the word ‘game’ refers to in this sentence. We would not need to discuss endlessly what the word game formally denotes. This is because the word game would have been *used* in a certain manner, and the *use* of the word provides the meaning of the word.

Many philosophers historically had proposed what Wittgenstein called a ‘picture theory of language’—i.e., a word labels (or pictures) an object, and an object is the word’s meaning.<sup>10</sup> Wittgenstein pointed out that this description was very limited. Sometimes words refer to objects or pictures (e.g. typically in scientific/empirical discourse), but often language is used in much more diverse ways. Philosophical problems arise due to the tendency to try and find what words actually metaphysically labeled. This itself was the very origin of philosophical puzzlement; therefore Wittgenstein was appealing to us to look at how we used language in our everyday life. This is the concept of a ‘language game’ in Wittgensteinian philosophy—a slice of human activity and language, which provides conditions that legitimize the use of certain terms. It is within these language games that words are given their definition and meaning.<sup>11</sup>

With this concept of language games, many philosophical problems are not answered, but rather dissolved. For example, philosophers often confused different types of knowledge—namely empirical knowledge with tautological knowledge. It seems that the way we know that the equation “1+1=2” is true is very different than the way know that the statement “the sun will rise tomorrow” is true. Whereas the former statement is a logical proof, and self-referential, the latter statement is backed up by evidence and experience, but it is not

*tautologically* true like the former statement. But this does not mean the latter proof qua the sun is not still a good proof—the two types of knowledge just have different types of language game. One is a language game where ‘truth’ is derived by hard rational logical inference. The other is part of a language game where truth is based upon collected evidence and experience. Ultimately the same issue applies to religious questions. We obviously cannot ‘know’ of God’s existence the same way we ‘know’ that “1+1=2,” but this is because the two are in fundamentally different language games.

Wittgenstein was very interested in and sympathetic to religious language. He often explained religious language as being derived from a certain way of life—a religious lifestyle wherein someone conducts themselves in a way which denotes a belief in God. From a certain lifestyle specific beliefs are made manifest—religious practices, language and ideas which create their own language game. If someone who acts in a way which denotes faith in God says “I know God” they mean they know him by dint of their own religious lifestyle and behavior (a religious language game), and not in reference to empirically proven knowledge, which again has its own language game.

Wittgenstein wrote in *Philosophical Investigations* that: “If a lion could speak, we could not understand it.”<sup>12</sup> This phrase encapsulates the concept of a language game—a lion lives a different type of life than we do, it partakes in different everyday activities and uses sounds and symbols in a different way—a lion has a different language game than our own. If it would talk, we would not understand it.

### Synthesis and Conclusion

Interestingly it would seem that both Wittgenstein and the Rambam approach their own respective theological and philosophical problems in certain similar ways. They both ask from where their problem stems from, and rather than answer the problem, they both dissolve the problem, and show that its original assumptions were wrong. The two figures embrace a philosophy of contextualization, words become imbued with different meanings when placed in cer-

tain contexts. The Rambam’s theory of context, and his idea that words must be made to fit with Jewish theology and therefore understood differently when they are placed in the context of discussions of the Divine, is similar to Wittgenstein’s theory of language games. Both stress the importance of being aware of what context or *language game*, the subject is being discussed in. It is here that we can see overlap of the Rambam and Wittgenstein.

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### END NOTES

- 1 Rabbeinu Moses Ben Maimon, *Moreh Nevuchim*
- 2 Ibid., pg. 3
- 3 Rabbeinu Moses Ben Maimon, *Moreh Nevuchim*, pg. 9, quoting a Midrash
- 4 *Tehillim*, 73:20
- 5 *Bereishit*, 1:27
- 6 *Yeshayah*, 51:11
- 7 Rabbeinu Moses Ben Maimon, *Moreh Nevuchim* (Scranton, PA: Yeshivath Beth Moshe, 1997), pg. 46
- 8 *Devarim*, 32:4
- 9 Ibid., 18
- 10 Avrum Stroll, *Wittgenstein* (Derby, UK: Oneworld Publications, 2002), pg. 103
- 11 Ibid.
- 12 Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations* (Oxford, UK: Basil Blackwell Ltd, 1953), pg 223

## *Reality, Time, and Space in Jewish Tradition*

Rabbi Mordecai Brownstein

### **Abstract:**

At the beginning of Hilchos Yesode HaTorah the Rambam states: “And everything that exists from Heaven to Earth and everything in between would not exist except from the truth of His existence.” Rabbi Soloveitchik z”tl understood this as saying that everything that exists in Heaven and Earth and in between, exists because He shares His existence with it.”

Being is granted by the Creator. There is only one reality: the being or existence of the Creator. Whatever else exists is granted the ability to exist because the Creator includes that entity within His own existence. Consequently, the essence of a thing and its ‘being’ are two different entities. Essence, existential identity, is defined by man, while ‘being’ is a gift from the Creator. Only He can grant being by including the created thing in His own being, as the Rav z”tl stated. Creation is defined as: actualization from non-being or potentiality to being.

To extend the idea beyond this point would be to say our ‘world’ is merely a created reality dependent on the Divine reality. His reality is the true reality while our perceived realities are created, presumed, and merely fabricated by the Creator.

### **Space in Jewish Tradition:**

Joshua proclaimed, “Through this will you know that there is a Living, Almighty G-d in your midst ...” Rashi and The Radak disagree on the ‘sign’ which was intended to indicate G-d is in their midst (‘through this ...’). The Radak writes that the sign was the splitting of the Jordan River allowing the Israelites to pass through. However, Rashi explains that the ‘sign’ was the miracle of placing the entire nation in between the two poles used to carry the Ark. This remarkable sign—the suspension of the limitations of space—was an indication that G-d, the Creator, was indeed present in their midst.

The primary idea in this narrative is the demonstration that the historic goal of the community of Israel is to carry the the Ark. Every man, woman, and child stood then with eyes fixed at the Ark, while its poles extended passed them on either side proclaiming the portability of the Torah and charging them with the responsibility to carry the Torah throughout all vicissitudes of history. Standing as one nation in-between the ark poles, defying physical law, indicated that assuming such position as carriers of G-d’s law, would exempt them from the limitations of time and space projecting them forward as a timeless community.

However, if one digs deeper, one begins to see the relationship between the miracle of confining several million people to a tiny space in-between two ark poles with the sign of the Living G-d in their midst. Physical law mandates one particle of mass must occupy only one unit of space. Two particles, cannot occupy the same area without consequence. If the entire Jewish nation of several million was confined to a space of perhaps two square feet, physical law had to be abrogated! Divine power capable of changing the perceptible physical reality of the universe acted. Israel’s world was liberated for a moment from the limitation of space. Thus, one must deduce the proof that a living G-d—alive and sharing His existence—was truly in their midst. ‘Living’ means granting the ability to be, to exist—to exist in time and space. One who can alter the inviolable physical reality of space compels the conclusion that this is the One Creator of the limitations of time and space. Stated differently, ‘living G-d’ as Rambam defines, is the ultimate reality.

*If one constructed the walls from above downwards, if the walls are three handbreadths from the ground, it is disqualified.*

As every student knows these two Mishnayot are illustrations of a Halacha known as “Laved.” Halacha states that when constructing a barrier that has halachic consequences, the barrier is valid even if compromised by breaches providing those breaches are less than three *handbreadths* wide. Less than three handbreadths is the distance that Halacha decrees the separated parts to be contiguous. More than that distance is Halachically separated, therefore the Mishnah says this distance invalidates the Succah. One sees a gap but Halacha rules no gap exists. Halacha has determined reality. An example of this can be found in the Talmud Sukkah Page 16

*If a roof were removed and branches placed over the gap, if the gap between the wall and the branches are four cubits it is disqualified.*

Once more we find an illustration of a fiction reified by the Torah. One sees a roof with a gap though Halacha redefines the reality labeling the unacceptable rooftop as a distorted wall—no gap in the roof, no problem. Halacha declares it to be a wall. The Torah reserves the right to define reality.

For the majority of the span of the western tradition, it was assumed that time and space were neutral factors not contributing to cause and effect. Time and space were merely frames of reference within which events happened. In 1638, Galileo penned the proposition that stated mechanical phenomena are perceived to be uniform to all observers moving at a constant speed in a straight line. This principle became known as the Relativity Principle. Einstein insisted that the Relativity Principle should apply to all electromagnetic phenomena as well.

A thought experiment can prove the verity of Galileo’s principle. Let us imagine we are observing a man, on a truck, dropping a wrench onto the bed of the truck while the truck is moving. The wrench will fall at the same pace whether or not the truck is moving—the man on the truck cannot prove the truck is moving from the drop of the wrench. However, we, who are watching from

the street, know the truck is moving though we see the wrench fall in the very same way as does the man on the truck. We cannot prove from any calculation of the falling wrench that the truck is moving. Our view of reality is not compromised.

Let us try another thought experiment. What if the bed of the truck is 186,280 miles long, the span of time it takes light to travel one second. Let us say that two men were to drop a wrench on either side of the truck just as we were equidistant from both. We would conclude that both were simultaneous and indeed in our frame of reference our conclusion would be correct. However, Mr. A standing on the north side of the truck would say his wrench dropped first since it would take one second for him to see the wrench dropped by Mr. B hit the truck’s bed. Likewise Mr. B standing on the south side of the truck would argue his wrench fell first since he would see how Mr. A’s wrench fell to the truck bed one second after his. David Hume, an eighteenth century British philosopher, posited in a paper that there can be no verification of simultaneity in distant occurrences. Einstein, however in his paper of 1905 on Special Relativity proved that each frame of reference is valid for each observer and can be the basis of mathematical reality for A, B, and the observer in between.

The same would apply to time as well, if each had a clock observable to all three. Time would vary for each observer; each clock would tell a different time since each observer would read a different clock, rather a different perception of the passage of time valid for each depending on location.

In conclusion, time and space are created realities. They are dimensions which are not absolute, not universal and not part of the inviolable structure of the universe. There is perceptible reality and non-perceptible reality. Time and space; holy times such as Chagim and Shabbos; holy spaces such as the Holy of Holies and precincts of the Temple; the post and horizontal line of the eruv which are halachic walls; the sukkah wall which rises or bends are fabrications; they are halachic realities though not perceptible realities.

Time and space are not characteristics of the Creator, rather dimensions instituted by the Creator and therefore not absolute. God is the “One Who

Grants” existence, Who shares existence with all that exist and determines which realities are seen and felt and which are ‘dark’ and not visible to human apprehension.

***Pharaoh, Yosef, Rabbi Moshe Feinstein and John Locke:  
Thoughts on Theory of Government***

Murray Sragow

To the American mind, the events described in Bereishit (47:13–26) are hard to imagine. Egypt has stored sufficient grain to feed itself, thanks to Yosef’s planning. Now the famine strikes, and the people purchase from Yosef the food they need. When their money is exhausted, in turn they sell their animals, their land, and finally themselves as slaves in return for food.

What? Why in the world should the Egyptians have to pay for their food? After all, didn’t Yosef get it initially by seizing it during the years of plenty? The Torah makes no mention of Yosef or Pharaoh purchasing the grain that he collected,<sup>1</sup> and even if they did, why should the people expect that their government demand payment for the food? Isn’t the whole purpose of the government to secure the welfare of its citizens?

Or, to put it in a local context, why were there food riots in Egypt in 1977 but not in 1523 BCE? In 1977, there were riots throughout Egypt to protest President Anwar Sadat’s termination of bread subsidies. When the price of food rose by 50%, Egypt’s poor took to the streets to demand the re-institution of subsidies that allowed bread to sell on the street for a fraction of its production cost.<sup>2</sup> That means that not only did Egyptians expect the government to guarantee their bread supply (as they also did in the Yosef story<sup>3</sup>), they expected it to provide that bread almost for free. Why did Egyptians in 1523 BCE not expect the same?

It is clearly the earlier Egyptians whose behavior is harder to understand. Why should people be expected to be calm and reasonable when they're starving? Furthermore, food riots were not new in 1977 and not unique to Egypt. In 1713 in Boston, over 200 poor people rioted in Boston Common, even shooting the Lieutenant Governor.<sup>4</sup> And of course it was bread riots in France in 1789 that provoked the famous response of Marie Antoinette of "Qu'ils mangent de la brioche," or "Let them eat cake."<sup>5</sup>

Perhaps the best way to understand Yosef's Egyptians is to consider the amazement and gratitude evident in the words of Rav Moshe Feinstein in describing the nature of the government of the United States. In 1977 (coincidentally, at the very same time that Egyptians were rioting) Rav Moshe was asked about the acceptability of yeshivot obtaining extra subsidies from the government beyond that which the law provided. In a powerfully written preamble to his response, he writes:

Regarding the matter of the kindness which our government, The United States of America, which Hashem who is blessed, in His great mercy upon the remaining refugees from the Jews of all the European states and the remaining Torah giants and their students, brought us here and established places of Torah both old from Europe and new;

In that this kingdom of kindness, whose entire purpose is to benefit the citizens of the state, has created various programs to help students in every school in the state so that they will be able to learn and be productive in their studies, through which Torah institutions also obtain great help for their students;

Certainly all heads of school and administrators and students appreciate all the goodness of the state and bless the state and all its leaders with all blessings<sup>6</sup>

Why does Rav Moshe refer to the United States as a "kingdom of kindness?" Why does he claim about it that its "entire purpose is to benefit the citizens of the state?" The answer is that Rav Moshe was contrasting the United States to

the Czarist Belarus of his youth (he was born in 1895) and Soviet Russia from which he immigrated to the United States in 1937.<sup>7</sup> The Czar was an absolute monarch who controlled all the wealth of the country and who acted in pursuit of what he saw as the state's benefit. While the communist Soviets were the heirs of a revolution against this philosophy, as a practical matter their totalitarian governments functioned in much the same way.<sup>8</sup> As a result, even without taking into account the horrible anti-Semitism that Rav Moshe experienced, it was clear to him that Russia did not have his interests in mind when formulating government policies. The individual was simply irrelevant. The health and well-being of either the king, the state or the ideology were the objectives of governments of Rav Moshe's youth.

This seems to also have been the case in Egypt under the Pharaohs. Just like in Russia, the Pharaohs saw their job as maintaining or growing the nation, which not coincidentally was seen as also promoting the wealth and power of the Pharaoh. This explains Joseph's interpretation of Pharaoh's dreams to begin with. Since the coming famine posed an existential threat to the Egyptian nation, and since Pharaoh was its defender and standard bearer, it is quite sensible for Hashem to have informed Pharaoh so that he could defend the nation. Not so that he could provide for the people, but rather so that he could provide for the nation.

This is why a food riot would have been foolish. The people understood that they existed to serve the government, not the reverse. Therefore demands for services from the government would not only fall on deaf ears, but be counterproductive. Pharaoh might conclude that if these people could not be trusted to be loyal laborers, he should kill or expel them and import others. This might also explain why, a little over a hundred years later, Pharaoh's main worry was the possibility that the Hebrew slaves would revolt and leave Egypt.<sup>9</sup> His primary concern regarding his subjects was the labor they could perform for him, not his duty to care for them.

By contrast, the government that Rav Moshe found upon immigrating to the United States was one that was built to serve its citizens. It was not led by rulers who claimed a divine right, rather elected officials who were described as



“public servants.” And its laws and actions were designed not to benefit the government’s leaders (although sometimes this happens, but we call it corruption and those who are found guilty of it are sentenced to prison), but instead, as the Preamble to the Constitution says, “promote the general welfare.” So, upon his halachic analysis, Rav Moshe ruled that this government was a “kingdom of kindness” that deserved a greater loyalty than Jews had felt before to the government of their host countries.

What might be the difference between a philosophy that yields a Pharaoh or Czar and a philosophy that yields the government that Rav Moshe praised so highly? It might be the question of whether individuals have rights. John Locke wrote in *Second Treatise of Government* in 1689<sup>10</sup> that each person has natural rights, that it is the role of government to protect them, and that the only legitimate government was one which fulfilled this role. From that point forward, the world was divided into those governments that at least attempted to act according to Locke’s rules and those that did not. By 1776 the Patriots in America were ready to create such a government, and their success can be measured by Rav Moshe’s praise almost exactly 200 years later. In the 19th century in Czarist Russia this was still not universally accepted, but by 1977, even Anwar Sadat was expected to run a government that took care of its people. Hence food riots.

It is also interesting that from the point of view of progress, of the recognition of human rights and the necessity to protect them, food riots are actually a good thing. Their absence in biblical Egypt was a sign of a backward society, and their presence in modern Egypt a sign that the country modernizing.

Ultimately, the difference between the world of Pharaoh and Yosef and the world of Rav Moshe’s “kingdom of kindness” is the acceptance of John Locke’s principle that the role of government is to serve man, not the role of man to serve government.<sup>11</sup>

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**END NOTES**

- 1 See *Bereishit* 41:47–49.
- 2 <http://www.csmonitor.com/World/Middle-East/2013/0403/Bread-riots-or-bankruptcy-Egypt-faces-stark-economic-choices>
- 3 *Bereishit* 41:55
- 4 <http://historical-nonfiction.tumblr.com/post/79479429584/the-boston-bread-riot-happened-in-1713-caused-by>
- 5 <http://www.history.com/news/ask-history/did-marie-antoinette-really-say-let-them-eat-cake>. While she probably did not actually say these words, there really were bread riots and this phrase accurately sums up the out-of-touch response of Louis XVI’s government which led to the French Revolution.
- 6 Igros Moshe Choshen Mishpat 2:29
- 7 <https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/biography/feinstein.html>
- 8 Lee, Stephen J. *Russia and the USSR, 1855–1991: Autocracy and Dictatorship*. 2006: Psychology Press, pp. 1–6.
- 9 *Shemot* 1:10
- 10 <http://www.earlymoderntexts.com/assets/pdfs/locke1689a.pdf> provides an excellent explanation of Locke’s masterpiece. Locke’s discussion of natural rights can be found in Chapter 2, beginning on page 3.
- 11 One wonders why this did not bother President John F. Kennedy when, in his inaugural address on January 20, 1961, he exhorted Americans to “ask not what your country can do for you—ask what you can do for your country.” Could his critics not have accused him of a reactionary anti-Lockean philosophy?

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