

David N. Myers

ue
ts,
nd
ig
:d

“Hazono Shel Hazony,”
or “Even If You Will It, It Can Still Be a Dream”

IN ONE OF THE BEST book reviews ever published, the philosopher Robert Paul Wolff performed a diabolically clever *trompe l'œil* on Allan Bloom's *The Closing of the American Mind*.¹ Rather than present the book as the sober meditations of a learned scholar of the classics, Wolff imagined *The Closing of the American Mind* as a work of fiction, written by Saul Bellow and featuring a cranky University of Chicago professor named Allan Bloom as its protagonist.

I must confess that, when reading Yoram Hazony's *The Jewish State: The Struggle for Israel's Soul*,² I am reminded of the Bloom satire. This is not only because Hazony has a Bloomian (read conspiratorial) fear of the devious designs of liberal academics. Nor is it his considerable powers of reductionism that grind down complex and often disparate chunks of history into a neat pile of dust—all the easier to blow away with glee. It is also because Hazony was educated and intellectually formed in the United States in the midst of debate over *The Closing of the American Mind*, and hence smack in the middle of the “culture wars” between the academic left and right. The result is that *The Jewish State* bears the deep imprint of a 1980s-style, American neo-conservative sensibility and sense of mission. When transposed onto the Israeli cultural landscape, this stamp seems inauthentic, like an elaborately designed coat of arms for an *arriviste*.

As a work of history, which it purports to be in part, *The Jewish State* is deeply flawed—to the point that the reader often has an easier time imagining it as a work of fiction. In this regard, it is tempting to consider Yoram Hazony as a younger Israeli version of Saul Bellow's Allan Bloom (who has now been given full novelistic honors in the recent *Ravelstein*³). The fictional Hazony would make a splendid foil to the protagonist of Philip Roth's *Operation Shylock*.⁴ In that masterpiece of self-referentiality, the main character masquerades in Israel as a famous author named Philip Roth, discrediting the latter by loudly espousing the idea that the Jews

of Israel should be restored to their home countries in the Diaspora. We might imagine that Saul Bellow invented a hero named Yoram Hazony as a fictional rebuttal to *Operation Shylock*. In contrast to Roth's Diasporist gadfly, the Hazony of *The Jewish State* is an earnest and ardent Zionist neo-classicist, harking back to the halcyon days of old—in particular, the *fin-de-siècle* era of Theodor Herzl—in order to wage war against the anti-Zionist nihilists of today.

It would be quite consoling if Hazony were a mere literary creation of Bellow, a sophisticated weapon in a literary joust involving two titans of American Jewish fiction. Alas, this is not so. Yoram Hazony is very much with us, serving as president of an organization known as the Shalem Center, whose inspiration and sustenance are owed largely to the right-wing American Jewish businessman Ronald Lauder. Together with the staff of the Shalem Center, Hazony has written a book that is—according to one of his publishing patrons, Martin Peretz of *The New Republic*⁵—“bracing.” Bracing perhaps, although I would prefer to describe it as touching in its sentimentality, disturbing in its methodology, and breathtaking in its audacity.

What is touching in Hazony's book is the desire to reclaim the one and true Zionism. What are disturbing and breathtaking are the lengths to which Hazony goes to attempt his reclamation. Had he left well enough alone and simply proclaimed his own affinity for Herzlian Zionism, it might have been possible to ignore him. But Hazony has written a book that is, by title and intent, a grandiose evocation of the canonical text of political Zionism, Theodor Herzl's *Der Judenstaat*.⁶ Moreover, Hazony and the Shalem Center research team have advanced a series of positions that are as provocative as they are unfounded. They include the view that 1) Theodor Herzl possessed a deep commitment to Judaism that fueled his particularist (vs. universalist) vision of Zionism; 2) the Herzlian vision embodied the true and legitimate form of Zionist expression; 3) the German-Jewish professoriate of the Hebrew University emerged as the chief subverters of Herzlian Zionism; 4) throughout their lives in Palestine and then Israel, these professors exerted a large and destructive role on Israeli political, cultural, and intellectual life; and 5) the moral bankruptcy of contemporary Israeli culture—arts, letters, scholarship—is the enduring legacy of this domineering cabal of anti-Zionist German Jews.

It is not my aim here to refute each of these positions; other critics have addressed some of them far more exhaustively than I plan to here.⁷ But it does seem important to point out that the historical perspective informing these positions suffers from a certain Manicheism. Hazony's world is

divided into heroes and villains, Zionists and anti-Zionists. Reigning over this bifurcated world is a simple, but iron-clad law: whosoever supports the creation of a Jewish state, however defined, is both good and a Zionist; whosoever does not is bad and an anti-Zionist. Thus, David Ben-Gurion, separated from Herzl by geography, generation, language and ideological disposition, is Herzl's junior partner by virtue of his support (not so forceful in the 1910s and 1920s, as Hazony himself notes) for a Jewish state. Conversely, Ahad Ha'am, prophet of the revival of Hebrew culture in the land of Israel, emerges as a traitor to the cause. It was not enough that Ahad Ha'am, by Hazony's own admission, apprehended the “central weakness” of Herzlian Zionism: “its limited appreciation of the need to strengthen the national Jewish culture and consciousness among the Jews.”⁸ Ahad Ha'am's hesitations about the viability and virtue of a political state, well before such a state became a serious prospect, condemned him to ignominy. Likewise, any Zionist who lacked Herzl's belief in a future Jewish state—which was deemed delusional by most in his day—does not deserve the right to be called by that name. Hazony's act of historical disenfranchisement thereby flattens the admirable cacophony of Zionist voices, present from the first Congress in Basel, to a dull monotone. By the same stroke, his Manichean scheme transforms culture itself, as against politics, into a force of evil.

I

Nowhere is Hazony's leveling tendency more evident than in the treatment of the German-Jewish intellectuals who left Europe to form the founding generation of the Hebrew University in Jerusalem. The fact that many of them—Baer, Bergmann, Buber, Ruppin, Scholem, Schwabe, Simon—were passionate Zionists well before immigration to Palestine is of no consequence to Hazony.⁹ For their emphasis on the revival of the Jewish national “spirit”—rather than on the explicit modality of a political state—is to him nothing but an expression of anti-Zionist *Selbsthass*. By extending Hazony's logic *ad absurdum*, we might conclude that the Balfour Declaration, in which the British Government declared in 1917 its support for “a national home for the Jewish people” in Palestine, was anti-Zionist. After all, it did not mention the prospect of a Jewish state.

But such a criterion is misguided and anachronistic. While it may be true that the étatist vision of Zionism ultimately won the day, it is far from true that it dominated Zionist activism in a pre-State phase. To

disregard or explain away other forms of Zionist discourse as inauthentic is to deny the movement's vitality, as well as to abandon the historian's careful attention to context. A particularly galling instance of the latter is Hazony's virtual equation of German Zionists and German anti-Zionists. While he notes correctly that many first generation German Zionists regarded Zionism as a practical solution for *others* (mainly Eastern European Jews), he fails to distinguish this generation either from contemporaneous German anti-Zionists (e.g., the *Protestrabbiner*) or from the succeeding generation of Zionists. But as Stephen Poppel has observed, German Zionism underwent a "radical reorientation" in the second generation.¹⁰ Following the lead of the charismatic Kurt Blumenfeld, second-generation German Zionists chose to abandon the assimilationist aspirations of their parents and make *aliyah* to Palestine.¹¹ The Posen Resolution of 1912, under whose banner they marched, eschewed the paternalistic Zionism of old and gave voice to a new "post-assimilatory" agenda according to which it was "the obligation of every Zionist . . . to incorporate emigration to Palestine in his life program."

For many who heeded the call of Posen, the figure of Martin Buber loomed large. Buber's appeal was not unlike that of men of letters—e.g., Mickiewicz, Palacky, and Masaryk—in other nationalist movements from which Zionism drew inspiration; i.e., he was able to highlight the unique properties, even messianic task, of his own nation without losing sight of the larger universe in which it operated. But this cosmopolitan nationalism had deep ethnic roots. In the first of his influential *Drei Reden über das Judentum* [Three Addresses on Judaism] from 1909.¹² Buber observed in an oft-quoted (and misunderstood) passage that blood ties among Jews constituted "the deepest, most potent stratum of our being." Buber was suggesting that the ethnic thread among Jews transformed them into a *Schicksalsgemeinschaft*—a multi-generational community of shared fate and memory.

Like many of his generation, Buber was immersed in the communitarian discourse initiated by the sociologist Ferdinand Tönnies in his *Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft*.¹³ In fact, it was this neo-Romanticist communitarianism that set Buber apart from other German-Jewish thinkers who portrayed Zionism as a dangerous aberration. Most prominent among Buber's opponents was the eminent neo-Kantian philosopher, Hermann Cohen, with whom he engaged in a sharp and symbolically significant polemic in 1916.

It is a measure of Yoram Hazony's inattention to contextual detail that he reduces Buber and Cohen, representatives of two distinct generations of

German Jews, to a single anti-Zionist position. Just as he explained away Buber's *Drei Reden* as expressing an indulgent and egocentric subjectivism, so Hazony waves his magic wand and pronounces the apparent differences between Cohen and Buber as "nonsense." Curiously, he recognizes that Buber's denunciation of Cohen resulted in his "instantly winning accolades as the young Zionist hero defending the honor of the movement."¹⁴ But this makes little difference. Reading against the evidence, Hazony seems to "know" that Buber was harboring a death wish for the Jewish people.

Let the evidence show that neither Cohen nor Buber was quite the demon that Hazony makes them out to be. While it is true that Cohen was opposed to Zionism, he was hardly indifferent to the fate of Jews; on the contrary, he was a tireless and impassioned opponent of anti-Semitism throughout his life. And while it is true that Buber was fearful of the consequences of a Jewish state, he was no anti-Zionist.

On this last point, there is not much doubt. When the elderly Cohen published a critique of Zionism in 1916, Buber responded with a fierce refutation. He admitted that he shared Cohen's yearning for the messianic age. Nevertheless, he added:

. . . let us make sure that the Jewish people does not disappear *now* so that the messianic age may perhaps come into being *later*. The Jewish people must persevere in the midst of today's human order—not as a fixed, brittle fact of nature appended to an ever more diluted confessional religion, but as a people pursuing its ideal, freely and unhindered for the sake of this human order.¹⁵

In a subsequent rejoinder to Cohen, Buber reaffirmed that the locus of what he called the renewal (*Erneuerung*) of Judaism was the land of Israel: "Palestine is the firm sod in which alone the seed of the new unity can sprout . . ."¹⁶ Only at great historical risk could one mistake Buber's commitment to Jewish national renewal in Palestine for Cohen's desired fusion of *Deutschtum* and *Judentum*.

In fact, it is far easier to link Hermann Cohen's and Yoram Hazony's view of Zionism. In Cohen's response to Buber, he noted that "it is only through the state, by virtue of a pure act of political morality, that the nation is constituted."¹⁷ Thus, the only logical means of constituting a Jewish nation is to create a state—a move to which Cohen objected, but to which Hazony would readily assent. But again, has such a statist vision of Zionism been the only legitimate expression of the movement?

There is a curious irony lurking behind this question. In his Manichean

reading of Zionist history, Yoram Hazony wants us to believe not only that statist Zionism was and is the only Zionism, but that its goal was and is a *Jewish* state rather than a state of Jews. This proposition leads to some fancy footwork in Hazony's book and more extensively in an article in the Shalem Center journal *Azure*, where Hazony insists that Herzl was far more spiritually and ritually attuned to Judaism than most scholars have maintained. He assembles some meager evidentiary shards—e.g., Herzl's lighting Hanukah candles with his children or holding a Passover Seder—to compensate for the absence of a sustained discussion of the Jewish content of the state in *Der Judenstaat*.¹⁸

But given Hazony's concern for the Jewish character of the Jewish state, it would be far more sensible to abandon the character make-over of Theodor Herzl into a pious Jew and begin lionizing figures such as Ahad Ha'am and Martin Buber. It was they, not Herzl, who were singularly devoted to the nature of Judaism and Jewishness in the Jewish community of Palestine. Indeed, it was they, not Herzl, who spoke the revived national tongue and placed their own physical destiny in the ancestral national homeland. Hazony's decision not to follow the path of these Zionists reinforces the murkiness of his, and Herzl's, idea of a *Jewish* state. It appears to rest on a hopelessly—and paradoxically—abstract principle: namely, "the Jewish particularism of the state."¹⁹ But what does this mean? Hazony's efforts to substantiate the principle of "Jewish particularism" collapse in a tautological web. Thus, we read that the purpose of Herzl's Jewish state was "to serve as the legal and political guardian of the interests of the Jewish people, and it was this purpose that made the theoretical state he envisioned a 'Jewish' one."²⁰

II

Had Yoram Hazony been content "merely" to undertake a character assassination of Martin Buber, it might have been possible to ignore him. But the same techniques used to attack Buber obtain throughout much of the rest of *The Jewish State* (e.g., parts I, III, and IV). In a bold act of conflation rivaling his equation of Buber and Cohen, Hazony reduces the sharply divergent views of Hasidism advanced by Buber and Gershom Scholem to "relatively small areas of disagreement."²¹ Not surprisingly, the common thread is what Hazony regards as Buber's and Scholem's anti-Zionist focus on the "neutralization" of the messianic impulse in Hasidism. There are enough mistakes in this claim to fuel an article or two—and surely more

than can be addressed here. But it is necessary to recall that Scholem's famous 1970 article on the "neutralization" of the messianic argued against Buber's own more forceful assertion of the "liquidation" of that impulse.²² Such distinctions may appear to Yoram Hazony as merely semantic, but it is the task of scholars to pay attention to semantic nuances, particularly since they may mask wider fissures. In fact, the differences between Buber and Scholem on the theme of Hasidism are hardly subtle. Scholem was an unrelenting critic of Buber's work on Hasidism, arguing in 1961 that the latter's conclusions were rooted in his "own philosophy of religious anarchism and existentialism and have no roots in the texts themselves."²³

Beyond this methodological criticism, we must recall that Scholem held Buber in contempt for much of his life, extending back to his censure of Buber's support for Germany during the First World War. While it is true that *at one brief point* Buber and Scholem did share the desire to create a binational state in Palestine, this should not obscure their shared commitment to Jewish renewal in the land of Israel. Nor should it obscure the fact that the two men's view of Hasidism neither "neutralized" nor "liquidated" their respective Zionist allegiances, but, at least in the case of Buber, may have had the opposite effect. Indeed, Buber's intense interest in the vital life force of Hasidism *reinvigorated* his commitment to Zionism as an agenda for Jewish national revival around the time of the *Drei Reden*.²⁴ In acknowledging this, the discerning scholar must nonetheless recognize that Martin Buber and Gershom Scholem were men of starkly different temperament, intellectual disposition, and even ideology. Indeed, the lives of these two fascinating men manifest a rather simple truth: all German Jews, though sharing a common language, did not think and act alike.

In Yoram Hazony's world, such seemingly banal truths are upended, and the consequences are dangerous. Had Hazony "merely" condemned all of German Jewry to national treason, it might have been possible to ignore him. But his lineage of Zionist dissent extends from Buber to many fellow academics and students at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. In this view, the Hebrew University became the "incubator" of a nefarious Buberian anti-Zionism that deeply penetrated Israeli society.²⁴ With grand élan, Hazony argues that the entire gamut of Israeli "culture-makers"—scholars, writers, artists—has been infected, cutting across party lines to include virtually every significant Israeli Jewish intellectual (from the philosopher Eliezer Schweid to the recently departed poet Yehuda Amichai).

But can we really ascribe all of contemporary Israeli culture and its ills to "Martin Buber's victory over Theodor Herzl"²⁵—or even more implausibly, to "the unwitting adoption of the anti-Zionist theories of

Hermann Cohen"?²⁶ As an academic, I must confess that it is enticing to entertain the prospect that fellow members of the scholarly fold are responsible for controlling the fate of a dynamic and vibrant society. Yet in the case before us, it strains credulity to claim that Martin Buber, much less Hermann Cohen, raised a generation of students bent on the destruction of the Jewish state. Buber had precious few disciples of any ideological disposition during his decades at the Hebrew University; Cohen, needless to say, had fewer. I suppose that insofar as Buber and Cohen deemed themselves humanists, and many of us embrace that descriptor for ourselves, then, yes, we are their legatees. But at such a level of abstraction, ideational affiliation of the sort that Yoram Hazony proposes becomes meaningless.

III

It should be clear by now that I find little in Yoram Hazony's narrative that is redeeming. And yet, I do share the perception that there is a much more cosmopolitan-universalist orientation in Israeli society today than in the first decades of the State. Rather than scour the dark corners of the ivory tower for the roots of this orientation, however, I would suggest looking at a broad array of societal factors, especially over the past two decades: policies of economic liberalization, practices of hyper-consumerism, the persistent push toward globalization, peace with Egypt, the debacle of the Lebanon War, growing awareness of the Palestinian question, etc. It is these factors, not Hermann Cohen's neo-Kantianism or Martin Buber's view of Hasidism, that have pushed Israeli society to its current position.

While Yoram Hazony finds that current position lamentable, it is hard to imagine how it could have been otherwise. In fact, it is highly unlikely that Theodor Herzl would have shared Hazony's dismay. On the contrary, Herzl's insistence on establishing a statist framework for the "normalization" of the Jewish condition would likely be satisfied by the current face of Israeli society—its material comfort, military strength, and stable (if majoritarian) democracy. I suspect that Herzl understood far better than Hazony that societies are malleable and dynamic. True to form, Israeli society is malleable and dynamic, at times maddeningly so. Its ideological underpinnings have naturally eroded somewhat, as ever-shifting realities on the ground create the need for new forms of self-expression. But this is not unique to the Jewish state. No revolution known to humanity—American, French, Russian, or Zionist—ever sustained its

initial fervor past the founding generation. Change is the engine of history, and stasis its enemy.

Had Yoram Hazony "merely" propagated his errant and static view of Herzlian Zionism to a handful of like-minded readers, it might have been possible to ignore him. Or better yet, had he merely been a fictional creation of an inventive novelist, the story might have been humorous. But the real-life story of Yoram Hazony is no laughing matter. Befitting his surname, he has been received in Israel and America with utmost seriousness as a prophet of doom.²⁷ With a nod to Daniel Goldhagen, he has foisted a vastly oversimplified narrative, devoid of historical context and analytical nuance, onto a wide public. On one hand, Hazony deserves a fair share of the credit. His penchant for publicity—and proximity to purse strings—allow him to advance his message with uncommon success. Similarly, his ability to offer up a profoundly distorted revision of Zionist/Israeli history in the name of a defense against post-Zionist "revisionism" is worthy of a first-rate propagandist.

On the other hand, the Israeli and American Jewish publics seem strangely ready to stomach this anti-"revisionist" revisionism. Why the willingness? Clearly, part of the allure of Hazony is the kind of sweeping anti-intellectualism that has not infrequently struck a responsive chord in America, as Richard Hofstadter noted in his famous *Anti-Intellectualism in American Life*.²⁸ The phenomenon is not unknown in Israel either—to wit, the contempt of Labor Zionist politicians for the Hebrew University, especially in its first decades of existence. That it strikes a chord again in Israel—indeed, when the Knesset Education Committee votes to invalidate innovative history textbooks because of Hazony's persistent assaults—is perhaps an ironic sign of the triumph of Herzlian Zionism. For if Herzl desired to overturn the Diaspora and create a society of normal Jews, one that included noble humanists and misguided revisionists, great scholars and *am-aratzim*, then he might well be proud of Yoram Hazony and his Jewish state.

NOTES

1. Robert Paul Wolff, "Review of Allan Bloom, *The Closing of the American Mind*, (New York, 1987)," *Academe* (September–October 1987) 64–5.
2. Yoram Hazony, *The Jewish State: The Struggle for Israel's Soul* (New York, 2000).

3. Saul Bellow, *Ravelstein* (New York, 2000).
4. Philip Roth, *Operation Shylock* (New York, 1993).
5. See Martin Peretz's comments on the back jacket of Hazony's *The Jewish State*.
6. Theodor Herzl, *Der Judentstaat* (Vienna, 1896).
7. Pride of place among these critics belongs to Allan Arkush, who has written a comprehensive critique of Yoram Hazony to appear in *Jewish Social Studies* that overlaps with many of the concerns raised in this essay.
8. Hazony, *The Jewish State*, 127.
9. I have studied many of these first-generation figures in my *Re-inventing the Jewish Past: European Jewish Intellectuals and the Zionist Return to History* (New York, 1995).
10. Stephen M. Poppel, *Zionism in Germany, 1897–1933* (Philadelphia, PA, 1977), 45ff.
11. Born into a highly assimilated Jewish family, Blumenfeld (1884–1963) became involved in Zionist activities while a university student. His impassioned oratorical style won him a reputation as a leading figure among “post-assimilatory” Jews—i.e., those German Jews who rebelled not only against the bourgeois aspirations of their parents, but against the paternalistic attitude of first-generation German Zionists. Blumenfeld moved to Palestine in 1933, where he became active in an array of Zionist activities.
12. Martin Buber, *Drei Reden über das Judentum* (Frankfurt am Main, 1911). This address is included in Nahum Glatzer's edition of Buber, *On Judaism* (New York, 1972) 17.
13. Ferdinand Tönnies, *Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft* (Berlin, 1912 [orig. 1887]).
14. Hazony, *The Jewish State*, 192.
15. In 1915, Hermann Cohen published his renowned pamphlet *Deutschtum und Judentum*, in which he sought to demonstrate the utter compatibility of German and Jewish cultural and ethical norms. It was this position that prompted Cohen to become a persistent critic of Zionism, which he took to task in the June 1916 number of the German-Jewish journal, the *K.—C. Blätter*. Martin Buber responded with a pointed rebuttal in the journal of politics and letters, *Der Jude*, which he founded in the same year. Cohen then replied to Buber, followed by another response by Buber. Portions of this exchange are included in Paul-Mendes-Flohr and Jehuda Reinhartz, *The Jew in the Modern World* (New York, 1980), 448–453. Buber's insistence on action in the here and now is found in *ibid.*, 449.
16. *Ibid.*, 452.
17. *Ibid.*, 449.
18. See Yoram Hazony's article “Did Herzl Want a ‘Jewish State’?” *Azure*, 9 (5760 [2000]). See the online version at <http://www.shalem.org/il/azure/9-hazony.html>, 1–25.

19. *Ibid.*, 12.
20. *Ibid.*, 14.
21. Hazony, *The Jewish State*, 288.
22. See Gershom Scholem, “The Neutralization of the Messianic Element in Early Hasidism,” originally published in *The Journal of Jewish Studies* (Fall 1970), and reprinted in Scholem's *The Messianic Idea in Judaism* (New York, 1971) 176–202.
23. See Scholem's article “Martin Buber's Interpretation of Hasidism,” originally published in *Commentary*, 22 (October 1961), and republished in *ibid.*, 247.
24. Hazony, *The Jewish State*, 285.
25. *Ibid.*, 340.
26. *Ibid.*, xxix.
27. Hazony is an adjectival form of the Hebrew word *hazon*, connoting a vision or revelation. The term abounds in the Prophetic writings as a description of a prophet's vision. At times, this vision is referred to as a *hazon sheker* (Jeremiah 14: 14)—a false vision.
28. Richard Hofstadter, *Anti-Intellectualism in American Life* (New York, 1963).