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when he served as Rabbi of Temple Emanuel at the beginning of the century. On the fringes of the founding faculty of the Hebrew University and its Institute of Jewish Studies intellectually, he was deeply involved politically, both by virtue of his brief period of study in Germany and by the similarity of his political vision to theirs. Although he was not one of them, the role that Magnes played was essential in carrying out central aspects of that vision.

## *Central European Intellectuals in Palestine*

G E O R G E L . M O S S E

TO DISCUSS THE FATE OF CENTRAL EUROPEANS IN Palestine, their demographics and their problems of acculturation as well as their scholarly contributions, would in itself be an interesting task, but this essay has a much more specific focus: a singular group of Central European intellectuals who shared a certain Zionist vision, and whose enthusiasm and commitment had carried them to Palestine already in the 1920s. While there are not one but many Zionist narratives, this particular Zionism played a leading role in the creation of the Hebrew University—though its long-range influence is more difficult to capture. As Martin Buber put it, looking backwards, this group of men worked not within but side by side with official Zionism. However, their overall Zionist vision may still represent a Zionist alternative worth remembering.

This group of Central Europeans contained an impressive list of intellectuals whose public influence was greater than their small numbers, even if they did not in the end succeed in realizing their own vision of a Jewish homeland. They included among other intellectuals men like the philosopher Hugo Bergman, the historian Hans Kohn, Gershom Scholem, Arthur Ruppin—the key figure in Zionist settlement—and the journalist Robert Weltsch; Martin Buber was a member of this group, and from the outside Judah Magnes, the president of the new Hebrew University, participated frequently in their discussions. Many

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more names could be added, professors at the new Hebrew University, or writers. They were defined not by their specific place of origin, whether Berlin, Prague, Vienna, or Lemberg, but by the common intellectual background and shared nationalist vision which they brought to the Zionist enterprise.

Though the core of this group remained surprisingly stable, its outer limits are more difficult to reconstruct. Obviously not all Central European intellectuals joined. Moreover, the affinity between their ideas and those of Ahad Ha'am and A. D. Gordon blurred some of the specifically Central European ideals they advocated. Nevertheless, a common core of attitudes and perceptions document the cohesive Zionist vision of this group. There was also a self-image and social reality which further defined this group both in their own minds and in that of the Yishuv in general. These men, though they were committed Zionists, came to symbolize the "Yekkes" of the later Israeli imagination, their numbers reinforced by the Central European refugees who arrived after the Nazis came to power.

Not unlike the Central European immigrants in many other countries they kept their lifestyle almost intact—but then to what group of the population could they have assimilated in the Palestine of those years? I myself still remember even through the 1970s the social gatherings in Jerusalem with their earnestness and absence of small talk, the birthday celebrations with their poetry recitations, which resembled those of my own youth in Berlin over half a century earlier. And Agnon who knew these scholars, observed in his novel, *Shira*, which caricatured the life of some central European professors at the Hebrew University, how "they poetized every family event." They clung to the German classics as part of what it meant to be educated, and when a well respected German scholar came to Jerusalem in the 1980s to read (in German) from the then newly discovered and highly erotic love poems of Goethe, their indignation knew no bounds. His lecture was generally regarded as "Nestbeschmutzung," a fouling of one's own nest. Their life style was accompanied by a lasting commitment to the Central European ideals in which they had been raised and which, as we shall see, continues to inform important aspects of their Zionism. The Philosopher Hugo Bergman, who emigrated from Prague in 1920 and whose published diaries are a preeminent source for the history of these intellectuals—and who was to become an important force in the early history of the Hebrew University—wrote soon after he had arrived in Palestine how they lived on a lonely island, believing themselves encircled by enemies, for no one understood their kind.

Living for the most part in Jerusalem, these men constituted a close-knit circle, something like a perpetual and mobile discussion group, as they visited each other's houses and came together at the University as well. Like all intellectuals they often disagreed among themselves, and yet several influences due to their Central European background and education continued to play a defining role both in their Judaism and in their Zionist commitment as well. I want to single out neo-romanticism, liberalism, and, above all, the concept of *Bildung* as documenting an intellectual and cultural continuity. Germany

provided the model: when Central European Jews at the time of their emancipation reached out to European culture, as Robert Weltsch put it, it was German culture they had in mind. For these Jews at emancipation the encounter with Europe took place on German soil. Such intellectuals had passed through a Germanic educational system, and most of them had spent time at what was then its pinnacle, the University of Berlin.

That text which best expressed their Jewish awakening, and which had touched many of them in their youth, came out of a specifically Jewish, but equally out of a neo-romantic tradition. Martin Buber's *Three Speeches on Judaism* (1911), originally given at the request of the Bar Kochba group in Prague, rejected the normative nationalism of the twentieth century, and instead returned to an earlier, neo-romantic tradition of national consciousness, turning to what he called the inner history of the Jewish people. That inner history, he believed, must be recaptured by every individual Jew, serve to change him, and give him a feeling of unity and spiritual direction. This nationalism meant a certain moral and ethical posture rather than a territorial demand. The linkage between national awakening and individual reform was typical for the rising national consciousness of all European nations, except that in these speeches reference to the environment in which this national consciousness might unfold was not stressed. Palestine, to be sure, was important, an ideal, but not essential for the Jewish awakening; while, in contrast, the "native landscape" had played a major part in German nationalism. Yet the unity of the nation and the individual, based upon shared emotions and a shared history, remained intact. This relative downgrading of Palestine as a geographic entity was suited to the diaspora but was not typical for this group, though it did, perhaps, foreshadow their emphasis upon Palestine as a necessary center for Jewish renewal without being wedded to precise geographical boundaries. They did not follow the implications of the "native landscape" in German and other European nationalisms which often served as a springboard for aggression, emphasizing the geographic claims of national sovereignty.

The Jewish national awakening of these men was in fact similar to the awakening German national consciousness a century earlier, at the beginning of the nineteenth century, and determined their admiration for some of the fathers of that movement with their frequent references to Johann Gottlieb Fichte. Fichte, so it was said, had tried to pull Germans from out of their deepest degradation through a national awakening, similar to their own task. Martin Buber himself saw Fichte as setting an example, giving to nationalism the ethical task which religion had performed previously. Fichte's nationalism, according to Weltsch, Bergman, and others was built on the reform of the individual, and not upon a belief system which was imposed from the top down. It was in this spirit that the principal Zionist organ, *Die Welt*, in 1912, took notice of Fichte's 120th birthday. This was, of course, Fichte as read before National Socialism, the early rather than the later Fichte. Yet it is astounding how in their search for models such men ignored the theme of German superiority present in his *Speeches*

to the German Nation (1808). By the time Buber's *Three Speeches* were published much of European nationalism had already become a civic religion.

In concert with the ideal of *Bildung*, nationalism for all of this group remained an open-ended process, and unlike German nationalism was never conceived as a finished or unalterable product. On the contrary, the distinction between Jewish and normative nationalism was sharply drawn, and the aggressive aspect of neo-romanticism was further neutralized by their liberalism and their devotion to *Bildung* and scholarship. As Martin Buber wrote, we do not want a homeland of this or that size but are concerned how its community will be constituted, and Gershom Scholem, however contemptuous of the vagueness of Buber's thought, agreed, asserting that national sovereignty did not matter if only Hebrew were spoken in Jerusalem.

These Central European intellectuals founded *Brit Shalom* in 1925 with Arthur Ruppin as its first chairman, and Scholem, Bergman, and Hans Kohn as prominent members. This was a small circle of friends, putting their Zionist ideals into practice, calling for Arab-Jewish understanding and a binational Jewish-Arab Palestine. Their influence was much greater than their small numbers. This is not the place to discuss this group, but the principles for which it stood had an undoubted influence on the political tone of the new Hebrew University.

The *Three Speeches* were only one part of the heritage of these intellectuals, liberalism was another, and the third which synthesized all the others, was the German concept of *Bildung* which they had absorbed through their education and which they tried to pass on to their university. Their liberalism meant putting the individual in the center of Jewish nationalism; according to Hugo Bergman man must never become a mere object. There are, of course, several liberalisms, but their own was close to a classical liberalism which took most of its inspiration from the eighteenth-century Enlightenment. They were convinced that there was no real contradiction between their principles of nationalism and the Enlightenment itself.

The Enlightenment as they tended to define it was once again close to that definition which men like Fichte had also advocated as they started to define the new national consciousness. Enlightenment meant that cosmopolitanism as well as opposition to intolerance and orthodoxy could exist side by side with a national identity, but it did not mean the unquestioned supremacy of reason. Theirs was a different liberalism from that of Theodor Herzl's *Judenstaat* which had taken the form of an ideal liberal state for the Jews. The Zionism of these Central European intellectuals was based upon what they understood as Jewish values, Jewish traditions, and the primacy of the Hebrew language. It seems to me questionable whether Herzl by contrast would have placed an institute of Judaic Studies at the core of the Humanities at the new Hebrew University. Though they differed in their specific understanding of Judaism, they yet joined in their view of Zionism and Palestine. Thus while Gershom Scholem was hostile to Buber's concept of Judaism in which he missed a hard

scholarly core, he nevertheless played an important role in *Brit Shalom* and in the intellectual and social life of this group.

Liberalism had its share in a nationalism defined as open-ended rather than a finished belief system—a wager Scholem once called it—and which through its very autocracy was supposed to construct a true humanity. This nationalism, I must emphasize, was different both from the normative European nationalism to which Fichte eventually succumbed, and in turn from that of many Zionists themselves. The concept of *Bildung* was central here, it synthesized their ideal of a Jewish homeland, and their attitude to the Hebrew University, which had a central place in such a concept. It must be remembered, as I mentioned earlier, that these men had been educated mostly in schools and universities on the German model which were supposed to transform young adults into respectable *Bildungsbürger*.

The concept of *Bildung* had originated in the stormy last third of the eighteenth century, tied closely to the Enlightenment, and carrying some religious overtones. As Johann Gottfried von Herder defined it, every man has an image within himself of what he is and could be, and as long as he is not yet what he could be, he will be restless. *Bildung* thus meant the shaping of one's self in order to become a harmonious, fully formed personality. As Goethe's Wilhelm Meister put it in what was one of the first German *Bildungsromane*: "to educate myself just the way I am." However, this process of self-formation did not proceed unaided. The development of one's rational faculties was basic to the original concept of *Bildung*, while for Wilhelm von Humboldt, the continuous quest for knowledge was an essential part of the *Bildung* ideal. The exercise of the rational faculties and the quest for knowledge meant that *Bildung* became, above all, an educational principle. Despite Immanuel Kant's exhortation "do not fear to use your reason," *Bildung* had an important historical dimension, emphasizing the past and future. There were models of *Bildung*, like the Greeks or the German classical writers—above all Goethe—which had to be studied and absorbed in order to begin to shape the self. The emphasis on development was always important in *Bildung*, and introduced a historical dimension; change was crucial and that meant that there could be no fixation upon individual sacred texts or traditions which might foreclose the future.\*

These Central European Jewish intellectuals believed in individual self-formation aided by the process of education. Zionism was for them, above all,

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\* However, in Germany the original process of individual, self-formation, was being increasingly restricted by mid-nineteenth century, channeled and directed from the outside. The proper education was meant to produce *Bildungsbürger*, and in Germany the humanistic Gymnasium was elevated above all other schools as the preeminent if not the only means of entering a university. Pedagogy came to replace the original emphasis upon the preeminence of individual reason, and even the ideal of self development tended to be usurped by teachers and professors. Here neo-romanticism and nationalism could take the place of the primary emphasis upon the development of the rational faculties as the content of *Bildung*, while in varying degrees reason and cosmopolitanism could still remain part of the concept. The harmonious personality was always the goal, a striving for unity which had been part of the Enlightenment and of nationalism as well.

an educational enterprise. They could, like Scholem, oppose Enlightenment ideals as designed to frustrate the survival of the Jewish people, and at the same time accept the *Bildung* ideal of critical reason—while their definition of nationalism itself remained open-ended. Scholem was opposed to fore-ordained results and finished products. He was more extreme than others in this belief, and yet agreed with Buber that the unity to which every Jew aspires, the fulfillment of a Jew's potential, is a constant never-ending struggle. To be sure, religious influences, and for Scholem the results of his fundamental scholarly inquiry into the Kabbalah, played a crucial part in their kind of Zionism—and yet the influence of *Bildung* cannot be discounted, for it had been built into their attitudes toward life.

The emphasis upon sociability on the part of such intellectuals, increased by their isolation, was also a central tenet of *Bildung*. Sociability, *Geselligkeit*, was one of its central maxims; learning was experienced as a social process, whether in the company of contemporaries or intellectuals dead and gone. Sociability was therefore not to be taken lightly but was supposed to be an intellectual experience. At many of the regular get-togethers of these Central European intellectuals in Jerusalem a theme was proposed and discussed, at others, contemporary or scholarly topics were addressed in a serious manner. Some, like the Scholems, had regular weekly salons where fellow scholars, their wives, and occasional visitors would meet. It is not possible to imagine any of these men engaged in the patter of an academic cocktail party. Self-examination as well as the detailed accounting for self-development were taken seriously and the Enlightenment cult of friendship informed their social gatherings. The many diaries and autobiographies these men left behind strike us, like Gershom Scholem's, as each a kind of *Bildungsroman*.

The influence of *Bildung* upon this group can be traced in much greater detail, which I have tried to do elsewhere. What is clear is that neo-romanticism, liberalism, and *Bildung* informed not only their formal thought but the kind of books they read, their conversations, and not surprisingly, their attitude towards the new university. *Bildung* is, I think, present in their scholarship as well, certainly in their historical work, though others will have to determine its influence on their analyses of Judaism and philosophy. Intellectually they were as a group after all not as isolated from outside influences as seemed to be the case. For example, Robert Weltsch wrote hopefully as early as 1913, that in these last years the influence of Ahad Ha'am had become ever more crucial among western Zionists, and he went on to compare his ethical imperatives to those of Fichte: The people must be ripe morally and spiritually for the great national undertaking. Hans Kohn, who all his life clung to the rationalism of the enlightenment, saw rather surprisingly in A. D. Gordon a kindred spirit who rejected all force or military action in the building of the new nation, and edited a book on nationalism together with him. But even so, the influence of the Central European intellectuals upon the new university was direct and decisive, though they did not always succeed in their aims.

There was no dispute among these men that the Hebrew University should be foremost a Jewish institution, and they saw the use of Hebrew as an all-important proof of this fact. However, they were on the whole not in favor of starting the University with a series of research institutes, as Chaim Weizman had suggested. Hugo Bergman, for example, librarian and later rector of the University, was keen on outreach: the philosophical faculty should lay the groundwork for a *Volkshochschule*—an adult education program through university extension. The university was conceived as the pinnacle of a general educational enterprise directed by the humanities. Certainly, there are echoes here not only of *Bildung* but of their effort to create support for a humanized nationalism. Their own scholarship departed from the traditional German model in that it was not disguised as impartial and value free, but had a definite aim: they wanted to change the national conscience of the homeland in which they lived. The aim of these intellectuals, starting with Buber's Prague speeches and throughout their later Zionist activity in Palestine, was summed up by Hans Kohn in a letter of 1929 voicing his disappointment with the course which Zionism was taking: the establishment of a Jewish community in Palestine could not constitute an end in itself, it was merely the necessary means to bring about the renaissance of Judaism and the rekindling of its creative individuality. This was certainly different from the view of nationalism as a belief system or as a haven providing security and shelter for the homeless and dispossessed.

By contrast there was to be relatively little open-endedness at their university. The strictest standards of German scholarship were applied from the beginning. Since these standards continue to prevail, they have made the Humanities at the Hebrew University until very recently singularly immune to changing academic fashions. Deconstructionism or even psychohistory, for example, has only recently found a foothold there, and even Michel Foucault has not exercised the dominance which he has gained elsewhere. This scholarly conservatism erected a barrier against fashionable academic movements which have at times influenced universities in the United States. Still, Central European intellectuals could balance rigorous scholarship with advocacy; indeed their Zionist ideals were reinforced and to some extent controlled by their scholarship. This may well be a unique phenomenon.

The negative side of these standards, this conservatism, meant keeping out some exciting innovations and new approaches especially in the Humanities. This has, as I see it, been truer in some departments of the University than others—for example, the new social history has made inroads and so has an anthropological approach. When I first came to the Hebrew University in the 1960s, sole reliance on the archives was still the acid test of historical scholarship. Jacob Talmon's more daring scholarship was regarded with some suspicion by members of this group, especially since his kind of cultural history came from a different, English tradition, more Oxford than Berlin.

A lively debate about the actual structure of the university took place at its founding, and French models like the Collège de France, and English

models as well, were proposed, before a modified German model was adopted. This was to be an *Ordinarien Universität*, a place where in fact, each professor ruled over his own kingdom. Moreover, academic discipline was important to many of them. Hugo Bergman in 1928, for example, demanded a strict system of examinations and regular control over the student's academic progress. Since many of them came from a Germanic background, this system was congenial, though such a departmental structure had also prevailed for some time in the United States. This organizational form held at the Hebrew University until some time after the Second World War, lasting longest in the Humanities. This meant that individuals could put their stamp upon whole departments. Eventually, American influences among others would serve to undermine this structure, until today it would no longer be correct to describe even the structure of the Humanities in this manner.

There was an obvious contradiction between the support of authoritarian structures in education and the open-endedness, individualism, and self cultivation which the original ideal of *Bildung* had advocated. Yet it is important to note that these Central European intellectuals did not follow the evolution of *Bildung* as it had taken place in Germany: they attempted to keep their liberalism and commitment to the classical concept of *Bildung* intact. They believed that the structure of the University did not affect the intrinsic values which they attributed to their Zionism. However, in Central Europe itself the opposite was the case, where an authoritarian educational structure served to support and further an authoritarian cast of mind, and with it a more extreme nationalism. And yet it was an undoubted weakness of these Central European Jewish intellectuals that they were scarcely concerned with political structures, apart from general support for Parliamentary government if not always for the chaos of political parties.

Cultural nationalism was an important aspect of the Zionism which these men espoused. But their specific background gave them their own framework for an approach to the university as well as to Zionism. This led to their growing disillusionment with Zionist reality while maintaining their own outlook upon the nation and politics. The contribution of these intellectuals to scholarship cannot be doubted, nor can their contribution to the Hebrew University. But beyond this I would mention two more spheres of influence, one impossible to grasp with any precision, the other utopian rather than realistic.

They furthered a certain intellectual atmosphere which was continued by their students, many of whom became teachers at the university and in high schools throughout the country. They contributed to an atmosphere of intellectualism which meshed, and in many instances overlapped, with that which came to Palestine from Eastern Europe. These Central European intellectuals in their very isolation produced an exciting intellectual milieu which spread beyond their group. Secondly, their approach to Zionism, though once again also found in others who came to Palestine, was a serious and conscious attempt to solve the dilemma of a nationalist commitment while at the same time retaining a belief



in cosmopolitanism, liberalism, and compromise. They repeated A. D. Gordon's phrase "a human people" in order to describe their Jewish vision. They advocated a German tradition and, with the exception of the university's structure, maintained its enlightened aspect while refusing to follow its descent into aggression and into the arms of a narrow parochial culture.

As these Central European intellectuals lived on into the post-war world they were haunted by their failure as far as the Zionist movement itself was concerned, even though their dream of a Hebrew University had been realized beyond all expectation and was a source of continual pride. Perhaps we should remember what they themselves often forgot, namely that *Bildung* like the Zionism they advocated should be open-ended, and therefore provide hope for the future.

## ***A New Scholarly Colony in Jerusalem: The Early History of Jewish Studies at the Hebrew University***

DAVID N. MYERS

MORE THAN SEVENTY YEARS AGO, IN ONE OF THE GRAND capitals of the Middle East, a new university was inaugurated. Bearing the name of a great civilization, this university stood as testimony to the efforts of dedicated and earnest men from the Occident (and here the gender-specific language is intended), individuals possessed of a missionary zeal to bring enlightenment, culture, and new standards of academic excellence to the barren shores of the Orient. Their stated aim was not the imposition of Western values but rather a more harmonious convergence of diverse traditions and peoples. The words of the institution's American president attest to this noble ideal: "the University does not have the negative aim of tearing her students from the formal affiliations and ceremonies of the ancient East, but rather the positive aim of sharing with them the spiritual experience of the growing West. The institution forms a link between East and West; a channel for the exchange of ideas between the two."<sup>1</sup>

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