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Leo Strauss

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should be derived not just from an abstractly construed "promise" made at the time of emancipation, but from reality.]

1. Joshua 9:7 (JPS version): "And the men of Israel said unto the Hivites: 'Peradventure ye dwell among us; and how shall we make a covenant with you?'" And cf. Deuteronomy 7:2, "and when the Lord thy God shall deliver them up before thee, and thou shalt smite them [i.e., the Hivites among them]; then thou shalt utterly destroy them; thou shalt make no covenant with them, nor show mercy unto them."

2. Under this title, Theodor Herzl (1860–1904), published a vitriolic essay in the newspaper of the World Zionist Organization, *Die Welt* (vol. 20, 15 October 1897), attacking the clientele of wealthy Jews who refused to back him financially. *Mauschel* (derived from the Western Ashkenazic pronunciation of the name Moses, *Mauschei*) was a derogatory term for Jews and their German Jewish idiom (*Judendeutsch*), and, in colloquial German, today still refers to indistinct speech (to mumble), to dishonesty in business (to cheat), or to a specific card game. By using this anti-Semitic term, and by bringing this internal Jewish fight into the public arena, Herzl broke two major taboos of what Strauss calls the mentality of the exile (*galut*). Strauss may be implying here that, by breaking these taboos and by thus establishing an internal Jewish division between friend and foe, Herzl inadvertently achieved a new level of politicization of Jewish affairs. On Herzl's "Mauschel" see Theodor Herzl, *Zionist Writings: Essays and Addresses*, ed. and trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Herzl Press, 1973), 1:163–65; and cf. Ernst Pawel, *The Labyrinth of Exile: A Life of Theodor Herzl* (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1989), 345–46, and Jacques Kornberg, *Theodor Herzl: From Assimilation to Zionism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993), 164, 219 n. 35. (I thank Ken Green for these references.) In the jargon of the German Zionist students, *Mauschel* referred to the anti-Zionist faction among the German Jews, that is, to those represented in the Central-Verein. So, for example, in Paul Hirsch, "Fehldiagnose, weil Ferndiagnose," *Der jüdische Student* 18, no. 5 (September–October 1921): 242.

3. Parallel to this construction is the expression *Staatsbürger-Dasein*, forming two distinct forms of Jewish existence, namely, that of existing in exile and existing as the (emancipated) citizen of a state. In the view of the Zionist, neither one is ultimately legitimate or even sustainable. The point of the "Remark" is to emphasize the importance of recognizing the unsustainability of illegitimate strategies of Zionist agitation that are rooted in a *galut* mentality, a fact that, if only one were able to read it properly (as Strauss understands it), is revealed in anti-Semitic polemic.

4. See the essay on Paul de Lagarde in this volume. It must have been fairly shocking to the readers of Strauss, then a novice author, when he praised the anti-Semite Lagarde as well as Herzl at his worst.

5. In the original publication, the word *Militarismus* appears between *speziell* and *galuth-jüdische*. With Meier (GS, 2:313, 2: 618), we regard the word *Militarismus* in this sentence as out of place.

6. Ahad Ha'am, originally: Asher Hirsch Ginsberg, 1856–1927, Hebrew essayist, leader of the Hibbat Tsiyyon movement and main voice of "cultural Zionism."

The Zionism of Nordau (1923)

It is the view of political Zionism that the plight of the Jews [*Judennot*] can only be alleviated by the establishment of a Jewish state, by the consolidation of the power of Jewish individuals into the power of the Jewish people. In pursuit of this end, Herzl played off the power of the moneyed Jews (not at all a Jewish power as such) against the political powers, and, on the other hand, he played off the political legitimization of his project by the Great Powers, who in matters of political significance were the only decisive element, against the Jews. Neither of these factors was really under his control. But as he played them off against one another, the politically amorphous power of Jewish individuals solidified into a political will, into the political significance of the Jewish people.

While thoroughly approving of this goal, Nordau rejects Herzl's means as "underhanded" [*hinterhältig*]. He wants the power, but he rejects intrigue as a means of obtaining power. He wants the power, but he calls for the admission that, at this time, we have no control over any power. *Thus he brings about the transition from political to spiritual Zionism*,¹ which makes a principle of the Jewish people's powerlessness—indeed, of its aversion to power.

The motive for this falling away from Herzl is itself already a spiritual one: "honesty." We know that the Zionism of Herzl was itself essentially determined by impulses of decency and loyalty. But Herzl knew all too well that, in politics, to speak of truth or untruth is ambiguous. Politics must create realities, and under certain circumstances the most effective and most likely means to succeed in creating realities is to pass off preconditions as having already been fulfilled, and thus to evoke the necessary efforts. This is particularly true in the case of preconditions of a moral nature that are brought about only by great efforts that the dull masses are reluctant to make. Today's untruth, perhaps precisely by being passed off as truth today, may actually become tomorrow's truth. The sky blue of the Zionist optimism of Herzl was, in good part, conditioned by the considerations of an agitator. Nordau put into circulation the fairy tale of Herzl's enthusiastic trust in his people, a fairy tale in which he himself did not believe, so that in this quite drastic way he could substantiate the betrayal by the Jewish people of its leader: in other words, he did so for political reasons.

We learn something about Nordau's judgment of Herzl from Herzl's comments in his diaries, in a form unrefracted by the purposes of agitation. "Nordau finds me insincere and underhanded in my dealings with princes and with the Jewish people. I think that one day he will make public this

reproach of his, and thereby disgrace himself, me, and all of us" (III 63). The diaries show that this "underhandedness" constitutes the essence of Herzlian politics. Nordau recognizes this tendency; he condemns it, and calls for a politics of trust. Thus, for example, instead of the *negotiorum gestio* of the dictator Herzl, Nordau calls for a democratic authorization and supervision of the leader (*Tagebücher* II, p. 251f.). He does not merely call for these politics, he enacts them to the detriment of Zionism and to the great vexation of Herzl. On the occasion of a speech by Nordau, Herzl notes: "He made entirely unjustified advances to socialism, exposed all of our weaknesses, reported on our helplessness, etc." (*Tagebücher* II, p. 258). The sympathy for socialism as well as the antipathy for secret diplomacy have the same root, and lead in the direction of dissolving the major contours of Herzlian politics, which has a tendency that is conservative and thoroughly "conducive to the maintenance of the political order" ["*staatserschaltend*"].

In the statements about Herzl in Nordau's *Zionist Writings* no trace can be found of the reproach that must have been uttered more than once in person. On the contrary! "My heart aches, when I trace his nine-year-long path of suffering, to see him grope with wounded hands through the thorns and thistles of reality, confused as in a fog by his beautiful trust in the Jews" (*Zionistische Schriften*, p. 160). Perhaps Nordau wrote this sentence—which, incidentally, is typical of his flowery, or rather weedy, style—for poetic reasons, and that may account for the tastelessness of the expression. Or he may have written it for reasons of agitation, as an appeal to the Jewish heart, which is always susceptible to an appeal to innocent suffering and disappointed idealism. Otherwise, this sentence is as incomprehensible as it is, in any case, absurd. Much the same can be said about Nordau's claim that Herzl was dominated by the image of "twelve million noblemen standing behind him," or about the utterance made under the immediate impression of Herzl's death: Herzl's "exquisite sensitivity made him the originator and leader of Zionism." If today Herzl appears to many as a long-suffering visionary in Israel (cf. the recent apotheosis by Emil Cohn),¹ it is largely Nordau who is to blame for it. While posing as an admirer, he diminished Herzl. He contributed much to the frustration of Herzl's original impulses by explaining the greatness of Herzl to himself and to the Jewish people in sentimental categories. This was all the more deplorable because, in terms of its ideology and hence

¹ As proofs for the correctness of Herzl's judgment see especially Nordau's address to the Eighth Congress (*Zionistische Schriften*, pp. 174–87) and his speech in Amsterdam (op. cit., pp. 288–311).

also in other respects, Zionism failed from the outset to reach the level intended by Herzl. It is with full intention that Herzl limited himself to an argumentation that was both more accessible and more immediately effective. Nordau remained on this lower level and, compared to Herzl, managed to move on it with no less skill and zeal, and with greater subtlety.

"Zionism, like any historical movement, emerged from a strongly felt and clearly recognized need, the need for a normal existence under natural conditions" (*Zionistische Schriften*, p. 178). For Nordau, Zionism is a product of the newly acquired sense of reality, which had been lacking in the previous eras of galut and assimilation.

In the *galut*, the Jewish people lived as a *Luftvolk*²—it lacks the ground beneath its feet in both the literal and the figurative senses, and it depends on all of the contingencies of the behavior of other peoples. In this condition life is sustained by a strong will to existence. All ideas and all forms of Judaism are unconsciously in the service of preserving the national existence as well as heightening the will to existence. The ideas of Chosenness and of the Messiah uphold under all circumstances the faith in the possibility and necessity of holding out the faith in a national future. On the other hand, by aiming at what is miraculous, at what is unattainable by human effort, these same ideas prevent that faith from leading to action. All Jewish customs and ways serve the purpose of segregation from the peoples, hence they are in the service of preserving the national existence; on the other hand, by keeping [the people] away from the conditions of normal life of a people, they prevent this very life. The absence of a political center has the same effect: the Jewish people cannot be annihilated at any one spot—and, on the other hand, just for that reason all comprehensive political action is impossible. This, therefore, is the essence of galut: it provides the Jewish people with a maximal possibility of existence by means of a minimum of normality. In the long run, the lack of natural conditions of existence was bound to ruin our people. Persecutions could have such terrible effects only because the people, lacking natural conditions of existence, also lacked the possibilities for a real recovery and a real uplift. In the *galut*, Zionism and messianism coincide, inasmuch as the return to Palestine is expected to be the work of the Messiah, something miraculous and to-be-prayed-for, something not to be prepared for rationally. This coupling with messianism, which empties Zionism of its reality [*entwirklichend*],³ was removed only by assimilation. Nordau does not feel grateful. Assimilation separated the two ideas from one another in order to facilitate the easy death of the Jewish people in Europe by abandoning Zionism and watering down messianism into missionism.⁴ Assimilation has basically no other motive than the egoism of Western Jewish individuals. It worsens the illusionism of the galut, expressed

in the belief in the "mystical" redemption by the Messiah, by secularizing the ideas of the *galut* that, for all their mysticism, had a very sober vital function. Assimilation takes away from the Jews the self-assurance of ghetto life, and gives them instead the illusionary surrogate of trust in the humanity of civilization. Its politics, not unlike that of the *galut*, is limited to the needs of the moment. But it is less useful inasmuch as it completely deludes itself about the attitude of the host nations, believing that the Jewish question can be resolved once and for all by shutting one's eyes to it. It is nothing but a "sacrifice of fidelity, of dignity, of historical consciousness."

This was the sacrifice Western Judaism brought to its emancipation. The basis of this emancipation was the doctrinarism of the French Revolution, which deduced the necessity for the emancipation of the Jews from a syllogism. However, precisely as a result of the French Revolution and the strengthening of the civilizing tendencies that derived from it, national antagonisms showed themselves all the more sharply—quite the opposite of the good-natured hopes of liberal Judaism.

The emancipation emerged from a change that took place solely in the non-Jewish world. This change was a move in the direction of absolute ideas (humanity, de-confessionalized religiosity), which were intelligible to all human beings, and hence also to the Jews. This secularization of Christian ideas is, to Nordau, as self-evident and rationally necessary as the secularization of Jewish ideas in missionism is "foolish and presumptuous." Apparently the idea of chosenness, even in a castrated state, possesses a significantly lesser degree of rationality than the idea of universalism in the sense of the Christian enlightenment.

Zionism retains the separation, effected by assimilation, between Zionism and messianism, between national, worldly ends and spiritual means—but it abandons messianism. In opposition to assimilation's will to perish, it goes back to the *galut's* will to live. Nordau rebukes assimilation for its abandonment of Zionism,³ but he does not acknowledge that, in a deeper sense, this previously mentioned separation prepared the ground for Zionism. Indeed, just as he viewed the assimilatory-emancipatory development as conditioned only by the non-Jewish world, so he is forced to regard Zionism as the product of the non-Jewish phenomena of nationalism and anti-Semitism. For this reason, he fails to achieve an understanding of the internal legitimacy, the Jewish

³ The term "Zionism" is used by Nordau in two different senses that are impossible to confuse with one another.

necessity, of a Jewish development that is influenced by and learns from European nationalism and anti-Semitism.

At this point, we should consider two things. First, we see how Zionism continues and heightens the de-Judaizing tendency of assimilation; it does so, more precisely, for the sake of its struggle against the illusionism, the lack of grounding in reality [*Entwirklichkeit*]⁶ of the *galut*, which it recognizes in the missionism of the assimilation. Second, Nordau's critique of emancipation displays something typical of current Zionism, namely, the coexistence of a naïve Enlightenment faith in the ideals of 1789 and a realistic skepticism concerning their actual significance for the Jewish question. In Nordau, just as much as in Herzl, the sober kernel of Zionism emerges once the shell of the lofty ideals of the French Revolution, which are self-evident to both assimilation and Zionism, is peeled away.

Zionism is a child of the nineteenth century. Instead of the "volcanic" conception of Jewish history, which orients itself by the great national catastrophes, Nordau demands a "Neptunian," less melodramatic conception, which sees in the accumulation of minor political and economic facts⁷ the cause of large revolutionary changes. Both the plight of the Jews and its alleviation lose all semblance of the miraculous. We are not dealing any more with the coming of the Messiah but with "a long, difficult, common effort" of the Jewish people. In Zionist matters, theology has no say; Zionism is purely political. The most general philosophical foundations are supplied by a biologically grounded ethics. The question of whether it is legitimate to apply this standpoint to the Jewish question does not arise: This is the voice of a science that is free of presuppositions [*voraussetzungslose Wissenschaft*]⁸! If we disregard the question of legitimacy, it is true that, once one has replaced teleology with causalism in regard to the organic, one is also predisposed to replace missionism with the demands of national needs. What we are dealing with is yet another example of the general rule that change in the motives of German Jewish (generally: Western Jewish) intellectual life is a function of change in the motives of European intellectual life.

The close relation to biology characterizes the Zionism of Nordau just as much as the enthusiasm for technology characterizes the Zionism of Herzl. To put it bluntly, Herzl has the attitude of the northern German engineer—"With our technological achievements, we'll get the job done"—whereas Nordau has the attitude of Homais the apothecary,⁸ who puts his famous scientific knowledge in the service of the public by engaging in the improvement of cider making, while constantly emphasizing his virtue.

Assimilation denied the existence of the Jewish question while Zionism acknowledges it. One might surmise that this acknowledgment belongs to

that series of endeavors of the nineteenth century that addressed all “questions” resulting from the problematization of self-evident facts of life (i.e., the death penalty question, the school question, the religious question, the sexual question, etc.). This nuance in the treatment of the Jewish question is also present in Nordau, which should come as no surprise in a student of Lombroso,⁹ and in the author of a book entitled *The Conventional Lies of Civilized Humanity*.¹⁰ However, he goes further. He has the contemporary sympathy for the helots and the corresponding indignation at the Spartans. But it is self-evident for him that one must replace the helotry of assimilation with the Spartan spirit of Zionism. This, however, is none other than the consequence that follows for ethics, and hence also for Jewish politics, from the displacement of teleologism by the more manly causalism.

NOTES

Source: “Der Zionismus bei Nordau,” *Der Jude: Eine Monatsschrift* (Berlin) 7, nos. 10–11 (October–November 1923): 657–60, reprinted in *GS*, 2:315–21. As Strauss indicates in a footnote, this relates to Max Nordau, *Zionistische Schriften*, 2d ed. (Berlin: Jüdischer Verlag, 1923).

Max Nordau (originally: Simon Maximilian Südfeld), 1849–1923, physician, journalist, and critical essayist. He met his Hungarian compatriot Theodor Herzl in Paris in 1892, and eventually assumed the responsibility of vice president of the Zionist congresses. After Herzl’s death in 1904, Nordau broke with the “practical Zionists” who took over the organization and whose goal it was to settle in Palestine even without first obtaining the political guarantees of the Great Powers. After 1911, Nordau, whose oratory on the Jewish question had fired up the earliest congresses, no longer participated in these meetings. The occasion for Strauss’s essay was Nordau’s death on 23 January 1923, in Paris. Cf. Michael Stanislawski, *Zionism and the Fin de siècle: Cosmopolitanism and Nationalism from Nordau to Jabotinsky* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001).

1. *geistiger Zionismus*: *geistig* means “mental” (where *Geist* refers to “mind”), “intellectual” (where it refers to the activity of the mind), or “spiritual” (where *Geist* refers to the “spirit”). To avoid the possible religious connotations of the latter, one might prefer “intellectual Zionism” to “spiritual Zionism.” Yet the reference to “honesty” in the following shows that Strauss sees Nordau’s intellectual home in the context of “cultural Zionism,” which is not so much an intellectual movement as it is a hybrid of cultural/intellectual and religious traditions. One of Strauss’s intellectual projects (fueled by an intellectual honesty all his own)—that is, the project to distinguish between the intellectual/cultural and the religious—has its origin right here: in their hybridization in the concrete case of Zionism. Herzl’s revolutionary achievement (at least as it is understood in the school of Vladimir Jabotinsky to which the early Strauss belonged) consisted in the politicization of the Jews, a cause that Strauss sees here as betrayed by

Nordau. Strauss generalizes this insight when he insists that the political constitutes a sphere in its own right to which religious or intellectual motifs/motivations attach only secondarily. In method, his work, here as elsewhere, is “archaeological” in that it identifies “secondary uses” of (intellectual and spiritual) materials and, based on such identification, reconstructs their original locus.

2. Emil Cohn, *Judentum: Ein Aufruf an die Zeit* (München: Verlag Georg Müller, 1923). In the same issue of *Der Jude* (vol. 7, April 1923), Franz Rosenzweig published a review, entitled “Ein Rabbinerbuch,” of Emil Cohn’s book. See Rosenzweig, *Zweistromland: Kleinere Schriften zu Glauben und Denken*, ed. Reinhold Mayer and Annemarie Mayer (Dordrecht and Boston: Martinus Nijhoff, 1984), 671–76, 858.

3. *Luftvolk*: literally, a “people living on/in the air.” Derived from the more common expression *Luftmensch*, that is, someone living on air.

4. The term Strauss uses here is *entwirklichend*. Cf. similarly *Entwirklichkeit* in “Response to Frankfurt’s ‘Word of Principle’” and in “Paul de Lagarde.”

5. “Missionism” refers to a common ideological tenet of nineteenth-century Jewish theology, especially of Reform Judaism—namely, to the idea that it is the “mission” of Israel to disseminate ethical monotheism. Cf. Michael A. Meyer, *Response to Modernity: A History of the Reform Movement in Judaism* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 137f.

6. *Entwirklichkeit*: see four paragraphs earlier: “entwirklichende Verkopplung des Zionismus mit dem Messianismus,” and cf. in the essay on Paul de Lagarde, where Strauss introduces the noun *Entwirklichkeit* as “an almost impossible” coinage of his own, whereas here (in an earlier publication) he uses it without apology.

7. In *Der Jude* 7 (1923): 660: “summierenden und politischen wirtschaftlichen” (*sic*). We follow Meier’s emendation in *GS*, 2:320: “summierenden politischen und wirtschaftlichen.” The major nineteenth-century source for a conception of history that emphasized the significance of the *petits faits significatifs* was Hippolyte Taine.

8. Homais: a character in Flaubert’s *Madame Bovary*. I thank Ken Green for pointing me to this source.

9. Cesare Lombroso (1835–1909), Italian. Beginning with *L’uomo delinquente* (1876), Lombroso interpreted data of craniology, physiognomy, and other now largely discredited forms of phrenology in evolutionary terms and determined the nature of criminal behavior as a biologically conditioned atavism. Because of their direct impact on the nature of crime, prevention, and punishment, his studies were widely influential at his time among criminologists and jurists and helped to inaugurate the field of criminal anthropology. Nordau and Lombroso exchanged signed presentation copies of their works and enjoyed a close rapport. Nordau’s main work, *Die konventionellen Lügen der Kulturmenscheit* (Leipzig: Eischer, 1883), is dedicated to Lombroso, while the latter dedicated *Le Crime: Causes et Remèdes* (Paris: F. Alcan, 1907) to Nordau with the words: “que vous dédie, comme le frère le plus aimé et le plus puissant.” The friendship also extended to Lombroso’s daughters, Paola and Gina.

10. *The Conventional Lies of Civilized Humanity* is a translation of *Die konventionellen Lügen der Kulturmenscheit* (1883). The published English translation renders the title somewhat inaccurately as *The Conventional Lies of Our Civilization*.