

Correspondence

Anti-Semitism

TO THE EDITORS:

In his article “Hatreds Entwined” (AZURE 16, Winter 2004), Yossi Klein Halevi slanderously described as anti-Semitic a column of mine in *The International Herald Tribune*. He does not identify the column, but it would seem to be one in which I discussed the influence of the philosopher Leo Strauss on neo-conservative intellectuals close to the Bush administration. As supposed evidence of my anti-Semitism, the author notes that all the people I mentioned in this context “happened to be Jews”—Richard Perle, Paul Wolfowitz, and Ariel Sharon.

I mentioned the last-named because he is prime minister of Israel. As for the other two, I would ask Halevi what two American neo-conservative intellectuals influenced by Leo Strauss and playing important roles in this U.S. administration he would have proposed that I name in place of Perle and Wolfowitz?

The influence that Perle and Wolfowitz exercise has nothing to do with their being Jews. Nor are the neo-conservatives a Jewish phenomenon; in the past decade or so

they have become the most vigorous ideological-intellectual lobby in Washington, and so far as I can see have plenty of non-Jewish members. Is one proscribed from attacking them because some of them are Jewish? Let us be serious.

As for Halevi’s larger thesis, I think he greatly overestimates the scale and significance of European anti-Semitism, discounts the importance of the link between what he describes as anti-Semitism and politically motivated European hostility to what is perceived as injustice in Israeli colonization of the Palestinian territories, and is wrong in conflating this sentiment with anti-Americanism. Anti-Semitism and anti-Americanism undoubtedly coexist in some European breasts, but the one is not the other. We Americans, at least, prefer to think that we are disliked (or liked) for what we ourselves are and do, rather than as surrogates for someone else.

William Pfaff

Paris

YOSSI KLEIN HALEVI RESPONDS:

Referring to the anti-Israel divestment movement on college campuses,

Harvard University president Lawrence Summers recently noted that “serious and thoughtful people are advocating and taking actions that are anti-Semitic in their effect if not their intent.”

I do not know what William Pfaff thinks about Jews, and my article did not accuse him of being an anti-Semite. But his column is, to paraphrase Summers, anti-Semitic in its effect if not its intent. The article, which appeared in the August 24, 2004 issue of the *International Herald Tribune*, assailed the Bush administration’s foreign policy for having endorsed the “great illusion” of neo-conservative ideology regarding America’s mission in the world.

This could be a legitimate claim, and it is true that Pfaff frames his argument in purely ideological terms. Yet when it comes time to name names, Pfaff surprisingly does not mention any of the advisers who are working closely with the president. Indeed, the names of Dick Cheney, Donald Rumsfeld, Colin Powell, or Condoleezza Rice appear nowhere in the column.

Whom does he blame for American foreign policy? He mentions precisely four people: Richard Perle, who does not hold any position in the administration; Deputy Secretary of Defense Paul Wolfowitz; Israeli

Prime Minister Ariel Sharon; and—bizarrely—Federal Reserve Chairman Alan Greenspan, whom he says the others “resemble.” In no case does he offer a shred of evidence that their influence is greater than those of the president’s senior advisers. Meanwhile, President Bush is presented as the classic dupe, fulfilling the neo-con blueprint with “seemingly little or no grasp of its sources, objectives, or assumptions.”

In this sense, Pfaff’s article reflects the timeworn model of enlightened anti-Semitism: Jews are depicted as working in collusion across international boundaries, wielding influence far beyond their actual power, manipulating gentile leaders. As Pfaff, who sits in Paris, surely knows, a key component of the new anti-Semitism spreading through Europe is the notion that Washington is controlled by “Zionists.” Intentionally or not, Pfaff’s column feeds that atmosphere.

Autumn of Nations

TO THE EDITORS:

In his article “Autumn of Nations” (AZURE 16, Winter 2004), Pierre Manent says many interesting things about the EU enterprise but misses the most significant. Yes, the common

market came into being because France and Germany “decided to consider each other partners, allies, and even friends.” Yes, “since the beginning of civilization, man has lived in one of three political forms: City, empire, or nation.” He recognizes that “Politics evolves according to a specific law of gravity, and the heaviest [i.e., Germany] naturally carries the day,” something Manent estimates to be “a good thing, and only fair.” Yet he accepts that the goal of the EU is “to discard our good old nations,” and fears that the expansion of the EU to the east will result in either stasis or the breakup of the EU.

Manent fails to appreciate that the French-German cooperation that began the enterprise is, in fact, its essence. Let me be melodramatic: Both France and Germany were unsuccessful in their separate attempts to conquer Europe on their own; together, through the EU, they are succeeding in creating not a new form of political association but rather one of the three Manent mentioned, and I do not mean city or nation.

Like many empires, the EU is growing somewhat absent-mindedly but succeeding at the most important thing for a young empire: Expanding. This empire sees its adversary as the United States, both

economically and strategically. Even before the antagonism of the past two years, didn't the EU broadcast that its market was larger than that of the U.S.? Did the EU not argue against free-trade agreements between countries in the Americas and the U.S. while itself growing? And did not the EU seek trade and diplomatic relations precisely with nations in conflict with the U.S.?

For France and Germany, the EU provides a mechanism for buying off the elites of those European nations that are intended to disappear. But please do not express surprise when the EU's rules are not applied when they conflict with French or German interests. Financial reporters may be taken in when exceptions are created to the rules on industrial subsidies whenever France so requires; political analysts should not be. And, of course, the rules on budget deficits are enforced only when they serve France and Germany.

Manent concludes his essay by expressing his doubt that the European project will be successful. Let us hope that he is right and that it will not take a world war to end it.

Joseph Shier
Toronto

Redemption

TO THE EDITORS:

In Meir Soloveichik's article "Redemption and the Power of Man" (AZURE 16, Winter 2004), he asserts that a powerful and often overlooked difference between Judaism and Christianity is that the former religion believes in man's ability to save himself and the latter does not. While his argument is cogent and well documented, I believe that he painted the Jewish approach with too broad a brush.

While certainly free will and the possibility of repentance are central to Judaism, nonetheless, the extent to which we can look forward to a totally man-initiated repentance is a matter of debate. Moses speaks of a mass return to God (Deuteronomy 4:30) but seems to leave open the possibility of a redemption without human intervention. While Hosea encourages Israel to repent unto the Lord (Hosea 14:2), Ezekiel speaks of God sprinkling the waters of repentance on us. (Ezekiel 36:25) And despite the author's protestations that the talmudic passage in Sanhedrin 97b ought be read otherwise, it can certainly be argued that the debate in the Talmud is actually about whether man will ultimately need divine prodding to be redeemed,

or whether he will come to it on his own.

While the possibility of human self-redemption, both personal and communal, is certainly a Jewish view, the Jewish tradition was certainly not unanimous that the perfection of the world would happen purely through human means.

Joel M. Finkelstein

Memphis, Tennessee

Israeli Sociology

TO THE EDITORS:

Although I agree with many of Alek D. Epstein's characterizations of many post-Zionist Israeli sociologists, I take issue with his assertion about "The Decline of Israeli Sociology" (AZURE 16, Winter 2004). He avers that, by the 1990s, critical sociology had led to the decline of a plurality of perspectives and the almost total radicalization of Israeli sociology. As a case in point, he cites a book by Uri Ram and the journal *Theory and Criticism*. No one would know from Epstein's narrative that the journal is but one of many and is not a professional sociology journal. No one would know that Ram's book is just that, a book, with a perspective that has been both acclaimed

and severely criticized in the professional literature. Nor would anyone know that Samuel Noah Eisenstadt and Moshe Lissak, to name the most prominent, are still alive, working, and very productive sociologists. Their theoretical perspectives are no longer the only ones, but they are still very much alive and kicking, giving papers, and writing high-quality articles and books, and many of their students are active in Israeli academia in general and in Israeli sociology in particular.

Israeli sociology, like American sociology, is today much more pluralistic than it was in the middle of the twentieth century. As I have written elsewhere ("Critical Sociology and the End of Ideology in Israel," *Israel Studies*, Spring 1997), some of those sociologists who are committed to Zionism would surely be tempted to respond to the likes of Epstein—as well as the post-Zionists—in the same vein as did one 1960s activist to those who proclaimed "the end of ideology": "When they proclaim the end of [Zionist] ideology, it's like the old man proclaiming the end of sex. Because he doesn't feel it anymore, he thinks it's disappeared."

Epstein presents a survey of papers given in recent years at sociology conferences in Israel and laments that only 14 percent were specifically

Israeli-Zionist. But his own data disprove his thesis of the monopoly or, at least, dominance of post-Zionism and anti-Zionism in Israeli sociology: If we add up his own figures, 66 or 67 percent of the papers were not specifically Israeli, and 14 percent were Israeli-Zionist. That leaves 20 percent, at most, that could have been post-Zionist and anti-Zionist.

Epstein states that there is a difference between critical sociology and post-Zionist or anti-Zionist ideology, but he does not elaborate, and in more than one place he at least insinuates that the former is responsible for the latter. He takes to task "the work of many critical sociologists [in which] the boundaries between the recent and distant past are blurred... since both can serve as a 'usable past,' a selective narrative employed for political and cultural purposes." Ironically, his first case in point is Yael Zerubavel, who is not a sociologist but a historian, author of *Recovered Roots: Collective Memory and the Making of Israeli National Tradition* (1995), which is a fascinating analysis of three major Israeli nation-building myths: The battle for Tel Hai, the Bar Kochba revolt, and the fall of Masada. What Epstein seems unable to understand is that there is no necessary relationship between critical social science and the

personal beliefs and values of the social scientist. Thus, for example, Eliezer Don-Yehiya—no post-Zionist, to be sure—can be viewed as a “critical” social scientist, in that he analyzes the use of symbols for political ends. In one of his essays, for example, he analyzes the ways in which the Jewish festival of Hanuka and the myth of the Maccabees has been variously interpreted and perhaps even exploited by Laborites, Revisionists, Canaanites, Haredim, Socialist-Zionists, religious Zionists, and Gush Emunim. Likewise, he and Charles Liebman, winner of the 2003 Israel Prize, have written a major work on Israeli “civil religion” that provides numerous manifestations of the exploitation of traditional Jewish religious symbols and concepts for political ends. Are they also guilty of having contributed to post-Zionism and anti-Zionism?

On a personal note, I chaired the first committee that explored the idea of creating an interdisciplinary Jewish-studies program at Rutgers University, and I played a part in bringing Yael Zerubavel to Rutgers, an achievement of which I am very proud. Under her leadership, the Jewish-studies program developed into a first-rate department which, I might add, has a broad series of Israel-related courses and programs. From 1997 through the end of the coming academic year, we will have

hosted more than a dozen prominent visiting Israeli faculty members who spent at least one semester with our department and center.

Epstein faults Israeli sociology for not focusing on specifically Israeli topics. Part of this is unquestionably a consequence of the desire of Israeli sociologists to be recognized beyond the boundaries of Israel. Indeed, the Israeli university system promotes this by requiring that promotion packets be evaluated by non-Israeli scholars in the relevant fields. It is thus much more important for an Israeli academician to be published in a foreign professional journal than in an Israeli one and more important for his books to be published by a foreign publisher than by an Israeli one. Whether or not one agrees with this approach, it is not necessarily a reflection of one’s Zionist or Israeli commitments.

Instead of disparaging all of Israeli sociology for not focusing on specifically Israeli topics, I would urge Epstein to focus on them himself, and to participate in the larger community of Israeli sociology. My own experience indicates little or no resistance to the inclusion of those kinds of topics in conferences of the Israeli Sociological Society. During the 1980s and early 1990s, I participated in quite a few of the ISS’s annual conferences, and every paper that I submitted was readily accepted. It is

true that there were times when I felt that I was a distinct minority. But I view that more as a consequence of non-submission than of ideologically based discrimination against those who are not post-Zionists or anti-Zionists.

Finally, I am pleased to inform Alek Epstein that Uzi Rebhun, a demographer and sociologist at the Hebrew University's Institute of Contemporary Jewry, and I have edited a volume on Israeli social science entitled *Jews in Israel: Contemporary Social and Cultural Patterns*, being published this fall; it includes original essays by many of Israel's top social scientists, who cover a wide range of topics relating to Jewish Israeli society. To paraphrase a famous American: The news of Israeli sociology's demise has been greatly exaggerated.

Chaim I. Waxman

Professor of Sociology
and Jewish Studies
Rutgers University

TO THE EDITORS:

I read with great interest Alek D. Epstein's essay, which surveys the development of "critical sociology" in Israel. This school of thought is indeed prevalent in contemporary Israeli academic discourse; what is lacking is any honest consideration of

who should be applying the critical approach to the critics themselves.

Epstein's essay, however, raises a serious question: Is the author demanding that scholars write completely free of any political agenda? He himself agrees that the identification of the founding generation of Israeli sociologists with Zionism was an important factor in their work, on the one hand; and that "the importance of sociology goes far beyond the realm of pure intellectual inquiry," on the other. To produce coherent criticism of the critical school, it is not enough simply to list the topics of its articles. Rather, it is necessary to reconsider the issues in light of the question of neutrality in academic work.

Moreover, if those "critics" are truly damaging the prestige of sociology, why should this bother those who are not among its ranks?

Finally, the author fails to respond to the crucial claim of the critics that the moral wrongs carried out by Zionism cannot allow academics to remain in their objective ivory tower. As Marx and Uri Ram contend, they must act to change the reality and not be satisfied with mere theory.

The crux of the matter is that the critical approach professes to be objectively valid, not just in its descriptions but also in its normative claims. It presents the intellectual as an

outside observer without any *a priori* responsibilities to his society—he may even have an obligation, as one noted critical intellectual once told me, to “rebel against his community.” For this reason, these same intellectuals also wage war against the classic concepts of identity, such as ethnic origin and religion, as decisive political factors.

It is from precisely this point, in my opinion, that criticism of the critics should begin. Even if their critique of Zionism is correct on many counts, it is still puzzling how, despite their pretensions to open discourse, every last one of them has chosen to identify with the Palestinian narrative regarding Zionism, as if it were not possible to criticize the official Zionist narrative from any other point of view. Indeed, no one disputes that real injustices were committed, and clearly the controversy between the “Zionist” and “post-Zionist” academics revolves not around the facts but rather around the theories they use to interpret those facts. The question is why the critical sociologists have chosen to delegitimize the Zionist view completely. This position, it seems, is neither “academic” nor “scientific.”

Hizky Shoham
Petah Tikva

ALEK D. EPSTEIN RESPONDS:

I accept Hizky Shoham’s opinion that sociology need neither promote nor attack the Zionist ethos—its main role is to study Israeli society, the central events of its public life, and the features that distinguish it from other societies. However, when any one ideological paradigm becomes dominant among the great majority of the senior people in the field, it seems that the discipline fails to advance both its societal and its professional missions.

I take issue with most of Chaim Waxman’s assertions, mainly because he does not present any research on the subject at hand and presents no methodical examinations to counter the ones that I conducted. I disagree that Uri Ram’s book is “simply a book.” Since the mid-1970s, Ram is the only author to publish an entire study of the development of sociology in Israel and the research paradigms that characterize it; there is nothing else like it. The fact that, in order to refute my assertions, Waxman has to rely on the names of two once-renowned professors, Eisenstadt and Lissak, both of whom are now retired, demonstrates the weakness of his claim. Incidentally, in an interview in *Ha’aretz* in August of last year, Lissak expressed his opinion of my thesis: “I agree with Epstein’s main conclusions,” he wrote. “I myself

refer to the last decade as 'the wasted years of Israeli sociology.'"

From a methodological standpoint, my study was based on three collections of data, which all produced similar results: The papers presented at the annual meetings of the Israeli Sociological Society; articles by Israeli authors about Israeli society published over the last forty years in the most respected international journals in the field; and dissertations in the field of sociology accepted by all the universities in Israel in recent years. Against all of this, Waxman presents only his own impressions and memories, and explains that "During the 1980s and early 1990s, I participated in quite a few of the ISS's annual conferences, and every paper that I submitted was readily accepted." It is worth emphasizing that even during that period there were times when Waxman felt himself to be "a distinct minority." Since that time, however, radical critical trends have only intensified; had he attended such conferences in recent years, Waxman would have felt even more isolated.

Moreover, a look at the conference of the Israeli Sociological Society held in February of this year only lends support to my claims. The main topic of the conference, "Globalization and Anti-Globalization," seems far removed from the central dilemmas

facing Israeli society today, and the tour of little-known Bedouin villages, which was the only social-professional event planned for attendees of the conference, clearly demonstrated which issues are of concern for the researchers of Israeli society. As a citizen of Israel and as a scholar, I wish I could agree with Waxman, but the weight of the evidence prevents this.

Taxes

TO THE EDITORS:

I read Daniel Polisar's editorial "Death by Taxes" (AZURE 15, Summer 2003). The article claims that "[the] reform... introduced the full weight of taxation on the capital markets." The tax rate, however, is not indicated. The reader of this sentence would reasonably conclude that the capital gains tax is roughly similar to income tax with a rate similar to that in Europe and the United States. In fact, the capital gains tax is 15 percent, much lower than accepted rates in Europe and the United States. Furthermore, it is less than one-third of the maximum income tax, even post-reform.

A second problem arises with regard to the purchase of a new Honda Civic. The author compares the price

in Israel to that in the United States. He claims that a middle-class American who earns an additional \$20,000 before taxes can afford one. In truth, he cannot afford one. It appears that the author failed to take into account state income tax and sales tax. In addition, the Israeli tax on Japanese cars is particularly high. The tax on European cars is lower and on American cars lower still. Why not draw a comparison to an American buying an American car?

Furthermore, the author compares the price of gasoline in Israel to that in the United States. He does not bother to mention that the price of gasoline in Israel is, roughly, equivalent to the average price in Europe or possibly lower.

The author then claims that President Reagan and Congress lowered the maximum tax bracket to 28 percent in 1981. He fails to indicate what the income tax rates are today. Were he to do so, he would find that until March 2003, the maximum federal income tax was 39.6 percent, which has since decreased to approximately 34.5 percent. In addition to the federal income tax, we must consider the state income tax, which is about 7 percent in New York and about 10 percent in California. In New York City, there is an additional city income tax of

about 4 percent. Based on this, income tax in California is roughly 41 percent and slightly higher in New York City.

It seems appropriate that the above facts be brought to the attention of the readers of AZURE.

Shmuel Kaniel

Einstein Institute of Mathematics
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DANIEL POLISAR RESPONDS:

The facts Professor Kaniel brings to the attention of AZURE's readers are, for the most part, correct. I take issue, however, with the implied criticism that the decision not to include these facts deprived readers of information that would have helped them judge the editorial's claim that taxes on Israelis are far too high and should be cut dramatically.

For example, it is true that a capital gains tax of 15 percent first instituted in Israel in 2003 is lower than comparable rates in the United States and some (but not all) European countries. However, the point I was making in the editorial is not that Israel's tax rates on capital are comparatively high, but that the full rate was put into effect on the first day of implementing the tax reform, whereas most of the compensating cuts in income tax, which were meant to

keep the overall burden unchanged, were deferred for up to two and a half years.

On another matter, I claimed that a Honda Civic, including all taxes, would cost \$13,500 in America and nearly twice as much, \$25,400, in Israel; and that an American earning \$28,300 a year and wanting to buy such a car would need to earn an additional \$20,000 beyond his current salary, whereas an Israeli with a comparable salary would have to earn an additional \$56,400. Contrary to Kaniel's conjecture, I made my calculations for the American assuming that he lives in a state with a typical sales tax and a high income tax. Thus, additional pre-tax earnings of \$20,000 will in fact enable him to buy a Civic.

The reason I chose to compare the prices of a Honda Civic in each of the countries is that Japanese vehicles are consistently purchased in greater numbers in Israel than are European or American models; the price of a Civic, a standard car of precisely the kind middle-class Israelis tend to buy, therefore provides a good barometer for judging the extent to which taxes in Israel are onerous.

I compared the price for a gallon of gasoline in Israel (\$3.90) to that in the United States (\$1.80) to dramatize the degree to which high taxation

ratchets up the cost to Israelis of owning and operating a car. It is true that some European countries also boast very high gasoline taxes, but this only means that in this case, misery does have company; it does not diminish the extent to which Israelis' costs are rendered sky-high by yet another confiscatory tax.

Finally, I suggested that other countries had cut income taxes far more sharply than Israel has, and with very positive economic results. I cited as an example Ronald Reagan's cutting of the top federal income tax rate in the United States from 70 percent to 28 percent, which contributed to the largest economic boom in American history. It is true that the top tax rate today stands at 34.5 percent, but this does not undercut my claims about the extent of the Reagan cuts or their positive effects. Moreover, even when one factors in state and city income taxes (as I did in various places in the editorial), the rates in Israel remain well ahead of those in the United States, not just for the top tier but at every level of income from lower middle class on up.

Israelis are indeed the most highly taxed people anywhere in the democratic world, and radical action is needed to redress this problem. The more closely one examines the

numbers, the more strongly this conclusion stands out.

George Steiner

TO THE EDITORS:

Too bad George Steiner's letter (AZURE 16, Winter 2004) did not respond to the detailed and perceptive review of his work by Assaf Sagiv, which raised serious and now unanswered questions about his moral stance with regard to Jews and Nazis ("George Steiner's Jewish Problem," AZURE 15, Summer 2003).

Steiner acknowledges that Israeli actions are necessary for self-defense. He hopes, undoubtedly, that this will induce the weak-hearted among us to regret having a state. Perhaps he would like all people to regret having states, for he admits that the use of force to survive is rather common. "For two thousand years," he writes, "we Jews were not in a position to torture other human beings. That was our incomparable nobility and mission." Other nations did it all the time.

Steiner knows full well that Israel today is no worse than any other nation. He just hates to see his own precious Jewish nobility, earned by the infinite sufferings of creatures

other than himself, tainted by the reality of Jewish empowerment. He would like to see other Jewish people put back into their former position, exposed more fully to unjust violence, but nobly unable to respond.

But it is hard to understand exactly what is so noble about "not being in a position" to do something. Does not nobility consist of being in a position to do wrong, and yet refraining from it?

In fact, Israel does demonstrate this kind of nobility. When I visited the Arab-populated city of Shechem (Nablus) some years ago, I spoke with a Palestinian who told me that the Israelis want the Intifada to continue. Otherwise, why hadn't they put a stop to it? It was inconceivable to him that a government would choose not to use overwhelming lethal force, as other nations do, if it really wanted to put an end to the violence.

While few have yet noticed the humanitarianism of Israeli military practice, or the willing self-sacrifice that it entails, there is a certain nobility in it. That nobility is enhanced by the fact that Israel receives no acknowledgment for it, least of all from George Steiner.

Gabriel Danzig

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The Battle of Jenin

TO THE EDITORS:

Yagil Henkin's excellent essay ("Urban Warfare and the Lessons of Jenin," *AZURE* 15, Summer 2003) leaves two major questions unanswered: First, how was the IDF able to carry out the mission with such low casualties, both to civilians (who were combatants in disguise) and to IDF personnel? And second, how is

it that the cleanest operation carried out by Jews is painted in the murkiest colors, where similar actions—far more atrocious, deadly, and dirty—are whitewashed elsewhere?

Is it possible that the very demand for cleanliness is the reason for the demonization of the IDF?

Y. Brandstetter

Pardesia

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