Political Theologies in the Holy Land

Israeli messianism and its critics

David Ohana

Political Theologies in the Holy Land

This book examines the role of messianism in Zionist ideology, from the birth of the Zionist movement through to the present. Is shows how messianism is not just a religious or philosophical term but a very tangible political practice and theology which has shaped Israeli identity.

The author explores key issues such as:

- the current presence of messianism in the Israeli public sphere and the debates with jewish settlers in the occupied territories after the 1967 war
- the difference between transcendental messianism and promethean messianism
- the disparity between the political ideology and political practice in the history of Israel
- the evolution of the messianic idea in the actions of David Ben-Gurion
- the debate between Martin Buber, Gershom Scholem, Isaiah Leibowitz, J. L. Talmon and other intellectual figures with Ben-Gurion
- the implications of political theology and the presence of messianic ideas in Israeli politics.

As the first book to examine the messianism in Israeli debate since the creation of the Israeli state, it will be particularly relevant for students and scholars of Political Science, modern intellectual history, Israel studies, Judaism and messianism.

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Israeli Messianism and Its Critics

David Ohana

To Aviezer Ravitzky
With friendship and admiration

The Messiah has not yet come, and I do not hope for a Messiah who will come. As soon as the Messiah comes, he ceases to be the Messiah. When you can find the Messiah's address in the telephone book he is no longer the Messiah. The greatness of the Messiah is that his address is not known and one cannot reach him, and one does not know in which car he is traveling or whether he travels by car at all or rides on an ass or is carried on eagle's wings. But a Messiah is needed in order that he will not come, for the days of the Messiah are more important than the Messiah, and the Jewish people lives in the days of the Messiah, expects the days of the Messiah, believes in the days of the Messiah, and that is one of the main reasons for the existence of the Jewish people.

David Ben-Gurion at a meeting with writers, 11.10.1949

Contents

Foreword

There is no such thing as political theology. There are only political theologies in different national societies. In Zionism, the national movement of the Jewish people in the modern age, there have been four main phases of political theology. The first phase appeared with the writings, speeches and confessions of many of the founders and initial supporters of Zionism, who saw it as a secular and universal form of Messianism, similar to romantic national movements in Europe. The second phase arose in Palestine in the 1920s and 1930s, when Rabbi Avraham Yitzhak Hacohen Kook (1865–1935), chief rabbi of Palestine, developed a Messianic political theology that in a dialectical manner mobilized socialist secularism for the purpose of establishing a renewed Jewish independence. The third phase arose in 1948 with the establishment of the State of Israel, the "Third Temple," which religious thinkers (and David Ben-Gurion) described as "the first flowering of our redemption." The fourth phase appeared in 1967 after the Six-Day War and the conquest of Greater Israel, with the Messianic euphoria that greeted the reunion of the theological with the military, and with the avant-garde activities of the Gush Emunim movement. *Political Theologies in the Holy Land: Israeli Messianism and Its Critics* examines these four manifestations of political theology: in the Zionist movement, in the State-in-the-making, in the state that had just been founded, and in the state after 1967.

Jewish intellectuals discussed these developments from the earliest days of Zionism, and Israeli intellectuals discussed them from the beginnings of Jewish settlement in Palestine at the turn of the twentieth century. They warned of the dangers lurking in the minefield in which the theological and the political came together, or, in the words of Jan Assman explaining the concept of political theology, in the "ever-changing relationships between political community and religious order, in short, between power [or authority: *Herrschaft*] and salvation [*Heil*]."[1]

In order to understand the different approaches of the intellectual groups that discussed the political theologies of Zionism and Israelism, I have followed the lead of the educationalist Akiva Ernst Simon (1899–1988), with his distinction between "Catholic" Judaism embracing all areas of life and "Protestant" Judaism which separates sacred and profane. Among the "Catholics"

were Jewish thinkers like Gershom Scholem (1897–1982), Martin Buber (1878–1965), and obviously Rabbi Kook, who were strongly attracted to the Messianic phenomenon, although they warned of its consequences in the sphere of practical politics. Buber and Scholem were ambivalent about political theology already in the 1920s, first in Europe and later in Palestine. Among the "Protestants" were Akiva Ernst Simon, the cultural critic Baruch Kurzweil (1907–72) and the scientist and philosopher Isaiah Leibowitz (1903–94). These were Orthodox Jewish thinkers who warned against mixing the sacred with the profane. A third group comprised secular thinkers like the historians J. L. Talmon, Joshua Arieli, and Uriel Tal, and the philosopher Natan Rotenstreich, who made a difference between Pope and Caesar, the kingdom of heaven and everyday politics. They were hostile to an unholy synthesis of religion, the realization of its metaphysical hopes in the present and its manifestations in contemporary politics. But there were also secular intellectuals such as Israel Eldad (1910–66), who combined the Messianic and the secular. These various outlooks among secular and religious thinkers prove that there are only variants of political theology.

The concept of political theology was an old one which made its appearance with Marcus Terentius Varro (116–27 BCE), but the modern discourse on the subject only began with the appearance of Carl Schmitt's *Politische Theologie* (Political theology) and Walter Benjamin's early articles.[2] Eminent thinkers like Leo Strauss, Ernst Cassirer, Ernst Bloch, Karl Löwith, Erich Voeglin, Hans Jonas, Ernst Kantorowicz, Jacob Taubes, Jacques Derrida, and Giorgio Agamben engaged in a fascinating discussion of the subject, and in so doing cast a new light on major political events of the modern age.[3]

In 1919–20, Schmitt participated in a seminar held by Max Weber in Munich, and later contributed a paper to the *Festschrift* of the great sociologist together with the Freiburg philosopher of law Ernst Kantorowicz. The article became the basis of Schmitt's famous book *Politische Theologie*, in which he abandoned neo-Kantian concepts of "supreme law" and "righteousness" in favor of modern Hobbesian formulas. He claimed that a legal theory has to relate to contemporary social and political conditions and that the "concrete situation," as he called it, took precedence over abstract constructions. Schmitt's thesis was that the modern secular constitutional state had lost its theological foundations. The strengthening of the state comes about through a strengthening of theology, and political theology is a challenge to the Enlightenment and an attempt to overcome the crisis of liberalism by finding a substitute for the political order. In Schmitt's opinion, political liberalism failed to take into account exceptional situations of danger and war that lie outside the normal legislative framework. Thus, one must ask, in what situations is the existence of the state endangered as a result of political or economic crisis? Who is the ruler in a state of chaos? The ruling power is no longer to be found in norms, in the people or in legislation, but in a person or group capable of achieving a situation of *Entscheidung* and setting up a dictatorship. The danger reflects the crisis of legitimacy of

modernity resulting from secularization, as we can see, for example, from the works of Hans Blumenberg and Jürgen Habermas.[4] This was also the problem of Zionism when it arose and of the State of Israel when it was established. What would provide a new legitimization after the disappearance of religious authority?

Was the secular Messianism – "that apocalyptic path," as Scholem called it – a vision of political philosophers or a political theology?[5] Does the assumption of the historian Mark Lilla – "we find it incomprehensible that theological ideas still stir up messianic passions, living societies in ruins" – stand on solid ground?[6] These shifting interrelationships between the theological and the political had concerned German and French thinkers who studied twentieth-century political-religious thought. In Protestant tradition, the criticism of the split between theology and politics was the result of wrestling with the historical heritage of this division, and especially with that of the "two realms" in Augustine's teachings and the idea of the "two swords" (first formulated by pope Gelasius, 492–96) of the Middle Ages.

Humanist scholars of religion like Scholem, Simon, and Martin Buber were close to the theological-political tradition. They were concerned that modern society in its secularism had lost all sense of the relationship between the sacred and the profane, between morality, religion, and practical life. Uriel Tal has observed: "Modern man's sense of moral responsibility is based on the believing man's imperatives on the one hand and on the hope of a redemption which will come about in this world, in society, in the state, on the other."[7] Walter Benjamin, for his part, considered the dialectical affinity between the secular, political hope of liberation and the religious and Messianic hope of redemption. Tal described the challenge posed by theology as follows: "On the one hand it requires one to take up a position with regard to political and social affairs, and on the other hand, because its authority is metaphysical and thus absolute, there is a danger that adopting such a position will sanctify politics. Religion is liable to encroach on politics and politics is liable to encroach on religion."[8]

David Ben-Gurion, the founder of the Israeli state and the first prime minister, on the one hand and Rabbi Kook on the other are good examples of different varieties of political theology. In some ways, they were on opposite sides of the fence. The former, a political leader, did not hesitate to appropriate the sacred, to mobilize hallowed myths and to harness them to the task of building the state; the latter, a religious mentor, did not hesitate to appropriate the profane, to mobilize Zionist pioneers and to harness them to mystical speculations concerning the coming of the Messiah. Each had an essentially different starting-point from the other, but the common denominator between them was the raising of the profane to the level of the sacred: the ploughman became a sacred vessel of Judaism and a central element in the process of redemption. For a short while there was a kind of meeting between these two opposite outlooks, but from that time onwards their paths again divided. Rabbi Kook turned towards transcendental Messianism, which

relied on the Ruler of the Universe, and Ben-Gurion turned towards Pro-
methean Messianism, which relied on the sovereignty of man. In both cases
there was a definite fusion between the world of the sacred and the world of
the profane, and both men had a clear political theology, but Ben-Gurion was
the most extreme expression of secular Messianism and worked for a politi-
cization of the theological, while Rabbi Kook was the most extreme expres-
sion of religious Messianism and worked for a theologization of politics.[9]

In founding the state, Ben-Gurion had made the most significant attempt at
nationalizing the Jewish Messianic concept. Zionism was a historical experi-
ment in nationalizing religious concepts and metamorphosing them into the
secular sphere. Ben-Gurion brought the matter to its ultimate conclusion in
his attempt to nationalize the Bible and Messianism. *Mamlachtiut* (etatism),
Ben-Gurion's act of nationalization in many spheres of life, was a broad,
comprehensive and multifaceted secular ideology which took hold of religious
myths and harnessed them to a project of statehood.

In the middle, between Rabbi Kook and Ben-Gurion, were the religious
and secular intellectuals who were repelled by the political theologies of both
these giants. The religious intellectuals saw the theo-political detonator which
the Messianic idea was likely to become. They preceded the secular intellec-
tuals and warned at an early stage against Ben-Gurion's Messianic vision
because this challenge had been imposed on them even earlier when they were
exposed to the explosive interlacing of worlds in the political theology of
Rabbi Kook. They had been there before: they felt that Ben-Gurion was
playing with fire, and the fact that this did not frighten him did not make it
any less dangerous.

At the beginning of the period of *Mamlachtiut*, three essays appeared by
orthodox intellectuals concerning the danger of mixing the theological and
the political. The three articles were published in successive years. They were
Akiva Ernst Simon's "Are We Still Jews?" (1951), Baruch Kurzweil's "The
Nature and Origins of the 'Young Hebrew' ('Canaanite') Movement" (1952),
and Isaiah Leibowitz's "After Kibiyeh" (1953).[10] In all three articles, religious
thinkers warned against the bear hug in which the new Israeli nationalism
held the sacred tongue; they warned of the radical effects of the Israeli
national secularism which extended even to Canaanism and thus expressed
the fear of a rise of a "territorial" or "Canaanite" Messianism.

"Canaanism" and "Messianism" are, on the face of it, opposites.
"Canaanism" is a national, geo-cultural ideology in which a certain piece of
land defines the collective identity of its inhabitants; "Messianism" is a reli-
gious belief that at the end of history "all human contradictions will be
resolved." "Canaanism" is a secular concept based on a nativistic myth;
"Messianism" is founded on non-human and ahistorical laws. "Canaanism"
embodies the physical basis, the place; "Messianism" represents the meta-
physical basis, "the Place" (i.e. God). "Canaanism" promoted Hebraism as a
territorial nationalism, while "Messianism" laid emphasis on the universality
of the Jewish religion. However, the rise of Gush Emunim after the Yom

Kippur War in 1973 introduced a new type of political theology that could be called "Canaanite Messianism."

The Messianic idea, with its promises and dangers, has nourished social and national movements throughout history, but, as Scholem has observed: "Despite the many studies that have been made of the Messianic idea, there is still room for a more penetrating analysis of the reasons for the special vitality of this vision in the history of the Jewish religion."[11] The book *Political Theologies in the Holy Land: Israeli Messianism and Its Critics* makes a thorough examination of the vitality and the problematics connected with this idea in the period *after* the establishment of modern Jewish political independence.

The prayer for the peace of the State, in which the State of Israel is described as "the first flowering of our redemption," was written by Shai Agnon (1888–1970), the Israeli writer who was awarded the Nobel Prize, at the request of the chief rabbi at the time, Rabbi Yitzhak Herzog. This association of the ancient Jewish yearning with the modern Jewish national movement was not, however, limited to prayers. The political-theological discourse passed beyond the sphere of religious belief and took place concurrently with the secular discourse, and both of them were lively debates on the significance of the new Israeli *Mamlachtiut* and its affinity with the religious tradition in general and the Messianic tradition in particular.

The story-behind-the-scenes of the metamorphoses of the expression *Tsur Israel* ("The Rock of Israel") in the Scroll of Independence is a fascinating one. Three weeks before the State was declared, Pinhas Rosen, head of the Judicial Council and the first Minister of Justice, asked the young jurist Mordechai Beham to make a rough draft of the Declaration of Independence. The lawyer, who had no experience of national legislation or of drafting national declarations, went to consult the conservative rabbi Dr. Shalom Zvi Davidowitz, a translator of Shakespeare and a commentator of Maimonides. "The meeting of the two," related law professor Yoram Shahar, who investigated the genealogy of the declaration,

> produced the most religious formulation to be found in any of the drafts. The right of the Jewish people to the land, it proclaimed, derived from the divine promise to the Fathers of the Nation. But after that, the further away Beham went from Davidowitz, the more the declaration took on a secularist coloring. The divine promise was toned down owing to historical, political and moral considerations … The only remaining reference to divine intervention was the expression "Rock of Israel."[12]

The "Rock of Israel" was the Israeli–Jewish version of the concept "Divine Providence," to be found in the American Declaration of Independence. After many changes and recasting, Ben-Gurion took over the formulation with Moshe Sharett (1894–1965), the minister for foreign affairs, Aaron Zisling (1901–64), of the leftist party Mapam, and Rabbi Judah Lieb Hacohen

Fishman Maimon (1875–1962).[13] Zisling asked for the expression to be taken out of the declaration, and Maimon wanted to say, "The Rock of Israel and its Redeemer." In the end, Ben-Gurion left the expression as it was. For the secularists, it symbolized the historical-cultural continuity of the Jewish people, and for the religious it referred to the Holy One, Blessed be He. From the moment the State was founded, there was an accelerated struggle over the significance of political theology within Israeli Mamlachtiut: hence the attempt to impose the political on the theological, and hence the political principle trying to bear hug the theological.

The founding of a modern state was never accompanied with such a ferment of ideological dreams, existential fears and Messianic hopes as was the case with the State of Israel. In the nature of things, the political renewal of the people after nearly two millennia gave rise to many expectations, some of them contradictory. The Israeli intellectuals, as the élite which produced the public discourse, accompanied the establishment of the State of Israel with reflections on the nature of a Jewish state and the meaning of the different political theologies. This matter preoccupied both the secular and the religious intellectuals, and was reflected in questions such as: Are we still Jews? Have we already become Canaanites? What does the Messianic vision mean to the young Israelis? The questions exposed crucial and deep controversies within the Jewish modern political theology, which is a special intellectual current within political philosophy. It is in this perspective I wish to explore the complex interconnections between Jewish theological thought, the Israeli political reality, and the universalist ideas of Enlightenment and its enemies.

Acknowledgements

1 The rise of secular Messianism

Messianism is essentially a belief in the perfection of man at the end of days, in a decisive and radical improvement that will take place in the condition of humanity, society and the world, in a final and complete resolution of history. Unlike the cyclical conceptions of time in classical and Eastern cultures, the Messianic conception of time envisaged a revolutionary change of order leading all at once to the Messianic future, or a linear progress of time from the imperfect present to a better state. This was an entirely new and utopian scheme, though it was sometimes viewed as a return to a golden age in the past (a "restorative utopia," to use Gershom Scholem's expression, as in "restore our days as of old").[1] The idea of the perfection of man at the end of days lies at the heart of the Messianic conception.

Judaism and Christianity had different approaches to Messianism and consequently to the idea of redemption. The various currents in historical Judaism saw redemption as a manifestation which takes place in the public sphere and in the arena of history, while Christian theology, with its stress on sin and atonement, saw it as the personal salvation of the individual. Christianity was essentially hostile to all movements of political Messianism because they declared that they had come to replace it. Their preaching of national or universal redemption and their vision of history moving towards a redemptive climax in which all social contradictions would be resolved in one revolutionary act were in contradiction to the Christian conception of history as a process of decline.[2] In a similar way, Martin Buber, the philosopher of *I and Thou*, saw the Messianic urge as a desire to resolve tensions, oppositions, and contradictions: "The world we live in is always full of fierce oppositions and always aspires to redemption."[3]

One of the basic forms of the Messianic idea assumes that the end of the human race will resemble its beginning. According to this view, when man started out he lived in harmony. In the course of time this harmony was disrupted for one reason or another, but in the future history promises an inevitable return to a peaceable garden of Eden in which all oppositions will be eliminated and all contradictions resolved in a final and decisive manner. The quasi-religious cast of the secular philosophy of the eighteenth century decreed that human contradictions are the outcome of man's sinful history

and will finally be swallowed up in the womb of a new and harmonious history.

What are the differences between ancient Messianism and modern Messianism? The religious Messianic movements and manifestations of ancient times ended with the abandonment of society and the creation of exclusive sects; the Messianism of our time seeks to bring about a revolution in society. The Christian revolutionaries owed allegiance to the Lord of the Universe and refused to recognize the rule of man; modern Messianism recognizes only human reason and seeks to achieve universal happiness within history in the here and now. The Christian revolutionaries, apart from the Calvinists and Anabaptists, recoiled from the use of force; secular Messianism tries to reach the absolute by all possible means. The dichotomy of the heavenly kingdom and the worldly kingdom facilitated the spread of religious Messianism; the monism of secular Messianism is free from this religious dichotomy and from spiritual inhibitions, and demands an immediate on-the-spot settling of accounts.[4]

Judaism was not originally a Messianic religion. Only gradually did the Messianic faith cease to be a marginal concern and gain a central position during the darker phases of Jewish history in Israel and the diaspora. The Messianic hope became a refuge from exile, from religious persecution, from destruction and oppression. The Messianic faith represented a hope of national or universal redemption which appeared in particular historical situations. Jewish Messianism has been described as a multi-storied building to which many spiritual, universal, cosmic, philosophical, and mystical levels had been added, and each floor changed the character of the previous floors. The tension between Jewish existence and Jewish Messianism resulted in moments of historical movement towards Messianism and movement away from Messianism.[5]

The Jewish presence in general history could be demonstrated by revealing the Messianic principle in Judaism and its contribution to universal history. The Jewish idea of Providence overseeing history and moving it towards a redemptive solution nurtured the revolutionary potential of the radical end-time movements which sought to achieve the kingdom of God within history.

Jean-Paul Sartre, who passed away in 1980, acknowledged in his final interview that Judaism's special contribution to the world was Messianism:

> What intrigues me is the objective which every Jew adheres to consciously or unconsciously, and which ought finally to unite mankind. It is an end in the social and religious sense, which is only to be found in the Jewish people. For me, Messianism is something important which only the Jews conceived of, which can also be used by non-Jews for additional moral purposes. What do we expect from a revolution? The disappearance of the present society and its replacement by a juster society … . This idea of the final end of a revolution is Messianism, so to speak.[6]

This perception of Sartre's bears a surprising resemblance to that of another Frenchman, Henri Saint-Simon (1760–1825), founder of the "Saint-Simonian" movement about a hundred and fifty years earlier. The beginning of political Messianism may be traced to Saint-Simon and to the Saint-Simonian movement and its Jewish members. Saint-Simon, the first socialist prophet and the figure whom Michelet called "the most audacious thinker of the nineteenth century," was the person who identified the vision of the redemption of mankind with the Jewish Messianic message:

> The chosen people of God, which received revelation before the appearance of Jesus, the people which has spread most widely over the whole world, has always felt that the Christian religion, founded by the Fathers of the Church, was incomplete. This people has always maintained that a great age will arrive, to which they have given the name of Messianic, an age when the religious doctrine will be set forth in the most universal terms of which it is capable, when it will govern the actions both of the temporal and of the spiritual power, and every human race will have the same religion and the same organization.[7]

The idea of the redemption of mankind, carried by the revolutionary ideologies of the nineteenth century, authorized a relativisation of values: there was a sanctification of the Messianic end at the expense of the means. This historical relativity and relativity of values was a source of inspiration and a temptation for all the political Messianic movements of the right and left which declared that they were the oracles of history, the spearhead of a class or a nation, and thus had the right and the duty to thrust the wagon of history forward and to throw on the refuse heap anything that stood in the way. The problematic nature of this phenomenon did not trouble Jewish political thinking unduly in the past, as it did not become real for the Jews until the birth of Zionism. However, in the era after the meta-narratives of modernism (nationalism, fascism, and communism), a feeling of skepticism towards Messianic politics arose. It was a reaction to the political theories which can be traced to Hegel. Hegelianism stressed impersonal idealism and the centrality of collective values. The source of the dialectic of ends and means was the Hegelian philosophy: the State or some revolutionary element strives to impose the realization of the historical objective as a bulldozer crushes delicate flowers in its path, to use Hegel's own image.

One can extrapolate from the Nietzschean dialectic of the apollonian principle, which organizes and makes order, and the dionysian principle, which is creative and chaotic, a mutual relationship between the Messianic-harmonic principle and the destructive principle. Gershom Scholem already perceived that "all radical Messianism, if taken seriously, opens up a chasm in which, through an inner necessity, antinomian outlooks and anarchic moral attitudes accumulate."[8] J. L. Talmon (1916–80), the Israeli historian from the Hebrew University and the author of *Political Messianism*, revealed destruction as the

other side of redemption, the apocalyptic ruin from which a cleansed and reformed world was supposed to spring forth.

In Messianism there is a discrepancy between the absolute and the complete and the attempt to achieve it, which involves the destruction of all that is not part of it; the hope of redemption is fulfilled at the cost of the elimination of all incompatibilities in human existence. Three such incompatibilities can be discerned: that of liberty with equality, that of private property with the organization of the collective, and that of the freedom of the individual with historical determinism. The Messianic ideologies wished to reconcile these differences.

Zionism: from transcendental Messianism to Promethean Messianism

The rise of Zionism was a turning-point in the transition from transcendental Messianism to Promethean Messianism. From the time of the Bar-Kochba revolt of 132 CE – the last act representing a fusion of Jewish sovereignty and the Messianic vision before the exile – until the appearance of Zionism, the faith of many Jews for nearly two millennia was characterized by what might be termed a "transcendental Messianism." In this form of Messianism, redemption was made dependent on a supernatural authority and the end of history was postponed. The concept of redemption was unconnected with the will or actions of men. The historical process was seen in an apocalyptic and ahistorical perspective. The end of history in this context was an event that was hidden, from the human point of view, but also predetermined.[9] The limited function of the Jew in the Middle Ages was to be content with hastening the redemption, but the redemption itself was in the hands of the kingdom of heaven. This situation was to change in the modern era, although the change did not take place overnight.

Was it a good thing for the Jews to "anticipate the end" and accelerate the coming of the Messiah? Could they carry the vision of the end of days on their weak shoulders and truly bring it to pass? Did the Messianic era depend on human actions? the Israeli philosopher Eliezer Schweid, the scholar of Jewish philosophy, enumerated three approaches to this question. The first approach is deterministic: that is to say, all is predetermined. According to the second approach, the time of redemption is not predetermined and will be fixed only when the people of Israel is worthy of redemption. According to the third approach, the coming of the Messiah will take place at the fixed time in any event, but if the people of Israel shows itself worthy, it can accelerate the redemption. The majority opinion favored the two last approaches, and according to these the Jews can hasten the coming of the Messiah by their actions. The Bar-Kochba revolt was the watershed with regard to the physical or active approach to Messianism. From the days of the Hasmoneans to Bar-Kochba, the rebellions against foreign rule reflected an active political and military approach to bringing about redemption. After the failure of the revolt, there was a prohibition against rebelling and

"mounting the ramparts." In the meantime, the Jews had to remain under the decree of exile.[10] The Bar-Kochba revolt, the fifth and last Messianic initiative, gave birth to the passive Messianic faith of the middle Ages.

Thus, the history of the Jews is unique. The late historian and sociologist Jacob Katz (1904–98) is of the opinion that, unlike other peoples who were exiled and then assimilated, in many Jewish communities of the diaspora the consciousness of redemption was introverted. It was precisely their Messianism that in many cases caused their separateness in exile and at the same was a result of it; the expectation of redemption nourished this separateness and the separateness deepened the expectation of returning to Zion. This dependence of Jewish Messianism distinguishes it from other kinds of Messianism, including the Christian Messianism. Another peculiarity of Jewish Messianism was its relationship to historical fact: at a certain point in the past the Jews had independence, and the hope of the Jews with self-awareness was to "renew their days as of old." The paradox is that, owing to the mythical memory, the exile served as a springboard for a Messianic future.[11]

The human actions given importance by the Jews in the Middle Ages were spiritual or ritualistic in nature. In addition to kabbalistic practices and the observance of precepts as actions which could hasten the redemption, there were public initiatives for this purpose. One can find examples such as the attempt by the sages of Safed to renew the Sanhedrin, the supreme religious and legislative establishment in ancient Israel, as a first step towards this end; the wave of mass weddings in 1666 aimed at fulfilling a Talmudic requirement by Shabbetai Zevi (1626–76), self-claimed Jewish Messiah who later converted to Islam; and the attempt by Zvi Hirsch Kalischer (1795–1874), an Orthodox German rabbi and one of the early pioneers of Jewish nationalism in Germany, before the period of Zionism, to renew the sacrifices on the Temple Mount. Sabbetaianism, however, was the most daring and ambitious attempt to rouse the Jews from their passivity.

Zionism – the revolt against the decree of exile – sprang up within it at the time of the nineteenth-century revolutionary ideologies, which were filled with a Promethean Messianism. In this form of Messianism, redemption was not passive or deterministic but was carried by a modern individual who prepared himself and his circle and claimed to form a total world within a partial reality. In the Promethean Messianism, it was human action which brought about redemption. The Israeli thinker Shalom Rosenberg draws attention to Maimonides' (1138–1204) contribution to this modern Jewish consciousness, based on a rejection of the cosmic principle in the vision of redemption. This rejection permits one to see the Messianic era as a historical happening subject to the laws of nature. Maimonides understood the transition to the Messianic era at the end of days as something achieved by rational means. This rationalization of the Messianic process had a great influence on the pre-Zionist consciousness. As a result, the Jewish medieval poet Judah Halevi (1075–1141), for example, called for the Messiah to be awaited in Eretz-Israel (Palestine).[12] The linking of the Messianic outlook to the historical political

principle was accomplished via Maimonides. Jewish sages like Yitzhak Abravanel (1437–1508) and Menasseh ben Israel (1604–57) were concerned with a historical political Messianism built on the basis laid by Maimonides.[13]

The era of the European Enlightenment marked the end of the passive eschatology. In September 1784, the Jewish-German philsopher Moses Men>delssohn (1729–86), to whose ideas the renaissance of European Jews is indebted, was the first to answer the question "What is Enlightenment?" put by the German journal *Berliner Monatsschrift*. He thought that the task of the Enlightenment was to create a necessary correlation between man-as-man and man-as-citizen. Man-as-man, he claimed, does not need culture (*Kultur*), but he needs Enlightenment (*Aufklärung*). The Scottish Enlightenment was chiefly concerned with morality, the French with politics, and the German with learning (*Bildung*) and culture. Four months later, Emmanuel Kant, writing in this journal, gave the following definition of the Enlightenment: "Sapere aude" ("Have the courage to use your mind!"). This was a kind of motto for the Enlightenment, and the definition made Kant one of the first thinkers to distinguish between Enlightenment – moving beyond immaturity through the use of one's mind without the guidance of another person – and modernity: the struggle for self-determination.

In the view of the eighteenth-century Enlightenment, one's social situation, cultural background, and legal status hampered the spread of reason among humanity. The Church, economic backwardness, poverty, and degeneracy combined to prevent the spread of reason. The power of religions derived from their transcendental and supernatural justification, which meant placing Messianic faith and salvation above critical rationality. Modernity sought to give science rather than God the crown of divine Providence. The challenge of modernity is identified with rationalization, whose real meaning was the destruction of all previous social relationships, which received their justification from non-rational elements: status, preferential treatment, blood-ties, inheritance, and the like. Rationalization was the tool of modernity; it was not a special category or a social class but universal reason which laid the path of historical development. Modernization was not the achievement of an enlightened despot, a popular revolution, or a ruling class but was brought about by reason embodied in science, in technology, in education and civic equality.

The granting of citizenship to the Jews in post-emancipation Europe in practice ended the situation of exile. With the emancipation, the Jews were asked to renounce the Messianic expectation. Moses Mendelssohn took the second step in quitting Messianism and entering history: the first had already been taken by Maimonides. A more radical view was adopted by four intellectuals of the *Haskalah* (The Jewish intellectual movement in Europe in the Enlightenment era) at the end of the eighteenth century: David Friedländer (1750–1834), who was one of Mendelssohn's disciples, Solomon Maimon (1754–1800) the critic of Maimonides' *Guide for the Perplexed* (*Moreh*

Nevuchim), Saul Ascher (1767–1822), and Lazarus Ben-David (1762–1832).[14] Basing himself on a minority opinion given in the Talmud limiting Messianic activity to the biblical period, Lazarus Ben-David, a German Kantian philosopher and reformer, concluded that the Jewish religion could henceforth exist without the Messianic expectation, which had been realized in the era of the Enlightenment by the rulers of states. Because it was not possible to abandon the ancient Messianic faith completely, all that could be done was to give it a new meaning. Although the emancipation had been given a Messianic significance, many people refused to jettison their future connection to national redemption.

The forerunners of modern Zionism Judah Hai Alkalai (1798–1878) and his German counterpart Zvi Hirsch Kalischer (1796–1874) foreshadowed many of the Zionist themes. They saw emancipation as the beginning of redemption. The liberation of Jewish individuals was a step on the way to Jewish collective national liberation. In this they were traditionalist heralds of modern Jewish nationalism. This was a new development in Jewish thought which permitted and even demanded the realization of the Messianic vision by means of human actions. From here the way was open to a revolutionary transition from a transcendental Messianism to a Promethean Messianism which was essentially a human atomization of redemption. It was Jews with a modern consciousness who were now to spur on the Messianic project by means of settlement in Eretz-Israel as well – means intended to bring nearer the Messianic goal.

It was the Jews who gave the idea of election to the world. However, the politicization of Jewish Messianism was the result of foreign influences. All the historical declarations of Zionist philosophy were made following the triumphs of national movements. Thus, Rabbi Alkalai advocated Jewish settlement of the Land of Israel under the inspiration of the Greek War of Independence and the rise of Serbian nationalism. *Rome and Jerusalem*, the work of Moses Hess (1812–75), a secular Jewish philosopher and one of the forerunners of socialist thought, was written under the influence of the unification of Italy. The Russian scholar and author Moshe Leib Lilienblum (1843–1910) called for a Jewish revival following the Hungarian national revival and Zionist activist Leo Pinsker's famous publication *Auto-Emancipation*, in which he urged the Jewish people to strive for independence and national consciousness, was written against the background of the founding of the Kingdom of Bulgaria. One therefore cannot understand the roots of Zionism without understanding the mutual relationship between the Messianic self-perception of many Zionist circles, which wished to establish a "restorative utopia" in their historic homeland, and the political-Messianic intellectual climate of the national movements in Europe.

There were two concurrent national traditions in Jewish thought at the turn of the century. The Hebrew essayist and one of the greatest pre-state Zionist thinkers Ahad Ha-Am (1856–1927) (Asher Zvi Hirsch Ginsberg) was the outstanding representative of the national-historicistic school, which stressed

the contributions of past generations as builders of the road to the goal of national redemption in the best tradition of Western theories of progress. Nationalism, according to Ahad Ha-Am, also reflected the nineteenth-century European tradition which sought to combine a national mission with an aspiration to universality. To the "Third Rome" of Guiseppe Mazzini, which had a Messianic mission, to the Poland of Adam Mickiewitz, the "Christ among the nations," Adam Ha-Am added national morality as the universalistic mission of Jewish nationalism. Unlike them, he was fearful of romantic Messianic activism and he was likewise repelled by Herzl and his Messianism. His élitist disposition distanced him from the aspiration of Zionism to be a movement of the masses. After the Uganda crisis, Adam Ha-Am declared that those who supported political Zionism resembled the followers of Shabbetai Zevi and Jacob Frank (1726–91).

In contrast to Ahad Ha-Am, there was the existential, national-particularist, heroic, and aesthetic tradition of the Berdichevsky school of thought. The tradition of heroism in nineteenth-century European culture, which reached its apex in the writings of Thomas Carlyle, sanctioned the hero as the representative of the new type of man promoted by the nationalist movements at the beginning of the twentieth century. According to the Nietzschean essayist and radical culture critic Micha Joseph Berdichevsky (1865–1921), the tradition which sought to reconstruct the heroic national past wished to restore things to their pristine splendor, and he declared, "Zionism is the continuation of Messianism."[15]

Promethean Messianism is readily recognizable in the image, life, and writings of Theodor Herzl (1860–1904), the prophet of modern Zionism. David Litvak, the hero of *Altneuland* (1902), Herzl's famous Zionist utopia, explained to his guests that in the national revival the modern Jews "could not expect anything from miracle-workers and everything depended on their own efforts."[16] In Herzl there is the idea of a personal Messianic calling, which finds expression in a dream he had at the age of twelve: "The King-Messiah came, a very splendid and venerable old man, took me in his arms and carried me away on the wings of the wind … . The Messiah called out to Moses, 'I have prayed for this child!', and he said to me, 'Go and tell the Jews that I will soon be coming, and I shall perform miracles and wonders for my people and the whole world!"[17] The image of the Messiah continued to accompany Herzl wherever he went, whether in admiration or in derision. His opponents – liberals, Reform Jews, socialists, and Orthodox – viewed Zionism as a pseudo-Messianic movement; his friend Max Nordau (1849–1923), the Zionist leader and the co-founder of the World Zionist Organization, in his article "Zionism" (1902) dissociated himself from seeing an identity between Messianism and Zionism; Ahad Ha-Am accused him of "kindling a false flame," and others compared him to Shabbetai Zevi, the fourteenth-century false messiah David Reubeni, and the "New Christian" who converted back to Judaism, the self-declared Messiah Solomon Molcho (1500–32).

The Herzl legend is enveloped in a Messianic halo. Herzl internalized it to such a degree that he made a comparison between himself and Shabbetai Zevi: "The difference between me and Shabbetai Zevi as I imagine him, apart from developments in technical resources due to the difference in periods, is that Shabbetai Zevi raised himself up to resemble the great ones of the earth, while I find the great ones of the earth to be as small as I am."[18] Dr. Joseph Bloch warned him against the temptation of presenting himself as a Messiah, as all the Messiahs "had brought disastrous consequences upon the Jews." He said that as soon as a Messiah "puts on flesh and blood, he ceases to be a redeemer."[19] Herzl, however, did not trip up and did not cross the Sabbataian threshold. When King Victor Emmanuel the Third told Herzl, when they met in 1904, that one of his distant relatives had been connected with Shabbetai Zevi, and he asked if there were still any Jews expecting the Messiah, Herzl replied, "Naturally, Your Majesty, in the religious circles. In our own, the academically trained and enlightened circles, no such thought exists, of course … . Our movement is purely nationalist." Herzl added that on his journey to Palestine he refrained from riding on a donkey "so that no one would embarrass me by thinking I was the Messiah."[20]

Eretz-Israel as a Messianic laboratory

In Eretz-Israel (Ottoman and Mandatory Palestine), the pioneers brought the Messiah into the ploughed field, the ivory tower, the utopian imagination, the poet's sanctuary, and the Hebrew language. The self-image of the reviving Jewish community in Eretz-Israel came under the influence of the Messianic idea. The very ancient Messianic idea and the modern national consciousness came together in the pioneers' desire to take their fate into their own hands and to establish a national Home. For the secular pioneers, belief in historical necessity replaced the religious faith in the Divine Promise: they believed that the divine determinism could be accelerated by voluntary action. The settlement of Eretz-Israel awoke biblical images and Messianic associations from their slumbers. The first settlers tried to link their enterprise with the prophets' vision of the future, and settlements were given names like that of the first Jewish colony Petah-Tikva (Gateway to Hope) or Rishon-le-Zion (the First in Zion). Ezekiel's vision of the dry bones took on flesh and sinews in Eretz-Israel in the first third of the twentieth century.

Together with the settlement enterprise of the pioneers, there was the historiographical enterprise of the intellectuals of the Hebrew University. The historians Ben-Zion Dinur (1884–1973), Israel's first education minister, Yitzhak Baer (1888–1980), a major scholar of the Jews in medieval Spain, Joseph Klausner (1874–1958), who took an active part in the revival of the Hebrew language and was the first editor of the Hebrew Encyclopaedia, and Gershom Scholem, all investigated the development of the Messianic idea in Jewish thought and history. The academic interest in the subject bestowed a certain legitimacy on the Messianic discourse. The common factor between

the pioneering settlement and the academic investigation of Messianism was the secular nature of their interest and actions. Among the scholars, Scholem's comprehensive academic achievement stands out: he created a new research discipline with his investigation of Jewish mysticism and Kabbalah. This historical and philological examination of the Messianic idea cast a critical eye on Messianic thought in the history of the Jewish people. Yet, at the same time, although he recoiled from connecting the Messianic idea with actual history, his comprehensive investigation of the subject, the discussion it gave rise to, and his dominant personality provoked a Messianic discourse. Only from this point of view were Scholem and Ben-Gurion on the same side of the barricade: despite their warnings against mixing theology and politics, the thorough investigation of the Messianic vision, its language, and accomplishments had consequences for the public and academic discourse on the subject. In his article "Thoughts on the Possibility of a Jewish Mysticism in Our Days," Scholem went so far as to envisage a fusion of theology and politics: "Is there the possibility that in our development we are moving towards a dual path of the secular and sacred?"[21] In this perspective, the theologization of the political and the politicization of the theological do not appear incongruous.

A concern with the Messianic was not only to be found in the context of pioneering settlement and in the sphere of academic research. It was also the golden age of Eretz-Israel utopias. The utopia is one of the features of the Messianic enterprise. The first and second aliyot (waves of immigration), both of which believed in the historical necessity of the Jewish rebirth, were remarkable for their creation of utopian agendas for the future. Laboring Eretz-Israel served as the social laboratory for utopian experiments in the reality of history: *The Gdud Ha'avodah* (the "Labor Corps") and the *Hevrat Ha'ovdim* ("Workers' Society") are outstanding examples of the socialist utopian imagination and of audacity in applying it. Many utopian principles found expression in Eretz-Israel: return to the ancestral land, conquering the Holy Land through labor (which in itself was considered a redeeming value), the revival of the Hebrew language and culture. Other examples were the creation of the "new Hebrew," the various kinds of communal settlements and egalitarian communities, and the ethos of the "model State."[22]

In transcendental Messianism, the end of days comes about through supernatural means; in Promethean Messianism, the future of mankind is the work of flesh and blood. One should bear in mind that utopias as a literary genre only began to appear in the Renaissance with the decline of religious authority. Until then, the Great Ruler of the Universe ruled over the future of mankind and directed it. In the period of the Renaissance and afterwards, the utopias, despite their revolutionary character, remained within the limits of a traditional discussion of nature or of the structure of the world in which we live. From the beginning of the nineteenth century, the utopias moved from the dimension of space, which characterized them at first, to the dimension of time. The creators of utopias wished to change this world *within* this world.

At the beginning of the twentieth century, the approaching footsteps of the Messiah were heard in Eretz-Israel, and the pioneers of the second *aliyah* (wave of immigration) were his heralds. Moreover, they were the living personification of the World of Tomorrow. Palestinian utopias such as those of Ber Borochov (1881–1917), the thinker and leader of Marxist Zionism, A. D. Gordon (1856–1922), the Zionist ideologue and the spiritual force behind practical Zionism, and Ahad Ha-Am were formulations of the dissymmetry between the economic and rational understandings of their authors and their uniquely irrational application in Eretz-Israel. It was precisely for this reason that they were seen as Messianic.

In Eretz-Israel, the Messianic discourse was also prominent in the world of poetry. Many of the poets between the two world wars – Avigdor Hameiri, Avraham Shlonsky, Yitzhak Lamdan, David Shimonovitz, Avot Yeshurun, Yitzhak Ogen, Yehuda Karni, Ezra Zusman, Yonatan Ratosh, Yokheved Bat-Miriam, and Shin Shalom – dealt in their works with the Messianic theme. The poetics and literature researcher Hannan Hever made a survey of Hebrew culture in Eretz-Israel, and came to the conclusion that in this culture there was a lively poetic discourse on the meaning of the Messianic element in the Zionist enterprise.[23] Hever pointed out the utopian temptation that existed in the pioneers' self-image as builders of the future, and on the other hand the tendency that existed in a second school of thought to be carried away by thoughts of "anticipating the end" and resorting to violence. There was the contrast between the symbolist school of Shlonsky, which extolled pioneering and sacrifice, and the apocalyptic Messianic vision of the radical poet Uri Zvi Greenberg.

The scope, audacity, and depth of the Messianism in Uri Zvi Greenberg's (1896–1981) poetry represent the most radical ethos in pioneering Eretz-Israel. His poetry is steeped in the Nietzschean philosophy of life, but unlike Berdichevsky and "the revolt of the young ones" ("mered Ha-Zeirim," young generation of Hebrew writers), who sought a Europeanization of Jewish culture, Greenberg believed that the aestheticization of power required one to turn away from Europe towards a revival of the Messianic idea. Greenberg's aspiration in his poem "Ha-Ugavar," which rises up above the heights, is to create the Jewish superman. In "Hazon Ehad Ha-Legionot" (1927), Greenberg sings a song of praise to Messianism and to political violence in the conquest of Eretz-Israel; the Messianic Jewish Prometheus is an arms-bearing prophet, as against the traditional transcendental conception of the Messiah. In "The Messianic Secret" ("Kelef Beit"), the true Messiah, Shimon Bar-Giora (circa the first century AD), comes up from the past to rescue the present; in "Gavrut Ha-Ola," Greenberg cries, "Come up, Shabbetai Zevi!"; in "Eima Gedola ve-Yareah," the Hebrew Jesus is summoned from his prison to help his brethren ploughing in the Valley. In all his poems Greenberg never wearied of searching for the Messiah who would redeem the Jews from their distress. It is hardly surprising if the educationalist Gershom Hanoch warned in 1927 of the dangers of this Messianic rhetoric:

If we could only go away and absent ourselves for just one generation, for a single half-century, from all these eternal Messianic ideas, from the liberation of mankind, from redemption and from visions, and take hold naturally and in all simplicity of this plot of land that has been given us to work and to live on – only then, perhaps, would the hoped-for Messiah appear.[24]

Through the fabric of Revisionistic Zionism – from Zeev Jabotinsky (1880–1940), Uri Zvi Greenberg, Abba Ahimeir (1897–1962), and Joshua Heschel Yevin (1891–1970) to Israel Eldad – an obsessive preoccupation with apocalypse and the Messiah runs like a thread. At the heart of Jabotinsky's outlook and activities was the hope of activating Jewish history, and the means to that end were the aesthetic experience of power, the centrality of ritual and play, and the creation of the "new man." As against this, Berl Katznelson (1887–1944), one of the moral and intellectual leaders of the Zionist labor movement, was not sympathetic to the Rightist Messianism. He also objected to the "Labor-Zionist Messianism" of *Poalei Zion*, the movement of Marxist Zionist Jewish workers in Palestine at the beginning of the twentieth century, "who get enthusiastic about the atmosphere of the eastern revolution which is wholly Messianic."[25]

It would seem that Joseph Chaim Brenner (1881–1921), the novelist and pioneer of the second *aliyah*, represented the most radical antithesis to the socialist "red Messianism," the Revisionist "brown Messianism," and certainly the Orthodox "black Messianism." His vehement secularity, his revolt against rabbinic authority and its representatives, the Nietzschean existentialism of his writings, his animosity towards the exilic mentality, his doubtfulness of all certainties, his ambivalence between personal freedom and participation in the Jewish fate – all these made him the greatest skeptic of the Messianic idea. One of his strongest attacks on the Messianic philosophy of history was an article with a very banal title – "Newspapers and Literature – Notes and Observations" – which Brenner published in *Hapoel Hatsa'ir* (the journal of the labor-Zionist party in Palestine): "The Jewish people have no Messiah. We must strengthen ourselves to be without a Messiah … . We few, the members of the living Jewish people, must be stronger than a rock, working and producing as much as possible. We must multiply the work of our people and its material and spiritual assets."[26]

European Orthodoxy likewise did not look favorably on the Promethean Messianism of the Jewish national revival in Eretz-Israel. The idea of a human, independent, modern undertaking was not in keeping with a transcendental Messianism which was supernatural, superhuman, sacred, and deterministic. Hassidism totally denied the political Messianic idea, other religious circles were more moderate in their opposition, but even those that supported it refused to see an identity between Messianism and the Zionist enterprise. Rabbi Avraham Yitzhak Hacohen Kook was the exception amongst the Orthodox.

Rabbi Kook saw Messianic redemption as growing by a fascinating dialectical process out of secular Zionism. He developed an original conceptual system whereby the Holy One, Blessed Be He, brought nationalism into the world in order to preserve religion. Nationalism and Eretz-Israel sustained the modern Jews observant of the Torah. This embodied God's original intention: to bestow the Torah on a chosen people rather than on chosen individuals in the world. Orthodoxy had nothing to fear from the secular pioneers. In his Messianic-Zionist-Orthodox theology, Rabbi Kook sought to link the Jewish mystical tradition to the secular return to Zion. A kabbalistic terminology was behind this conception: the secularist denial contained sparks of holiness which come together in the cosmos whose source is transcendental. The temporary secular manifestations are a necessary stage towards the heavenly redemption. In the higher synthesis, secular nationalism promotes the divine project.[27]

Rabbi Kook was more daring than his predecessors, the traditionalist heralds of Zionism, Kalischer and Alkalai, who made the modern Messianic enterprise conditional on its pioneering representatives observing the commandments. Rabbi Kook developed a unique theologo-political dialectic in which transcendental Messianism and Promethean Messianism were blended. The renewal of the Jewish people in Eretz-Israel was important even if it was achieved by secularist agents. In this way the foundations were laid for a real collaboration between the secular and religious in the Zionist movement, a necessary precondition for the founding of a Jewish State.[28]

Mamlachtiut – the nationalization of Messianism?

After the founding of the State of Israel, Ben-Gurion placed the concept of *Mamlachtiut* at the centre of his political and social thinking.[29] At the end of the period of transition from the Yishuv (the Jewish community in Mandatory Palestine) to the State, he sought to silence all the particularistic elements that could challenge its new-born sovereignty. The shelling of the *Altalena* (the cargo ship that brought ammo to separatist rightist forces in 1948) and the disbanding of the *Palmach* (the regular fighting force and the unofficial army of the Yishuv) were milestones on the path to *Mamlachtiut*; the ideologically based militias were dissolved into the national army; mixed frameworks in education like the "labor trend" were prominent; official frameworks in the economic and social spheres were established. The State, which had just been born, had to contend with the absence of a tradition of sovereignty among the Jewish people, with the lack of a democratic political culture in their countries of origin, with social, ethnic, religious, national, political, and ideological cleavages. All this forced the new Israelis to live in a society which suffered from an "overburdening of utopia."[30]

The young State was molded by three basic experiences: the extermination of a third of its people, a struggle for survival which ended with the spilling of the blood of a percentage of its inhabitants, and the mass influx of

immigrants, who in a short time became more numerous than those that absorbed them. It is in this context that one should understand *Mamlachtiut*. The establishment of the State did not end with its declaration: it had only taken its first steps. The new citizens had to begin to build their State. It is symbolic that Ben-Gurion listed the elements that were necessary for the young State on the very day that the nations of the world recognized the right of the Jews to a State of their own. These were a government, a name, a capital, a budget, a police force, ports, a coinage, etc. But the process of nationalization did not end with these usual elements of a modern state. The process of *Mamlachtiut* in its totality also included the nationalization of culture and Jewish tradition. The spearhead of the Jewish faith was the Messianic vision. With the nationalization of Messianism, the circle of Jewish tradition, the Zionist ideology, and Israeli *Mamlachtiut* was closed.

The nationalization of Messianism was liable to be regarded as the national appropriation of a universal idea, a form of tribal segregation and shrinkage, but it should be remembered that Ben-Gurion saw the State as merely "an instrument for the realization and implementation of the vision of redemption."[31] Moreover, "[a] State is simply an organizational and official framework. A State means liberty, independence, freedom to create, the absence of servitude and dependence."[32] The nationalization of the Messianic idea was a dual dialectical process. It restored the idea of the universal Messianism to its original carriers, to a national vanguard which had formerly been the agent of the Messianic tradition in Western culture. Now, dwelling once again in its National Home, it could disseminate this idea among the nations. Thus, having such a role, Israeli society would make itself fit to be worthy of the vision. A Messianism nationalized for a universal end would first of all set about creating a society with an appropriate moral ethics.

The whole of Ben-Gurion's political career was devoted to founding the State, and once it was established his supreme mission was accomplished. Few people in the Zionist movement gave thought to what was to follow. Planning for "the day of small things" was neglected on account of the great events. When the State was established, Ben-Gurion began to formulate the ideology of *Mamlachtiut*, which would give impetus and imagination to the new-born infant entity. His aim was to inspire 600,000 people, the basis of the State-in-the-making, with a vision which would give meaning to its existence as a political body. He sought to describe the return of the Jews to their homeland in utopian terms, to delineate their future existence not only in terms of what existed but in terms of what should be. His great fear was that the age-old dream of the ancient Jewish civilization which gave the world monotheism and universalism, Maimonides and Einstein would shrink to the dimensions of a crusader fortress in the heart of the Middle East. Ben-Gurion feared that out of all this there would emerge an Albania or a Sparta.

The building of the new Jewish sovereignty not only was a means of mobilization but involved the creation of a new national ideology. What would the significance of the State be from now on? How would it look in the

eyes of the world? What kind of connection would there be between this State and the Jewish diasporas? In order to answer these questions, Ben-Gurion began to formulate his secular Messianic vision. With his sharp political instinct, he understood that the young State had to be given a sense of solidarity; its self-image required a "surplus value," a special quality which would distinguish it from other nations, and a sense of being the centre of gravity in relation to the diaspora. The vision he promoted was revolutionary by any standards: a young nation – in fact, a settlement lacking population and resources, which had only just arisen from the ruins of destruction and the struggle for independence – carrying on its shoulders the Messianic gospel to the peoples of the world! The gospel in question was not religious or national in nature but aware of an élite group that was set apart to disseminate the idea of the universalization of mankind.

In Ben-Gurion's *Mamlachtiut*, the particularist-national principle and the universalist-Messianic came together:

> Our redemption will not come about, however, merely as a result of the redemption of the world. We shall not succeed without an effort. Redemption must come from within ourselves. The Messianic vision that has lighted up our path for thousands of years has prepared and fitted us to be a light to the nations. Moreover, it has imposed on us the duty of becoming a model people and building a model state. It is through the power of this ideal with which we are imbued that we have succeeded in achieving the renewal of our independence – the "beginnings of redemption"; without the hope for Messianic redemption and the profound attachment to the ancient homeland, the State of Israel would never have been established.[33]

Ben-Gurion's Messianic vision gave rise to a stormy Messianic debate in which one of the most profound and fascinating discussions on the collective identity and self-image of the new Israelis took place. This debate between Ben-Gurion and the Israeli intellectuals took place in the 1950s and the beginning of the 1960s and accompanied the building of the Israeli nation. The controversy did not spring up in a vacuum but was rooted in various historiographical interpretations of the Messianic idea in general philosophy, Jewish thought, the Zionist movement, and Israeli politics.

Ben-Gurion's secular Messianic vision was not formed in the 1950s and 1960s as his interpreters have thought until now. The aim of this study – with its primary sources, introductions, and appendices – is to demonstrate that the roots of Ben-Gurion's vision were already formed in the early stages of the evolution of his political and social thinking as it crystallized in the revolutionary European intellectual climate and in the secular Messianic tradition of Zionism. The genealogical analysis which we make of Ben-Gurion's primary sources – his personal diary, his correspondence, his speeches, and the symposia in which he participated – shows that the Messianic terminology

was with him throughout his life. Was the Messianic vision of the State created for political or rhetorical purposes, as has been claimed until now in Israeli historiography? My conclusion is that Ben-Gurion's Messianic approach was not fashioned for the tactical requirements of a traditional discourse with the mass of new immigrants arriving from the Muslim countries, but was a secular "political theology" based on Zionism aimed at reformulating the purpose of Israeli sovereignty (*Mamlachtiut*).

The roots of Ben-Gurion's Messianic ideas are buried deep in the biographical, ideological, and political milieu in which the young leader grew up and matured. In the first decade of the State of Israel, they were given a new coherent interpretation, a sweeping nationalization of Messianism in the form of *Mamlachtiut*. For more than sixty years, Ben-Gurion never tired of preaching about the Messianic vision of the people of Israel. As he saw it, the Messianic motif, which was a kind of mobilizing myth in the building of the young nation, had no religious or transcendental content but embodied a proper moral ethos, a call for settlement, a mobilization of youth, and the socialization of all the different segments of society into the sovereign mold of *Mamlachtiut*. However, the chief basis of his political vision was a call for the young Jewish nation-state to serve as the vanguard of the idea of the universalization of humanity.

According to Ben-Gurion, the Messianic idea was the dialectical underpinning of the aims of history. The Jewish Messianic idea, like the Hegelian theodicy – history as "God's action on earth" – stretched from one period of history to the next, from the First and Second Temples to the establishment of the Third Temple, and thus the Jewish-theological tradition and the Zionist-secularist ideology came together. In this perspective, a secular redemption is seen as a historical process unfolding in stages and not at the end of history. Here the founder of the State continued the secular revolution which Zionism had effected in Jewish history by exchanging traditional theological concepts for a national language. Ben-Gurion brought this historical process to its ultimate conclusion, "anticipating the end" by declaring the State. This action was seen by him as the beginning of redemption.

2   David Ben-Gurion and the Messianic idea

Did Ben-Gurion possess the Promethean passion of modern man and the modern era? The ways of modernity are tortuous, and its roots are not to be found in the desire for Enlightenment or in a movement towards progress, but in Western man's Promethean urge to be his own master, to rebel against the fate which prescribes his present condition, to take hold of history and mold society and not to be content with the situation he has been given. In order to realize the project of modernity, its advocates enlisted the Enlightenment – reason, progress, and science – in the service of the Promethean passion. This passion was the basis of the political ideologies of the nineteenth century and put its stamp on the régimes to which they gave birth in the twentieth. These ideologies and régimes were modern in that they tried to institutionalize the political and social reality in the image of man. In this sense, Zionism was the Promethean passion of the Jews in the modern era.

The great revolutions of the modern era – the American, French, and Russian – were the offspring of this Promethean passion. The praise which Ben-Gurion lavished on these modern revolutions was due to their Promethean character, their attempt to mold a new reality on earth and not in heaven. He saw the American Revolution as a model for the Zionist Revolution, for "no people is liberated automatically." A country cannot be obtained without effort, will-power, and dedication: "The history of the settlement of America shows how great and difficult was the task of the first settlers who came to seek a new homeland for themselves in the New World, what troubles and agonies they had to suffer, what difficult struggles they had with wild nature and the inhabitants, how many people they had to sacrifice before they were able to make the country fit for mass-immigration and settlement."[1]

The Promethean character of the American Revolution could be seen in the conquest of nature, space, and people in a single large country, but, as against this,

> The French Revolution, which had the vision of liberty, equality and fraternity, was not confined to its own country but had major repercussions in all the countries of Europe, overthrew the institutions of royalty, the aristocracy and the feudal régime, and also gave the initial impetus to

the liberation of the Jews (emancipation) and to granting them equal rights in the Western countries.[2]

Ben-Gurion did not accept the view of certain Israeli intellectuals who had studied Messianism that the Messianic faith tended towards despotism, citing as proof the Messianism of the French Revolution. He welcomed the French Revolution, seeing it within the context of his Messianic philosophy of history with regard to the Jews: "The French Revolution was a blessing for mankind, and without the Messianic faith the last three generations of our people would not have been able to do what they did."[3]

Like Alexis de Tocqueville, who recognized the missionary aspect of the French Revolution, Ben-Gurion saw an instructional element not only in the eighteenth-century revolution but also in the Bolshevik Revolution of the twentieth century, and in both cases it was a test for the Jewish people:

> Like the French Revolution, the Russian Revolution did not remain within the boundaries of its country but made and continues to make waves in the entire world, and it placed the Jewish people once again before an ideological and historical test – one no less serious than any of those which came before it.[4]

All his life, Ben-Gurion had a soft spot for the Bolshevik Revolution, which in his opinion was emasculated and distorted by its makers. The Russian revolutionary tradition, which boasted of changing Russia from a feudal society to a modern one at a single stroke, left a strong imprint on the young Ben-Gurion.

Underlying the secular religions there was the secular Messianic passion of modern man, who dared to mold with his own hands both this world and the next world within this one. The modern revolutionary ideologies translated the old religious leanings into secular and political concepts. Religion was secularized and became history; the kingdom of heaven was replaced by the kingdom of man and transcendental salvation made way for the Promethean passion.[5] Ben-Gurion learnt the history lesson of the Promethean revolutions, and the desire of modern man to create his own world was basic to his political thinking and central to his political activities. At a gathering of young people at the height of the extermination of the Jews in Europe, he distinguished between the Jewish Revolution and the other modern revolutions:

> The Jewish Revolution is perhaps the most difficult of all the revolutions in world history, although it is not the only or first revolution. There have been several great revolutions. I will just point out the revolution in England in the seventeenth century, the revolutions in America and France in the eighteenth century and the Russian Revolution in the twentieth century, and these are not the last. But there is one basic difference which bestows uniqueness on the Jewish Revolution. All these

revolutions which have taken place and which will take place in other countries were revolutions against a régime – against a political, social and economic régime. The Jewish Revolution is not only against a régime but against fate, against the fate unique of its kind of a people unique of its kind.[6]

The revolt of Ben-Gurion, the Zionist Prometheus, against the physical fate of the Jews – life in exile outside history – was expressed in the continuation of his speech:

The makers of the Jewish Revolution of our time said: it is not enough to yield to fate. We must control our fate: we must take our fate in our hands. That is what the Jewish Revolution means. In other words: not a refusal to yield to exile but a cancellation and rooting out of exile.

The person who at the end of the nineteenth century founded a modern movement of Jews who sought as a group to rebel against their fate was Theodor Herzl. Ben-Gurion made a brilliant connection between the Promethean passion of "the visionary of the Jewish State" in revolting "against a passive faith in the eternity of Israel" and his own Messianic vision of "seeking redemption." The commemorative ceremony for Herzl in 1934 was a good opportunity for Ben-Gurion to describe the Messianic faith of the founder of political Zionism:

Herzl dared where no man before him had dared – within the scope of the vision, the Messianic vision, which is the heart of Jewish history – to embrace the world in its fullness, to embrace redemption itself which leaves nothing behind it, the redemption of the people of Israel, the redemption of the world and the healing of the world in the kingdom of God … but it was not given to Herzl to see his vision come to pass. This, apparently, is the lot of all the great redeemers of our people. Herzl's vision did not prove false, but Herzl's revolt against a passive faith in the eternity of Israel, and the desire to anticipate the end which was the motive-force of Herzl's activities – just as the Messianic idea, the soul of Jewish history in exile, was perverted by false Messiahs on several occasions – so, after Herzl's death, this splendid name was falsely flaunted by falsifiers of his teaching, and we must learn from Herzl to seek redemption, the great redemption, speedily, in our days.[7]

When he was ten years' old, in 1896, the year of the publication of Herzl's *The Jewish State*, as he accompanied his father to pray in the synagogue, he heard that "it was being said in the town that the Messiah was on his way, and he was now in Vienna, and he had a black beard and his name was Herzl."[8] It was said that he was "tall and handsome and had a black beard – an extraordinary man."[9] Ben-Gurion looked at his picture and decided "to

follow him immediately to the land of my fathers." And the founder of the Jewish State wrote about the prophet of the Jewish State: "Herzl was indeed like a Messiah since he galvanized the feeling of the youth that Eretz-Israel was achievable. He added, however, that it could only come to pass if we built it with our own hands."[10]

The young Ben-Gurion's recognition that doing it "with our own hands" was the sole condition for realizing Herzl's secular Messianism was central in molding his political and intellectual path. In 1904, eight years after the rumor about "Herzl the Messiah," Ben-Gurion, stunned by the news of Herzl's death, wrote an emotional letter to his good friend Shemuel Fuchs. What he said is interesting because of his mythical-hagiographical treatment of Herzl, the "sun of Zionism":

> The sun has gone out but its light is still shining … . The bright sparks of resurrection which he has sown so deeply in our hearts will never be extinguished! … His lofty thought will always accompany us; the tremendous desire for the work of resurrection which he imparted to us with his strong will shall be with us until we have completed the great task to which our great leader sacrificed his noble life.
>
>   We shall not see again a man as wonderful as he, who united in our midst the heroism of the Maccabees with the melodiousness of David, the bravery of Rabbi Akiva … the beauty of Rabbi Judah Ha-Nasi and the ardent love of Rabbi Judah Halevi.
>
>   … Our country was twice destroyed and we have been exiled to foreign lands … and we still live. For two thousand years we have been sunk in slavery, we have been despised and we have despised ourselves. All our bones are dried up, every warm ray of light, nothing but the darkness of the cemetery – and suddenly there is this man who is all freedom, light, hope, faith and work! Suddenly, awakening, coming together, standing upright, the hope of freedom, labor, revival![11]

In this mythicization of Herzl, Ben-Gurion contrasts exile, which is "slavery" and the "darkness of the cemetery," with Herzlian Zionism, which epitomizes freedom, light, and resurrection. In another place he describes the exile as "a miserable experience, wretched, bitter, contemptible, nothing to be proud of. On the contrary – it has to be totally rejected."[12] Ben-Gurion's negation of the exile was to influence his ideas of "shortening the path" of history and breaking the continuity of Jewish history.[13]

Zionism was a movement of self-emancipation, liberation of self together with liberation from exile. Later on, Ben-Gurion maintained that exile was not only a physical place but a state of mind: "We have taken the Jews out of exile," he said, "but we have not yet taken the exile out of the Jews." Ben-Gurion held that the emancipation resulting from the French Revolution and the changes in Europe in the modern era "required the Jews to obliterate their national image" and almost turned European Judaism into a "religious sect."

But "the historical will of the Jewish people prevailed, and emancipation did not lead to absorption but to a new expression of its national uniqueness and its Messianic longings."[14] Emancipation "ceased to be self-emancipation – a movement of freeing oneself from the bonds of foreign dependency and alien life – and the first foundations were laid for the renewal of national independence in the ancient homeland." Self-emancipation, the liberation of self from "the bonds of dependency," was the essence of Zionism's Promethean passion.

The Promethean will to recreate oneself as the "new Jew" in his homeland meant first of all the obliteration of the dichotomy expressed in the slogan of the Haskalah: "Be a Jew in your home and a man outside." Ben-Gurion identified "the split between the man and the Jew which divided the Jewish soul in exile."[15] The awareness of the modern Jew of this inner rupture and of an inequality between himself and the others in Europe led him to a critical attitude and to self-criticism. A sense of alienation from exile and of personal alienation came about only in the post-emancipatory world. When the modern Jew began to think for himself and to have his own values, he began to ask himself why he should be enslaved to the national norms of his neighbors and colleagues. The paradox was that the Jew as a free man in the era of emancipation discovered that he was enslaved. It was this reflective consciousness which derived from the emancipation and not from anti-Semitism which gave birth to modern Jewish nationalism and the revolt of the Zionist Protheans.

One cannot of course disregard Ben-Gurion's strong expressions concerning exilic Jews, and his formulation that "the exilic Jews as Jews are human dust who struggle against one another, perhaps more than members of other peoples in similar circumstances."[16] Perhaps this is an attempt to emphasize the contrast between the passive condition of the Jew in exile, where he is only dust – a kind of shadow or pale reflection – and the truly human state which he can only attain in Eretz-Israel: "Only in Israel does sovereignty provide the full possibility of molding a man's life according to his own needs and values." It is not anti-Semitism, or "distress," as Ben-Gurion calls it, that can explain the revival of the Jewish people, though of course it cannot be ignored: "Distress undoubtedly played a part … but distress alone does not have the power to direct immigrants to the country … . All that has been renewed in our time … cannot be understood if one does not see the vision of Messianic redemption implanted in the soul of the Jewish people." Zionism sought to eradicate the alienation between the Jew and the man and proposed an authentic answer in the form of a homeland: "In Israel, the partition between the Jew and the man fell and was shattered."[17]

Ben-Gurion's Messianic terminology did not come from nowhere. David Joseph Gruen (Ben-Gurion's previous surname) absorbed the treasures of Judaism on the benches of his "*heder*" (religious elementary school) and on the knees of his grandfather, who was knowledgeable in Jewish studies from Maimonides to Rabbi Nachman Krochmal (1785–1840), the Jewish-Austrian

philosopher, theologian, and historian. He learnt the Hebrew language from him, and read with him the Pentateuch, the other books of the Bible and the Targum, with Mendelssohn's German commentaries. As he himself said, "[a]t the age of seven I suddenly became pious and scrupulous in observing the commandments."[18] Up to his Bar Mitzva he studied Hebrew, Rashi, the Talmud, and the commentaries, but already then he preferred the Bible. His father wrote a letter to Herzl in 1901 asking him to intervene on behalf of his son, so that he would be accepted into the rabbinical seminary in Vienna, "for there is also a centre for Jewish studies there, a seminary for rabbis." When the request was not answered, young David continued on his own for another three years until he went to Warsaw to study Jewish thought, literature, and poetry, reading Y. L. Peretz, Abraham Broides, Peretz (Peter) Smolenskin, Y. L. Gordon, Ahad Ha-Am, and of course Micha Joseph Berdichevsky. He bound together blank sheets of paper and would copy out every new poem by "the poet Bialik, beloved of my heart." One book made a special impression on him: Abraham Mapu's *Ahavat Zion* (the love of Zion), "which I read when I was nine or ten. This book brought me to Zionism."[19] We see, then, that the sources at which the young Ben-Gurion was suckled derived not only from the revolutionary ideological atmosphere of Eastern Europe but also from the roots of Jewish culture. Later, in his debate in Israel in the 1950s with Zionist representatives and Israeli intellectuals, he asserted that "the title Jew is precious and important to me … . The name Jew not only preceded the name Zionist but says much more than the name Zionist. Judaism is more than Zionism, and the observances of Judaism do not tally with assimilation."[20]

Ben-Gurion was a disciple of the culture of the Hebrew revival in Europe at the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, which sprang up dialectically from the Enlightenment. It was the European universalism of the Enlightenment which gave rise to the particularistic national-Jewish consciousness. If the right of self-determination was a universal right given to every ethno-historical unit with an awareness of its own special nature, why should not the Jews enjoy this right like the French, the Italians, and other European peoples? Ben-Gurion's Zionist philosophy of history was not based on the "tearful" approach to Jewish history ("distress") which saw anti-Semitism as its essence and main experience, but on a positive view of Jewish history which stressed the position of the sovereign Jews as a vanguard amongst the peoples of the world. At the heart of this "vanguard" approach was the Messianic principle.

The Zionist ideology came out of the Jewish Haskalah, the product of contact with general history. Anyone who examines Ben-Gurion's political biography according to the criteria of Jewish historiography will not learn much about the revolutionary potential of the young leader. The Haskalah of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries was the first modern ideology in the history of the Jews. The significance of its modernization of Jewish history is that it reflected the new awareness of the Jews and their desire to mold that

history. Zionism as a modern national movement aspired to create sovereign human beings who were not subject to the authority of the landowner and the sultan, authentic people with a clear identity. The difference between the Enlightenment and modernity corresponds to the difference between the reality and the ideal in the Zionist self-awareness. It is the tension that existed between exilic Judaism – the historical reality – and Zionism – the political and cultural ideal, or between the Yishuv and Israeliness. Zionism was a modern choice of a way to refashion the collective Jewish identity.

Ben-Gurion tried to locate reference points in the development of the collective Jewish identity. In his article "Israel and the Diaspora," he said that if a Jew two hundred years previously had been asked what a Jew is, he would have answered, "A Jew is a son of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob who observes the commandments and hopes for the coming of the Messiah." The French Revolution and the subsequent granting of equal rights in Europe weakened accepted beliefs and religious traditions not only amongst the Jews but amongst all the peoples of Europe and America. "And there are not many Jews today who hope for the coming of the Messiah," observed Ben-Gurion.[21] The next reference point was the Haskalah. If the Jews of the Haskalah had been asked about their identity a hundred and fifty years ago (at the time Ben-Gurion was writing), they would have answered that they were "a religious community." A hundred years ago, he said, most Jews in Eastern Europe would have answered that they were "a minority people in exile," and fifty years ago they would have answered, "The Jews want to return to Zion without waiting for the Messiah and without believing in a Messiah."

For Ben-Gurion, the wish to return to Zion – Zionism – was simultaneously a return to history, geography, and sociology. With regard to the return to history, it was a revolt against the "Jewish time" of the exile, which was characterized, in his opinion, by passivity, and a readoption of responsibility for molding the historical reality. With regard to the return to geography, it was a revolt against the foreign location of the exile and a return to one's old-new space – the only place where the Jews could come back and rebuild their sovereignty. With regard to the return to sociology, in 1919, Ben-Gurion wrote:

> In realizing Zionism, in the course of that realization, the particular will of the Hebrew worker will find expression. In building the country, the Hebrew worker will strive to leave his social imprint on it … . Precisely because his work will be devoted to building the homeland, the Jewish worker will discover his original initiative and his creative independence.[22]

This perceived affinity between the Jews' return to history, the return to their space and the transformation of their socio-economic structure already preoccupied Ben-Gurion at the beginning of the First World War. This triple

aspiration could be condensed into one: "To make Eretz-Israel and the Hebrew people into the Eretz-Israeli people." Although this could require various political initiatives such as "autonomy," "federation," or "a sort of independent kingdom," the change would not come about through political or diplomatic action but through a commitment to "plant the people in the homeland and give the country back to the people." The war was a revolutionary opportunity: "The hour is a crucial one in history as such and in the history of our people. Mighty events are happening, tremendous revolutions are taking place, accepted values are changing, sacred tablets are being hewn, new truths are being revealed, new relationships are being formed." Things that could not be done in normal times could be done at that moment: "We are now permitted to attempt to force the issue and to hope for a shortening of the way."[23]

A few months later, in the midst of the tempest of the First World War that overtook Europe, Ben-Gurion proclaimed, "The sound of the Messiah's ram's horn reaches us through the storm."[24] Perhaps, he thought, this opportune moment would bring the peoples of the world to solve the Jewish question in Palestine. Would Palestine consequently become the land of the Jews? Ben-Gurion's answer typified the Promethean nature of Zionism, which was essentially the idea that the modern Jew could forge his national enterprise with his own hands:

> If the people have the right to say, this is my land, my homeland, that is only because the people have created its land. The soil is a gift of nature, and man cannot create matter out of nothing. All that man enjoys is a product of nature. Man is only an instrument who with his hands and brain works on the natural materials and forces for his use and enjoyment. Preparing the land for the needs of the nation through labor – preparing the soil and making it fertile, laying roads, creating means of transport, uncovering treasures and natural riches, setting up industries and so on – that is the creation of the homeland."[25]

Nature is like a material in the hands of an artist; the people create the land with its own hands; the homeland is the product of human labor; it is technology and settlement that make the country what it is. In this, Ben-Gurion was taking part in the Promethean transformation which had taken place in science itself from the time of the Renaissance to the twentieth century, i.e. the change from the desire to know nature to ruling over nature; from the ideal of contemplation and the ambition of knowing the laws of creation to the will-to-power that boasts of changing reality. Here Ben-Gurion touched on the very essence of Zionism and of labor-Zionism in particular: the act of the creating the homeland is not declarative or military or diplomatic but a matter of actual social construction. As in the Promethean ethos, the homeland could only be gained through labor and production. The land of Israel would not be Jewish when the European powers decided on it, "but when we,

the Jews, build it." In this connection, Shabtai Teveth did well when he gave as the introductory quotation to his Ben-Gurion biography, *Kinat David* (David's Envy), a statement by Ben-Gurion from the article under discussion: "Eretz-Israel will be ours when the majority of its workers and guardians will be our people."[26]

The Zionist Prometheus is not only a man rebelling against his national fate but the new Jew molding his national and social reality and refusing to submit to historical determinism or stychic forces:

> The expectation of a "stychic process" is merely a hypocritical excuse for sterility and weakness. History is not determined by destiny, and life is not a matter of blind chance. The intentional and far-sighted intervention of the creative and conscious active will throughout history – *that* is one of the causes and motivations of the stychic process.[27]

A decade earlier, influenced by Borochov's materialist-determinism, he had thought in terms of *stychia* (Greek for "natural spontaneity"). The idea of *stychia* was that the immigration of Jews to Palestine, which was economically backward, would bring Jewish capital, and this in turn would attract Jewish workers. Ben-Gurion now countered *stychia* with the "creative active will."

Two intellectual traditions contended at the turn of the century for the souls of numerous Jews in Eastern Europe: the abstract and historicistic approach of Ahad Ha-Am, whose aim was a "universal prophetic morality," and the national-particularistic approach which derived from Berdichevsky and which was based on the voluntaristic principles of will-to-power, character, and creativity.[28] Ahad Ha-Am and Berdichevsky were both opposed to the view that Jewish nationalism was a reaction to anti-Semitism, as against Herzl, Pinsker, and Nordau, who saw anti-Semitism as its main cause. Ben-Gurion's nationalism did not derive from *ressentiment* – Nietzsche's term for the feeling of bearing a grudge – or from the way that others look at you, but was based on the concepts of independence and authenticity. Ben-Gurion was undoubtedly deeply influenced by Berdichevsky. His biographer tells us that "[h]e read all Berdichevsky's writings – scholarship, articles and stories. His articles impressed David and his friends more than those of Ahad Ha-Am."[29]

Berdichevsky issued a revolutionary call for the transformation of the "last Jews" into the "first Hebrews." Authentic Jews were given precedence over abstract Judaism; life was decision, and decision was will and character. Ben-Gurion was strongly attracted to Berdichevsky's Nietzschean motifs, which suited his national-existential approach: the will-to-power, the "new man," the revaluation of values, the revolt against slave morality, and a monumental and creative concept of history. Ben-Gurion belonged to the tradition of the "first Hebrews," who were seen as "the generation that conquered Canaan in a storm," to use the expression of the poet and translator Saul Tchernikovsky (1875–1943) expression, and who were influenced by Berdichevsky's call for a

turning away "from Judaism to Jews, from abstract Jews to Hebrew Jews."
These "Hebrew Jews" favored a revolutionary selective interpretation of history which skipped over the exile and made a daring mythical leap to the remote past of the Hebrew people in the land of Canaan. This Hebraism, of which the Canaanite movement was later an extreme manifestation, stressed the geographical-indigenous side of the collective identity rather than its historical-abstract aspect. Here one may also find the source of Ben-Gurion's "Hebraic" approach to the Bible and of his historiographical ideas concerning the affirmation of "leaps" in history. On his gravestone he did not ask for his achievements or date of birth to be mentioned, or verses from the Bible, but only the words "he came to the country and settled there." The true date of his birth was the year he immigrated to Eretz-Israel; the years outside the land of Israel were prehistory.

The "new Hebrew," as depicted by Hebrew historiography and the literature of the national revival, did not receive his world from an inherited culture or from history, but rather from his identification with modernity. There could no longer be any inherited themes from the culture of the past that could be taken for granted or illusions about rational development or normative ethics. Instead, he sought an unmediated view of the modern world. Since reality is dynamic, the human being must not rest on his laurels. He must identify with the rhythm of history, exploit revolutionary historical situations as a window of opportunity and a time for decisive action. This philosophical-historiographical outlook necessarily led to national existentialism. If modern man is the will-to-power and history is made up of nations, the necessary outcome is national existentialism.[30]

Out of this kind of existential experience the "new man" emerged who was not subject to religious tradition or motivated by rationality but was actuated by new criteria of authenticity and decadence. In the Zionist context, he was the "new Jew" as opposed to "human dust." The rebel against history identifies with a world which is the fruit of his own labor, and he thereby becomes authentic rather than decadent. Indeed, one of the main characteristics of the "new man" was the quest for authenticity – a response to the alienation that existed between the individual and his world. Ben-Gurion did not remain forever within the narrow confines of philosophy but lived in a modern secular-revolutionary intellectual climate which sought to create a new reality in a new space.

The "new Jew" was the spearhead of the movement of renewal, exemplified a basic principle in nationalism, and symbolized the new society that was to arise from the ruins of past history. Ben-Gurion was far from the integral nationalism of the Heinrich von Treitschke variety based on narrow tribalism and social hierarchy, and close to the universalist nationalist tradition which stressed the contribution of each people to the nations of the world. He continued the nineteenth-century European tradition of nationalism, which believed in the universal mission of modern nationalism.[31] Like the Italian Giuseppe Mazzini, the Hungarian Lajos Kosshut, the Russian Alexander

Hertzen, and the Frenchman Louis Auguste Blanqui, Ben-Gurion believed in the universal-Messianic mission of his people to be "a light unto the nations."

1917 – the footsteps of approaching redemption

The year 1917 was a revolutionary turning-point. The Bolshevik Revolution and the Balfour Declaration aroused waves of enthusiasm among the workers in Europe, among the Zionist activists, and among many of the world's Jews. And in addition, there was also the end of the First World War ("the war to end wars"), the collapse of the multinational empires, and a time of grace in which the right of self-determination was granted to European peoples, thanks largely to Woodrow Wilson, and to the Zionists, thanks to Lord Balfour. These events made the people of that generation feel that they were experiencing an extraordinary historical moment in which there was a sense of exaltation and of a kind of historical redemption.

As in other critical junctures in his life, Ben-Gurion's reaction to the Balfour Declaration was one which tempered the enthusiasm pertaining to his "Messianic" point of view with a good dose of political realism and roused him to activity. On November 14, 1917, he affirmed, "The great miracle has happened and is here to stay." The great power had recognized the Jewish claims; the Jewish people had once again become a political factor: "Something miraculous has happened to the broken vessel: that we have come to be a people … and that our faith in the national resurrection never ceased."[32] At the same time, he explained that only the Jews were able to restore their own sovereignty: "Precisely now, when we are rejoicing over the great victory, this point must be given special emphasis: Britain does not have the capacity to give the country back to us."[33] Perhaps revealing a hidden jealousy of the achievement of Chaim Weizmann (1874–1952) in obtaining the declaration, Ben-Gurion asserted that this declaration of recognition of the Yishuv as a political nation, with its confirmation of the Jewish right to the land, was not enough, and that "the Hebrew people must itself transform this right into a living fact, must with its body and soul, its strength and resources raise up its national home and fulfill its national redemption to the end."

This article caused discomfort among the Zionist leadership in the United States because it was not in keeping with the feeling of enthusiasm with which the Declaration was received there. "Despite the Messianic atmosphere which surrounded them (the Second Aliyah), despite the feeling that a miracle had taken place, so that even those who had always believed in redemption were amazed and astounded on hearing about it, they did not lose their sober intellectual judgment of the situation."[34] Ben-Gurion quickly published two articles in the Po'alei Zion journal. In the first, he declared that "[o]ur path has been miraculously shortened. A long and difficult journey which we prepared to undertake very, very slowly with endless hardships and difficulties has been shortened as though by a miracle and we stand on the threshold of

fulfillment."[35] But the aim, he said, was to bring the people back to the land: "In the next twenty years, we must create a Jewish majority in Palestine. This is the essence of the new historical situation." In the second article, Ben-Gurion likewise stated that one should not be content with the historical achievement which "fulfilled the task of Zionism in relation to the outside world." The "more important, serious and difficult task" was now the internal one: the building of the country by the Hebrew people.[36]

The year 1917 saw the British call for the formation of the Jewish Battalions, the beginning of General Edmund Henry Allenby's conquest of Palestine, and the transition from Turkish rule to the British Mandate. Ben-Gurion's biographer described the fatefulness of the hour:

> For Poalei Tzion it was a threefold redemption: a human, Jewish and Zionist redemption. … *Ge'ula* (redemption), which in Jewish tradition is a religious concept bound up with the coming of the Messiah, was for them for a moment a reality, a concrete formulation, a marching order. In the United States and Britain, the Hebrew word came into daily use in Hebrew and Yiddish. Po'alei Tzion had "Ge'ula evenings," "Ge'ula appeals," "Ge'ula balls" and "Ge'ula conventions."[37]

This intellectual climate existed both among the Zionists in America and among the members of the Second Aliyah. The historian Anita Shapira wrote:

> To the people of the Second Aliyah it seemed that they heard the approaching footsteps of the Messiah, and thoughts of Jewish independence and of the redemption of the people in its land which had been repressed deep in the heart welled up with an upsurge of hope with the formation of the battalions and the British conquest of the country.[38]

Despite the slight reserve of Ben-Gurion's reaction to the revolutionary British declaration, he was immediately swept up in the general enthusiasm in the pages of the Po'alei Tzion journal, which appeared in Yiddish, even calling his article "The Ge'ula":

> it is a Messianic declaration. It is a declaration of *ge'ula* which not only gives the Jews new hope in their history, but much more than that: it re-opens their history.[39]

Under the influence of the Balfour Declaration as well as for other reasons, Ben-Gurion enlisted in the Jewish Battalions, although he had originally been opposed to them. In the spirit of that time, when the word *ge'ula* was in common use, in his will of May 28, 1918 he issued the following instructions to his wife, who was bearing his child:

> This is my will which I leave to my family before I go to the Jewish Battalion to fight in Eretz-Israel for the redemption (*ge'ula*) of my country … I want my child to be called "Yariv" if it is a boy and "Ge'ula" if it is a girl.[40]

The First World War encouraged the polarized ideological camps in Europe to put their ideologies, whether socialist or nationalist, into practice. Following the war, the October Revolution broke out on the one hand and the fascist movements sprang up on the other. Ben-Gurion, like many people of his generation, saw the events of the war as furthering the aims of Zionism. He wrote in his diary, "Pre-Messianic tribulations previous to *ge'ula*."[41]

The total confrontation was seen as the war of Gog and Magog, the negative climax of modernity proclaiming the end of the illusion of the Enlightenment concerning historical progress. It was a sign of the end of the nineteenth-century outlook and an evil omen for the beginning of a new, blood-soaked century. The first mechanized war made a total mobilization of human resources for the purposes of mutual extermination and a festival of technological slaughter. Out of the European chaos, "the generation of the wickedness and folly of the war," Ben-Gurion expected that there would arise "a mightier enterprise of heroism and sacrifice … . Adversity is a fruitful and productive basis in human life. Without affliction, the human soul sinks lower and lower. The pains of birth are the precondition to creation."[42]

The creation he had in mind was of course the establishment of the National Home of the Jewish people in Eretz-Israel. The doctrine of will as taught by Nietzsche, Bergson, and Berdichevsky also influenced the future leader, who thought that "in this great historic moment" it was incumbent on the whole Hebrew people to "reveal its will-to-Eretz-Israel." The masses of Jews in the exile "now had to show that they *willed* Eretz-Israel." This collective will was described by him as "the manifestation of the national will-to-Eretz-Israel."[43] The Messianic inspiration following the horrors of war reflected a desire to give meaning to human existence. This rationalization was based on the notion that the best must come out of the worst. Thinkers, writers, and politicians associated the achievement of a suitable collective national or ideological purpose with the idea that one could only be saved from the apocalyptic depths of the European "total war" by ascending to Messianic heights.

The First World War was the crucible of revolutionary changes in Europe, and first of all the Bolshevik Revolution in Russia. As one trained in the revolutionary intellectual climate in Europe, Ben-Gurion too was influenced by the Russian Revolution. About ten years after the revolutionary events in Russia, the labor-Zionist leader permitted himself to express his feelings at a *Histadrut* protest meeting:

> We have great sympathy for the recent Russian Revolution. Not all of us justify all the actions and tactics involved. Out of a deep moral concern

and ideological sensitivity we reject the terrorist methods and bloodshed by means of which they have tried to set up the new régime there. But despite this way of ruling, we genuinely love the great revolution in Russia.[44]

Ben-Gurion's view of the Bolshevik Revolution, "[t]he greatest rebellion in human history," was colored above all by its Messianic forcing of the issue:

Many of us have felt an inner sympathy for that forcing of the issue in which the communist party has excelled. Tired of waiting for stychic processes to take their course, it has sought, with a tremendous exercise of the will, to bring redemption closer. For we too seek to force the issue of our redemption.[45]

This affinity which Ben-Gurion saw between the Bolshevik forcing of the issue and the Zionist one is very important for an understanding of the development of his social and political thinking. At the start of his political career, he was influenced by the narodniki and the Marxists, the Jewish Haskalah and the Russian revolutionary tradition, and according to one of his Marxist interpreters, "[p]erhaps there is here at one and the same time an encounter and a confrontation between two kinds of Messianism, the Jewish and the Russian (the 'Third Rome,' which now takes the form of world communism)."[46] In his youth in Plonsk, Ben-Gurion joined Po'alei Zion, which sought to combine the Zionist rebirth with communist revolution. When he immigrated to Israel, he believed in the "dictatorship of the proletariat" and the "dictatorship of the Hebrew worker in the national affairs of the Hebrew people."

Utopia and violence are the two aspects of the revolutionary-in-action. In the revolutionary atmosphere of the beginning of the twentieth century, the view seemed justified that in order to destroy the old world and build a new national and social order, one had to use force. This was the background against which Lenin and Trotsky, Pilsudski and Ataturk operated, and Ben-Gurion as well.[47] Ben-Gurion, like these leaders and founders, was reared on a Messianic-utopian vision which could only be realized by revolutionary means. His labor-Zionist revolutionism was refined in the Marxist crucible, and its point of departure was society as the necessary basis for change.[48]

The "myth-leader"

Ben-Gurion learnt a major historical lesson from Lenin, who by means of the Bolshevik Party sought to metamorphose an evolutionary historical theory into a revolutionary practice. The special feature of Lenin was his adaptation of Marxist revolutionary principles to the particular conditions of Russia. What Ben-Gurion gained from Lenin was the understanding that the

possibility of carrying out a revolution (in his case, the Zionist one) necessitates a social change and a change of values, the precondition to which is the realization that the revolution requires the use of force. The story told by the Israeli essayist Shlomo Grodzinsky that Ben-Gurion used to read biographies of revolutionaries while his daughter was at the New York public library during the First World War is quite typical. The biography which impressed him most of all was that of Lenin. Ben-Gurion's attraction to the Russian Revolution and its progenitors was due to his admiration for the qualities of the father of the Bolshevik Revolution rather than to a liking for its ideology. Lenin exemplified for him the revolutionary leader who steers a new path: bold, full of initiative, able to break with historical determinism and showing a capacity for organization.

In sailing from the Soviet Union to Palestine, he was inspired to describe in poetic terms the contrasts he had observed in Russia in the midst of the rebellion and fire of the revolution. He wondered whether these immanent tensions of revolutionary Russia did not also exemplify the personality of Lenin, and whether the fate of the dead leader would not also be that of communist Russia. In reading the following passage about Lenin it is hard to avoid the impression that Ben-Gurion was also speaking of himself:

> A total master of strategy who knows how to retreat in order to muster his strength for a new onslaught, who is not afraid to deny today what he affirmed yesterday and to affirm tomorrow what he denies today, who does not allow his thinking to be caught in webs of verbiage, is not ensnared by empty formulas and does not fall into the trap of dogma, for his clear-seeing eyes can discern the complex reality, the cruel truth and the true power-relationships … but amidst all the diversions and retreats and the complications of the struggle a single unchanging objective burns like a red flame before him: the objective of the Great Revolution. The fundamental revolution which uproots the existing reality and overturns the rotten, depraved society to its foundations.[49]

The victory of the revolution in Russia was also the failure of Marx's model of a Promethean-Messianic revolution: the triumph of the revolution in one place put an end to the spread of the revolution throughout the world. Lenin was not a determinist; his aim was to speed up the revolution, and one of the means he used was sharpening the class-consciousness of a party cadre which would lead the masses. Hence the lesson Ben-Gurion learnt from Lenin: one must give due importance to an understanding of the significance of historical processes and international developments and one must act only after studying them: what he was referring to was the war. Is war a progressive factor which brings about revolutionary situations? The First World War created a revolutionary situation in Russia which finally engendered a revolution of the proletariat. Ben-Gurion also learnt this from Lenin: not every revolutionary situation leads to a revolution, but no revolution can exist without a

revolutionary situation. Ben-Gurion wrote down this lesson in his memoirs, and he was to use it when the time came for him to make revolutionary decisions.

The treaty of Brest-Litovsk, the ceasefire of mid-December 1917, was one of Lenin's revolutionary decisions. Ben-Gurion gave a good description of Lenin's leadership in this test:

> At the time of Brest-Litovsk, it became clear to me what the secret of this influence was … A far-seeing eye peering within the complexities and recesses of life and seizing within the depths of reality the dominant forces of the future, but also a fixed objective, the outline of the path of a man who is a master strategist who will not turn left or right, for although he knows how to reach it by various ways according to the situation, he has but one path, the path which leads to the objective. "If you are unable to adapt, if you do not find it in yourself to crawl on your stomach in the mire, you are not a revolutionary but a prattler, but it is not for this reason that I want to do this; it is not because I like it but because there is no other way." – These words spoken in this address expressed the essence of Lenin's thoughts and feelings.[50]

Immediately after the October Revolution, Lenin and the other leaders of the revolution turned to the two contending sides in the First World War with the proposal of making a peace based on the principle of "national self-determination."[51] Lenin's decision to make a painful compromise impressed Ben-Gurion much more than Trotsky's ambiguous hesitancy: "neither peace nor war." Lenin wanted to overrule the stubborn opposition of Trotsky and others who, drunk with the victory of revolutionary Messianism, were willing to risk everything. When Ben-Gurion had to accept painful compromises – as with Hevrat Ha-Ovdim, the Partition Plan, and the agreement with Jabotinsky – he remembered the *Realpolitik* of Lenin and not the *permanent revolution* of Trotsky, the "red Messiah." Lenin was shown to be a visionary and a pragmatic statesman who was not bound by the Messianic principles of the revolutionary imperative. As Ben-Gurion saw it, the Russian revolutionary combined political flair and ideological zeal with the gift of adaptation to reality. This was the model of true leadership.

After Lenin's death, Ben-Gurion realized the mythical potential of the departed leader:

> We see what Lenin is to the party, to all its members and its leaders without exception, how he dominates their hearts and minds; to what a degree his word, his thoughts, his ideas count as legislation, orders, decrees which cannot be questioned. How deep a faith there is in his understanding and guidance – a faith which is boundless and unconditional. "That is what Vladimir Ilitch said" – No argument is more convincing than that.[52]

Ben-Gurion saw Lenin as a "myth-leader." A "myth-leader" is a myth surrounding a leader which personifies tales of symbolic events which have an aura of sanctity and convey ideas of educational significance. All political ideologies characterized by constant mobilization, socialization, and motivation of the masses tend to have a "myth-leader." Thus, Bolshevism had Lenin, National Socialism had Adolf Hitler, Italian fascism had Mussolini, Gaullism had Charles De Gaulle, and Peronism had Juan Peron. The personification facilitates the believers' identification with the ideology (and sometimes even replaces it), strengthens the myth, and increases its effectiveness. Lenin, as it were, became Leninism: would Ben-Gurion become Ben-Gurionism?

The myth-leader is liable to be a founding-father of various and sometimes contrary ideologies. Giuseppe Mazzini, the prophet of United Italy, was a source of legitimation for both the socialist Filippo Turati, who stressed the heritage of the left, and the fascist Benito Mussolini, who wished to complete the unfinished *risorgimento*. In Israel, the Trumpeldor myth, based on the tragic battle of Trumpeldor and his comrades in the Galilee in 1920, was appropriated both by the "Joseph Trumpeldor Gdud Avodah (labor corps)," representing the socialist ideology, and by Betar's "Brit Joseph Trumpeldor," representing the nationalist ideology. The Bar-Kochba myth also underwent a selective adoption which reflected the point of view of the recipient. Israel Eldad, on the right, saw the Bar-Kochba revolt as a positive myth of struggle for national freedom, while Yehoshafat Harkabi (1921–94), on the left, viewed it as a negative myth revealing a lack of political realism which led to exile and destruction.[53] Would Ben-Gurionism have different ideological connotations for the various political camps in Israel?

One can distinguish between the leader of a generation like Winston Churchill, who is relevant only to his own time, and a myth-leader like Peron in Argentina, whose image has been detached from the context of his life and has been elevated to a fantastic degree by being associated with events that happened after his death. The myth-leader gains his full stature in the consciousness of the public after the leader himself has gone. Ideologies named after a person, like Leninism, Peronism, and Gaullism, generally suggest that this was a myth-leader through whom a political mobilization was carried out.

The most outstanding examples of myth-leaders are founders of nations like Mustafa Kemal Ataturk in Turkey and Kwame Nkrumah in Ghana; ideological or religious leaders like Lenin (Leninism was based on the Marxist ideology) or Ruholla Said Khomeini (Khomeinism was based on the Muslim religion); founders of régimes like Mussolini, who provides an example of a régime whose life-span is the same as that of its leader; and legislators like De Gaulle, who was adopted by both right and left because of the legislation enacted in his name, unlike Francisco Franco, who had a mythical image only for the Spanish right. In the American democracy we also find myth-leaders who come into being as a result of particular needs and circumstances. Certain civic festivals in the United States are ritual

expressions of a myth-leader who represents a particular facet of the American experience. George Washington represents a mythicization of the birth of the American nation; Abraham Lincoln represents a mythicization of the unity of the American nation; Martin Luther King represents a mythicization of equality before the law. Although the image of Ben-Gurion in the general Israeli consciousness is that of the founder of the Israeli nation, the ritual commemorating his death is no more than an official ceremony. As against this, 11 Adar (in the Hebrew calendar), the date of Trumpeldor's death, and November 4 (1995), the date of Israeli prime minister Yitzhak Rabin's murder, are imprinted in the Israeli consciousness.

The time factor is essential in the crystallization of a myth-leader's status. In some cases, only a short time elapses between the death of a leader and the myth that is built up around them, and in other cases a longer period is required for the myth to be developed. In either case, political interests or social needs dictate the way this happens. In the case of a widely accepted figure like Trumpeldor, the myth connected with his name formed only a few months after he fell with his friends at Tel Hai on March 1, 1920, but the transition from the sectoral status of the myth to official status required a time perspective so that it would not be connected with any particular party.

It seems that in Israel time does not work to the advantage of mythical figures from the past like Berl Katznelson or even Moshe Dayan (1915–81), the Israeli military leader and politician who became a national hero after the 1967 war. They have evaporated, so to speak, in comparison with the figure of Ben-Gurion, whose image only tends to improve with time. Ben-Gurion's mythical biography developed after the event: the memory of episodes associated with sectorial interests, like his slogan "without Herut [the Israeli rightist party] and Maki [the Israeli communist party]" or his refusal to allow Jabotinsky's bones to be brought up for burial in Israel, was eventually eclipsed by the national significance of the founding of the State.[54] Ben-Gurion finally came to be regarded as a founding-father and a figure above party by the Israeli right as well. On the other hand, a similar process did not happen in the case of the attitude of the Israeli left towards Jabotinsky, who has remained a myth-leader only for the Israeli right.

The common feature of Ben-Gurion and Lenin was that despite their Messianic vision they were not constrained by rigid ideological principles. Both leaders paid sufficient attention to the changing conditions of history. Lenin was faced with many problems: the struggle within the party, the world war, the institutionalization of Marxism, the civil war and the threat from the Western powers. Ben-Gurion's problems were no less weighty than Lenin's. At the beginning of the 1920s, he had wanted to impose Lenin's avant-garde Bolshevik approach, thinking that he should take control of the party (Ahdut Ha-Avodah) in order that it should run the *Histadrut* as a labor movement, guide the labor faction within the Zionist movement, and finally steer the state-in-the-making towards national independence. The Jewish leader was drawn to the Russian one because of the fascination of his personality, his

grasp of organization and his capacity to compromise with his Bolshevik Messianism. The rising labor-Zionist leader was also drawn to Trotsky on account of his militaristic Messianism expressed in a military-type communism.

The Messianic vision and social engineering

Lenin's influence on Ben-Gurion has already been discussed in Israeli historiography, but Ben-Gurion's attraction to Trotsky has not yet been deeply investigated. In the memorial ceremony for Chaim Arlosoroff (1899–1933), the Histadrut official who was assassinated by Jewish right-wing extremists, Ben-Gurion singled out Trotsky and Disraeli as the two great Jewish leaders of the last two hundred years.[55] A quarter of a century later, when the idea came up of creating a Jewish Museum in Jerusalem, he again drew attention to these two figures in his diary as examples of the great influence exerted by the Jews in all countries.[56] On August 25, 1923, Ben-Gurion copied out by hand in Russian a section of Trotsky's speech at the Fourth Metalworkers' Conference:

> The chief problem which in the long run will decide our fate in a decisive manner is the rational and scientific organization of industry, the concentration and correct organization of production. This is now the revolutionary objective, almost as sacrosanct as the struggle for rule in October.[57]

It is not surprising that it was this passage precisely that caught Ben-Gurion's attention: social engineering through "rational and scientific organization" and "concentration and correct organization" was a "sacrosanct revolutionary objective" for Ben-Gurion as well as Trotsky. In working out his program for *Hevrat Ha-Ovdim* (the Workers' Society), Ben-Gurion could draw on the Bolshevik experience after the Revolution, and especially Trotsky's "belligerent communism."

In 1920, the central committee of the party adopted some of Trotsky's specific proposals, which developed out of the mobilization of the nation during the war.[58] His proposals were as follows: In order to end the chaos, the government had to "regard the population as a reserve army of labor." The economy was to be subject to military regulations, and the population had the duty of organizing itself in battalions, companies and divisions under the command of army officers who had trained in industrial centers. Every worker would now be a soldier. At the Third Congress of the National Economic Council and at the Moscow Soviet of the Workers' and Farmers' Representatives, Trotsky presented his program for the military organization of industry: "The military establishment must train the economic establishment: industrial areas will be declared military zones. The

positions of command will be taken by our technicians, the new engineers, and the people of the enterprise or the administration."[59]

Underlying this military-economic analogy was the challenge of turning an amorphous mass into a machine operating on orders from above. Military culture and mechanical psychology were Trotsky's inspiration in building the socialist society. He believed that the nation in the future would resemble a military body, and that accordingly the best preparation would be the total militarization of society. Discipline, administrative reorganization, economic planning on a war basis, and the constant military preparedness of the entire population would, metaphorically speaking, turn the Soviet Union into a military camp.[60]

Both Trotsky and Ben-Gurion drew inspiration from the "Paris Commune," which in 1871 had had the vision of a social republic. It was Ben-Gurion's communist phase at the beginning of the 1920s that in the final analysis was responsible for his Messianic vision of an Israeli social republic.

For Ben-Gurion, the Messianic vision and social engineering were two sides of the same coin. As the secretary of the *Histadrut*, he sought to have all the organizations brought under his authority, to effect reorganization with the creation of a comprehensive bureaucratic structure, to impose the dominance of political over economic factors and to favor the general national interest over the particular interest of the civil society of the Yishuv. Because the communist method was also the surest way of assuring the security of the whole Yishuv, one had to set up a "general commune with military discipline of all the workers of Palestine, which would have authority over all the agricultural settlements and urban cooperatives, the feeding and supply of the whole Yishuv and the launching and administration of all public works in the country."[61] This ambition was reflected in Ben-Gurion's attempt to found a concentrational organization which would permit total control and supervision of all members of the *Histadrut*.[62] While this project was in the process of crystallization, he proposed that the members of *Ahdut Ha-Avodah* should join this quasi-military organization on a voluntary basis, and thanks to this avant-garde unit the army of labor would become the possession of all the workers.

The proposals for a "workers' society" (*Hevrat Ovdim*) were published in *Contres*, the Ahdut Ha-Avodah journal, in readiness for the third Congress of the movement, which met in Haifa in December 1922.[63] Under the heading "Task of the General Federation of Labor (*Histadrut*)," Ben-Gurion made eleven points: briefly, the General *Histadrut* is solely responsible for the organization and management of the labor, production and supply of the workers in the towns and villages; all voluntary, cooperative, agricultural and urban organizations come under the sole authority of the *Histadrut*; all products of their labor are its property; the *Histadrut* is the sole contractor of public and private works in the country; the salaries of all workers go into the *Histadrut* fund; all the workers' needs – food, clothing, housing, medical attention and education – are supplied by the *Histadrut*; it also determines

minimum and maximum prices. The two final points are very interesting, and illustrate the nature of the "army of labor":

> Section 10: Until the General *Histadrut* assumes the abovementioned tasks, a disciplined army of labor will be created which will organize and manage the labor, produce and supply of all its members according to the abovementioned principles.
> Section 11: Ahdut Ha-Avodah will immediately mobilize all its members for the army of labor. All members of Ahdut Ha-Avodah are obliged to unquestioningly obey the orders of the leadership of the army of labor with regard to location, profession and organization of work.[64]

This bureaucratic-military program of the "army of labor," called the "general commune" by Ben-Gurion, reflected his constant fear of anarchy. At the beginning of his proposal, he called for "order and discipline instead of anarchy." The "army of labor" as a proletarian-military structure was the opposite of anarchism, which was derived from the Greek word *anarchos* (without rule). The starting-point of the anarchists of the end of the nineteenth century was really harmony: they thought that instead of a coerced organization within the framework of a state there should be a free association of individuals and groups. This liberal society, organized on just economic principles, would have a harmonious character and would have no need of a coercive government from above. However, Ben-Gurion, unlike the anarchist groups, feared anarchistic, individualistic, uncontrolled activities:

> Instead of anarchy, order and discipline; instead of divisions and oppositions, unity and mutual responsibility; instead of strengthening the parts at the expense of and to the detriment of the whole, the strengthening of the entire working class with our combined forces. Instead of a private economy and capitalist economic relationships among the workers themselves, a common general labor economy for the entire body of workers in the country, a labor economy whose fundamental aim would be providing for the needs of the working Yishuv through its own production.[65]

This represents a very significant phase in Ben-Gurion's life, and, although it did not last long, it was marked by a syndrome characteristic of revolutionary political ideologies: the combination of a militaristic-hierarchic structuralism with a Messianic mentality.[66] This syndrome appeared on the stage of history with the French Revolution and the Soviet Revolution: revolutions which were political religions whose principles – modernism, secularism, optimism, Jacobinism – were supposed to create a new man and a new society.[67]

The "army of labor," like the "Gdud Ha-Avodah" (labor corps) before it, was a worthy microcosm of the new society marked by discipline, hierarchy (and at the same time equality), and quasi-military structures. The features of

Ben-Gurion's program resembled Trotsky's: the construction of a rigid labor economy, maximum planning and supervision, concentration, management, standardization, total ownership of the means of production, communist étatism in place of a free economy. Ben-Gurion and Trotsky were both drawn, in different historical contexts, to the same syndrome of militaristic structuralism which was essentially a Promethean phenomenon. But Ben-Gurion's capacity to retreat from his Messianic-proletarian-militaristic program when he saw that his colleagues did not accept it is what distinguished him from Trotsky.

A few days before the end of 1923, after his visit to Russia and his time in the laboratory of world revolution where Lenin appeared as "the man with the iron will," the inspiring model of a leader who transforms reality under the guidance of an idea, a few days before he arrived back, on the ship which sailed from Brindisi to Alexandria, Ben-Gurion indulged in reflections:

> Only the dull of spirit and those of limited perceptions can imagine that the Messianic dream of tens of generations filled with suffering and affliction was but a vain illusion. Through hidden channels, from generation to generation, the great and inspiring ideal persisted, and what will a man blessed with hunger and thirst for creativity and redemption not do? Driven by the power of suffering, he will perform the greatest miracle when he turns to the path of creativity, planted in the soil of the homeland, connected by a thousand vibrations to the vision of universal salvation and the great, Messianic redemption, the vision which renews Hebrew history.[68]

Many elements of Ben-Gurion's concept of Messianism were already present at this early stage of the political biography of the founder of the State: a belief in the effective power of the Messianic dream of bringing the Jewish people back to history; an acknowledgement of the importance of cultural tradition and historical continuity; the understanding that redemption must be preceded by pre-Messianic tribulations; the idea that the realization of the Messianic dream can only take place on the soil of the homeland, and, together with that, an insistence on the necessary connection between the particularistic national vision and the universal Messianic redemption, and above all the awareness that the achievement of the Messianic vision is the central aim of Jewish/Hebrew history. In this passage and in what follows one finds the kernel of Ben-Gurion's vision, which was destined to grow into a conceptual tree of many branches: the centrality of the Bible, the motherland and Eretz-Israel, the attachment to the vision of the prophets and the belief in the task of the Jewish people as a vanguard among the peoples of the world within a universalist-nationalist outlook:

> They are still scattered in all parts of the world: hundreds and thousands of our youth bearing in their hearts an indistinct dream, desires for

redemption and some vague revolution. They will gather in the land, and a spring of sealed-up creativity shall gush forth; the energy suppressed and held back from time immemorial shall break forth, steeped in the Messianic vision and drawing from the source of the great human revolution, the revolution in all its strength taking place in our much-suffering generation thirsty for renewal, and the great work which will light up the path of the future, the work of redemption, will take hold of the culture of the land of wonders awakening with each new bud, purifying the heart of the debased Jewish masses, and a new people will arise, a people with a new heart, and its soul will be fresh and thirsty, and in that heart will be great energy, and in that great undertaking, the undertaking of creating redemption, it will find its healing.[69]

The world revolution on the one hand, and the Messianic energy of the Jewish youth "bearing in their hearts an indistinct dream, desires for redemption and some vague revolution" on the other, brought Ben-Gurion to the conclusion that one had to give the Jewish youth in Eastern Europe a challenge; the Zionist challenge was of no less universal significance than the Bolshevik. He was thinking, perhaps, of young people like the historian J. L. Talmon, who related that his youth was "caught in a cross-fire from two directions: the Messianic fire from eastern Europe and the fire of Zionism from Eretz-Israel."[70] For these young people, Ben-Gurion sought – in view of the Bolshevik challenge – to transform Zionism into a Messianic fire. Ben-Gurion and his generation were fully conscious of the revolutionary intellectual climate of their period, and, seeking to preserve Zionism, they declared that their aim was the redemption of the Jewish people. This declaration was made under the influence of the claim of the Bolshevik Revolution that it offered a universal redemption to all humankind, including the Jewish people, and not merely a partial healing as proposed by Zionism.[71]

In 1924, Ben-Gurion, who was thirty-seven years old, had for two years been secretary-general of the Federation of Labor (*Histadrut*) in Palestine. He envisaged the future Jewish State not only in organizational and political terms as a nation-state, but also in revolutionary terms of the perfection of man and the perfection of the world. In Israel, a "new society" and a "new people" were to come into being. This challenge had to be formulated in a suitably revolutionary manner: if one wanted to change human nature, to create an alternative reality, or, in other words, not to go with history step by step, but rather go against it, one had to use meta-historical concepts.

Ben-Gurion's intention as secretary of the *Histadrut* was not only to set up a syndicated trade union, but "to erect a new structure – new from top to bottom … . The pioneering workers should together lay a strong foundation for a new society." He saw the workers in the *Histadrut* as "the pioneers of the national rebirth and the social redemption of the Hebrew people."[72] He believed that the labor movement "derived its existence from the idea of rebirth and redemption" and its members were the vanguard of the new

society to be founded in Eretz-Israel. Thus, Eretz-Israel was not only a territorial/political solution to the plight of the Jews but a space in which a Messianic vision based on moral ideals could be realized:

> Zionism is not only the building of Eretz-Israel. One could build Eretz-Israel and the hope of Israel would be disappointed. One could create a society that would be a disgrace. There is no magic in Eretz-Israel as such. There too one can degenerate; there too there are white-slave traders. One could create places of Arab slavery which would be a horror for the Jewish people and for humanity. Building up the Jewish people requires money, but not only money. One needs a great moral idea.[73]

In 1929, *Ahdut Ha-Avodah* and *Ha-Po'el Ha-Tza'ir* – the two great movements in the *Histadrut* – merged and founded *Mapai* (Hebrew acronym for Eretz-Israel's Labor Party). Both Berl Katznelson and Ben-Gurion, who were the driving forces behind the merger, used ecstatic terminology and described the new socialist political body as "a movement of national redemption."[74] After it had gained complete control of the labor camp, the way was clear for its domination of the Zionist movement. The period in which Ben-Gurion served there as chairman of the Jewish Agency (1935–48) was also the period of the catastrophe of the Jewish people in Europe.

The apocalypse and the days of the Messiah

In 1932, the former secretary-general of the *Histadrut* set out in a direction which was to lead to the conquest of the Zionist movement. Aiming at this strategic objective and striving to attain it, he gained the opportunity to become acquainted at close quarters with the distress of the European Jews against the background of the rise of the fascist movements between the two world wars. On the internal political front, a new rival had appeared which seemed to be on its way to achieving a majority in the Zionist Organization. With the emergence of the Revisionist movement, he immediately discerned the great potential of the Jewish political right, the talents of the charismatic leader of this mass movement, its tendency towards an aestheticization of politics, and its Messianic rhetoric.

According to Ben-Gurion, a gulf separated the concept of redemption of the labor movement from that of the Revisionist movement. He believed that "in the Hebrew labor movement, one finds the historical essence of the hope of redemption in all its boundless depth … . Zionism for them was not only a return to the country but also a turning towards a reformed life; not only a geographical transformation but a social transformation." As against this, "the Revisionist filth is nothing more than a link in the accursed chain of distortions of the idea of redemption."[75]

Jabotinsky was Ben-Gurion's bitter adversary in the struggle for the hearts of the Jews of Poland in the stormy campaign in 1933 for the election of the

leadership of the Zionist Organization. In this struggle, Ben-Gurion did not mince his words, and the opening chapter of his book *The Labor Movement and Revisionism*, published that same year, was entitled "Jabotinsky in the Footsteps of Hitler." For him, Jabotinsky and his friends were

> false Messiahs sucking up the refuse of history and its worthless dross, prophesying in the name of the powers of darkness and social uncleanliness, who have attached themselves to the Zionist Organization and try to divert this national movement from its goal of human liberation towards "a régime of blood, mire and slavery" and place their hopes on external forces from the past which no longer exist.[76]

In a strong letter of condemnation of "Revisionismus," Ben-Gurion contrasted the authentic Messianic vision of historical Judaism and modern Zionism with the false Messianism of the Jewish radical right:

> Zionism is a Messianic movement. In their long and terrible days of suffering, which do not have their like in human history, the Jewish people cherished a great and lofty vision, a universal vision – the vision of the end of days, the vision of human redemption. From time to time, false Messiahs arose who made the vision a fraud and perverted the hope and faith of the people. But the eternity of the people (God) did not lie. The great vision was not a false one, for it sprang from deep needs and primal longings which were refined in the crucible of suffering and heroism. Zionism has taken upon itself the audacious task of turning the ancient dream into a living reality, and our generation has been able to see the beginning of its realization.[77]

In the course of his campaign to capture world Zionism, Ben-Gurion was exposed to the suffering of the Polish Jews. This, he said, was a fertile soil for the false attraction of Revisionist Messianism. Jabotinsky and Ben-Gurion both saw the situation correctly, but they proposed different solutions. When Hitler came to power, Jabotinsky called for the evacuation of the Jews of Europe, and Ben-Gurion saw "the nightmarish situation of the Jews of Poland, a situation of permanent pogrom, both political, physical, economic and moral, perhaps much worse than in Germany … The poverty is alarming, the insults intolerable, and there is not the slightest hope of improvement, of self-defense. Black despair and impotence, the absence of deliverance and no way out."[78]

In this tragic situation of the year 1936, he perceived the negative potential of the Messianic faith to lead to Jewish passivity:

> There is some sort of Messianic inspiration, but in a negative way: not the reinforcement of faith by one's own efforts and a strengthening of will, but an abstract delusion.[79]

This sentiment was confirmed by his experience at a public meeting in which he spoke to the Polish Jews about the political problems and the terrible dangers "and there was a boundless enthusiasm in the hall, as though I had announced the coming of the Messiah."[80] Ben-Gurion felt frustrated: the exilic Jews were excited by rhetoric but took no concrete steps to escape their predicament. In August 1936, in a telegram to the World Jewish Congress, he remarked on the one hand on the bad political weather in Europe and the disturbances in Palestine ("Cruel oppressors with the mark of Cain on their brows and loathsome racial doctrines in their mouths have risen up against us in exile, and gangs of rioters assail our redemptive undertaking in Eretz-Israel"), and on the other, even in that difficult time, he never tired of proclaiming his Messianic vision and urging greater "efforts towards a speedy and full realization of the redemption of our people in its land."[81]

Ben-Gurion's calls for a "speedy and full realization of national redemption" in the period before the outbreak of the Second World War were more than mere words. In those years there was a change in the conception of *aliyah* (immigration to Israel) which he and his movement had had until then. He switched from the idea of a selective, avant-garde, pioneering *aliyah* which would prepare the way for an ideal society to the concept of a mass *aliyah* – an immediate rescue of the Jews of Europe. He recognized the harsh historical reality lurking on their doorstep; he saw its scale and changed his order of priorities. The ideal of the hoped-for utopian society gave way to the rescue of the "human dust" of the Jewish people. Rescuing the European Jews and bringing most of them to Palestine would also strengthen Ben-Gurion's main purpose in his entire Zionist career thus far: the establishment of a national home for the Jewish people in Eretz-Israel.

In 1937, the recommendations of the Peel Commission for the partition of Palestine were published. At the twentieth Zionist Congress, Ben-Gurion gave his reasons for supporting an emergency plan to rescue the Jews of Europe and realize the idea of a Jewish State in practical terms even if it meant compromising the vision of a Greater Land of Israel. He recognized the fatefulness of the hour: "I see the next congress as no less important than Herzl's first congress."[82] This was a major crossroads: "We stand on the threshold of a great disaster or on the threshold of a mighty historical conquest." Ben-Gurion stood before a fateful decision, and understood that he was faced with a revolutionary situation as Lenin was at the time of the treaty of Brest-Litovsk. The historical crisis could not be measured by normal criteria, and it had its own momentum:

> We are now called upon to make our reckoning, not in accordance with normal considerations but with a revolutionary approach, the sense of a deep historical crisis passing over ourselves and the land. Historical crises have their own logic, fundamentally different from the logic of regular, normal times, and we shall miss our objective if we now measure things

by our usual criteria … Here there are totally different dangers and also a completely new momentum.[83]

Ben-Gurion pushed for compromise on two binding and commonly accepted imperatives of the labor movement: the wholeness of the land and selective pioneering immigration. The two things were interdependent: the "magic solution" of partition, which meant a decision against the wholeness of the land, provided the opportunity to work for a broad, non-selective *aliyah*. It is paradoxical that in practice these two painful compromises made possible the building of the State. It is not surprising that it was precisely at this decisive moment of historical compromise that Ben-Gurion mobilized all the Messianic rhetoric at his command: the act of compromise was his and the action was Messianic. The decision of partition which played an active part in history and molded it was the Messianic act par excellence, as against waiting for the Messiah to appear at the end of history.

Unlike Yitzhak Tabenkin (1888–1971), a labor activist and the leader of the United Kibbutz Movement, on one side and Jabotinsky on the other, Ben-Gurion understood the potential of the fateful hour that came his way with the partition proposal, seeing it as a unique opportunity for *aliyah* and for building up the country. In the philosophy of history he had developed there were historic leaps forward, revolutionary moments that had to be met with revolutionary means. This logic applied even more during the ever-increasing chaos of the Second World War. Ben-Gurion, unlike his colleagues, realized that it was possible and even essential in the crisis that was developing in the 1930s to rescue most of the Jewish people and settle it in even a small part of Palestine. In fact, the partition proposal facilitated a situation of self-reliance in which the Jewish leadership was not subjected to immigration quotas and the limitations on settlement imposed by the British. In that situation, one could make a virtue of necessity: one could rescue the Jews of Europe and found the hoped-for state. Ben-Gurion believed that the opposition to the partition proposal on the right was motivated by Revisionist adventurism, "the worst kind of false Messianism."[84] After the failure of his talks with the Arab leaders in 1933 he realized that it would not be possible to sign an agreement with the Arabs, and he hoped to force an outcome by creating facts on the ground. The partition proposal was, so to speak, a partial solution to two problems at once: the distressful situation of the Jewish people in Europe and the blood-feud with the Arabs. The Zionist Prometheus had moved from an ideological Messianism to a pragmatic Messianism.

The "bad weather" in Europe and the call for a "new momentum" brought out Ben-Gurion's leadership, which was increasingly manifest in the following years. From 1937 to 1948 he made crucial decisions with the feeling of engineering a historic breakthrough, from the call for a mass immigration of the European Jews in the 1930s to the opening of the gates of the State of Israel in the first years of the great immigration, and from the acceptance of the

Peel Commission's partition plan to the decision to declare the State. These acts of leadership appear in historical perspective to be acts of assault, of creating a historical direction – "Messianism" in the Ben-Gurion sense of the term. At that time, he refused to oppose the terms that were offered, and in the face of the dramatic events taking place on Europe – the Nuremberg Laws, the Munich Agreement, the Kristallnacht – he sought to steer the course of history towards a realization of the Zionist project in a revolutionary historical situation. A year before the outbreak of the Second World War, he wrote in his diary:

> I believe in the days of the Messiah. Wickedness will not reign forever. Hitler and Chamberlain will not exist forever … Righteousness, now trampled underfoot, will yet appear.[85]

When the skies of Europe grew overcast, Ben-Gurion did not sink into a state of depression. The meaning of his declaration "I believe in the days of the Messiah" was that in European Jewry's darkest hour the leader placed his trust in the future. He put forward a Messianic faith in a better future for humanity and the Jewish people as a value in which one should believe; in the end, human righteousness would overcome human wickedness. Two years later, his friend and colleague Berl Katznelson also spoke in Messianic terms, but this time it was in order to express helplessness and despair. In 1940, according to Berl's biographer, Anita Shapira, he reported that a woman had said to a friend in the market: "The Lord of the Universe is wrong in delaying and not sending the Messiah. What will happen if the Messiah comes and no longer finds his Jews?" When the scale of the catastrophe became clear, Ben-Gurion declared in a rough manner: "previously, we were a people without a state, now we are a state without a people."

That was the whole difference between them. At a time when Berl, the warm-hearted Jewish intellectual, was in despair concerning the Jews of Europe, was helpless before their suffering and identified with the victims to the point of desperation, Ben-Gurion remained cool-headed and alert and statesmanlike to the depths of his being. He did not feel the horror any less than Berl did and even saw it coming earlier than he and others. Already in 1934, on reading *Mein Kampf*, he wrote: "Hitler's régime puts the whole Jewish people in danger,"[86] and in 1938 he made a grim forecast of the fate in store for the Jewish people: "Hitler is not only the enemy and adversary of German Jewry. His sadistic and fanatical aim is the extermination of the Jews in the entire world."[87] His grim forecasts did not render him helpless, and in the face of the approaching disaster he did what was best in the situation: he prepared to found a state. The path which led to independence and the realization of the vision of the National Home in Eretz-Israel was to be a tragic one. He did not look back in anger but prepared an infrastructure for the absorption of masses of Jewish immigrants.

Ben-Gurion and the Holocaust are still an unsolved riddle. The efforts Ben-Gurion made to rescue the European Jews tragically did not bear fruit. In the opinion of many, they did not display the initiative and political energy normally so characteristic of this bold leader. In the opinion of others, however, the demands of the situation were so many and the possibilities so few that the people of the Yishuv were not able with the few means they had to save the lives of their brethren and parents in Europe. Their attempts at rescue were at best "arrows in the dark," to use the expression of Eliezer Kaplan (1891–1952), Israel's first minister of finance, in his report to the Jewish Agency, and as is shown by Tuvia Friling's study of Ben-Gurion, the Yishuv leadership, and attempts at rescue during the Holocaust. Ben-Gurion's Zionist outlook was marked by two parallel features: negation of the exilic Jewish condition and the desire to rescue the Jews by such means as the restoration of their sovereignty.[88]

It may be true that "Ben-Gurion saw rescue almost exclusively in terms of immigration to Palestine, and decided – correctly – that there was no chance of rescuing masses by this means,"[89] or that, as his biographer claimed, "Ben-Gurion could not do anything to relieve the suffering or save lives, and may therefore have preferred silence to words without actions."[90] Whatever the case, he "called for the Zionist ideology to adapt to the difficult reality, as Zionism, in his words, was not a 'metaphysical theology' but a movement of practical liberation."[91] In the face of Dante's inferno, as he called it, and in the face of the industrial extermination carried out by the Nazis, he made a radical decision: perhaps the best thing to do was to save what there was and not to concern oneself with what was lost.

At a time when Berl wrote in his diary, "One has no strength to greet the next day," Ben-Gurion was working on a political program for the day after the war. In the Baltimore Program (May 1942), he succeeded in uniting the Zionist movement around a political plan of action which worked towards the creation of a Jewish State in Palestine after the war and called for the transference of the authority for decisions concerning immigration and settlement to the Zionist establishment. About six months later, he initiated the setting up of a national team to plan the immigration and settlement of masses of Jews from Europe. This team, which eventually came to be known as *Va'adat Ha-Tichnun* (the "Planning Committee"), was occupied for about two years in working out the details of a "Plan for a Million" which had been presented to the members of Ben-Gurion's party seven years before. This plan envisaged the immigration of a million Jews to Palestine and their settlement there within an extremely short period. Ben-Gurion wrote at that time in his diary that if a million or half a million Jews were to immigrate to Palestine within a year, "I would see it as the coming of the Messiah."[92]

In May 1945, the Second World War in Europe ended. After the war, Ben-Gurion declared: "These few remnants refuse to return to the countries which have become cemeteries for their parents and children."[93] In August of that year, he gave a brief formulation of his Zionist-Messianic philosophy of history.

Its general principle was: "Nothing Jewish is alien to us." Then he wondered, "Are the Jews a nation only in Eretz-Israel, or are they a secular political nation throughout the world? Or are they a historical-spiritual unit?" Until a hundred and fifty years before, he said, the Jews were a separate nation "with a special status in the ghetto, and one central idea – the idea of the Messiah. The chosen nation would be redeemed in its entirety and return to Zion, and all the peoples would flow towards it."[94] He claimed that with the coming of emancipation Jewish separateness and the Messianic idea were undermined. From that time onwards, two approaches existed among the Jewish people: the dynamic Zionist approach and the static exilic approach.

According to Ben-Gurion, the dynamic Zionist approach became a reality when the United Nations recognized the right of the Jews to self-determination in Palestine in November 1947. On that occasion, the hour of redemption was linked to an apocalyptic threat: the international recognition of the Jewish State led to an inevitable confrontation between the Jews and Arabs in Palestine. The Yishuv fought for its life; it faced a life-or-death situation.

In his autobiography *A Tale of Love and Darkness*, Amos Oz gave a good description of the sense of redemption together with fear which gripped the Yishuv with the United Nations Assembly's declaration of the partition of Palestine into two states, as though it was the revelation of Sinai:

> The whole crowd seemed to have been turned to stone in that frightening night silence, as if they were not real people but hundreds of dark silhouettes painted on to the canvas of the flickering darkness. As though they had died on their feet. Not a word was heard, not a cough nor a footstep. No mosquito hummed. Only the deep, rough voice of the American presenter blaring from the radio which was set at full volume and made the night air tremble … At that, the voice suddenly stopped, and an other-worldly silence descended and froze the whole scene, a terrified, eerie silence, a silence of hundreds of people holding their breath, such as I have never heard in my life either before or after that night.[95]

On November 29, 1947, Ben-Gurion was staying at Kibbutz Kallia near the Dead Sea. He refused to go out to meet the Israelis who were celebrating the United Nations Assembly's decision. He explained to his daughter Renana: "Who knows if some of those dancing here will not be amongst those who will fall?"[96]

In his pocket diary, he wrote down a sort of "shopping list," a recipe for setting up a state: "Government, name, capital, budget, police, radio, army, services, officials, legislation, courts, ports, airports, districts, finance, coinage, anthem."[97] About six months later, after he had officially declared the founding of an independent state, he noted in his diary: "There is much joy and rejoicing in the country, and once again I am a mourner among the revellers as on the 29th of November."[98]

Ben-Gurion and the Messianic myth

For Ben-Gurion, the founding of the State of Israel was a "Messianic event." After it had come into existence, he connected the founding of the Jewish State with the catastrophe that had overtaken European Jewry: "Fate so desired it that the Messianic event – I permit myself to use this awesome, glorious term – of the revival of the Jewish State took place at a time when a third of our people was exterminated."[99] Between the two main events in the history of the Jewish people in the twentieth century – the Holocaust and the founding of the State of Israel – there was a space of only three years, which gives it a special importance in the history of nations and makes it a unique case study in historical leadership.

In March and October 1949, Ben-Gurion arranged two meetings with writers and intellectuals. The question discussed in these meetings was the kind of collective identity the pioneering élite should have in the face of the mounting waves of immigration, or, more specifically, how a State which had fixed its patterns of identity in the society of the Yishuv could adapt itself to the great immigration of the late 1940s and the beginning of the 1950s. Ben-Gurion, as usual, was intensely focused on his objective, perhaps the most important in the history of the State of Israel: the absorption of the great *aliyah*. Yesterday's military commander had become the builder of a nation. In the centre of his agenda was the great *aliyah* which within three years was to double the number of Jewish inhabitants. Both his colleagues in the political establishment and the intellectuals and writers were worried about the impact of this non-selective wave of immigrants, but Ben-Gurion, for his part, saw it as a development which would make the State of Israel into an established fact. Here one sees Ben-Gurion's revolutionary understanding that the immigration was not a stroke of fate but an opportunity, in exactly the same way as he had seen the positive potential of the 1937 partition plan.

Tragic circumstances led to the fulfillment of the Zionist prophecy, and instead of the entire people being redeemed one only had Holocaust survivors and the remnants of oriental Jewry. The cultural inheritance of these people did not form part of the pioneering Zionist ethos of the society of the Yishuv. This "human dust" was supposed to be transformed into the "new man." The aim was to form a sociological collective with a common goal, and the ideology of the "melting pot," myths of heroism, and rituals of *Mamlachtiut* were created for that purpose. These elements of acculturation were intended as a common inheritance. The Messianic myth conceived as the ethos of the new State was identified solely with Ben-Gurion and was seen as his creation. The Ben-Gurion ethos of *Mamlachtiut* was accompanied by a Messianic ideology.[100]

Ben-Gurion saw the Messianic idea as a common basis for building the Israeli nation, a means of strengthening it and a goal towards which both the old and the new *aliyah* could strive. The Messianic idea, which drew from traditional Jewish sources, could serve as a mobilizing myth which enabled

different Jewish communities to create a meta-narrative of exile and renewal, of dispersion and independence. According to this narrative, the homeland was Zion, the movement was Zionism, history was the return to Zion; the future was the national and cultural redemption of the Jewish people which was achieved by the establishment of the Jewish realm in Eretz-Israel.

Although there were religious-Zionist circles, pioneers of the second *aliyah* and major philosophers in the history of Jewish thought for whom the concept of Messianism was central to their consciousness and actions, Ben-Gurion was the first Zionist political leader who made a conscious and significant use of the Messianic myth. Founding myths generally have a dramatic connection to the theme of origins and goals: where the society comes from and where it is going. The Messianic myth does in fact do this by connecting the historical house of David with the end of days. One can trace the gradual development of this Messianic myth into a central idea in Judaism. Zionism translated the myth into secular political terms to such a degree that there were some who saw Zionism as a secular Messianism, and it was transformed by Ben-Gurion into a mobilizing tool in the building of a modern society renewing its sovereignty in its historical homeland. Ben-Gurion made dual use of the Messianic myth: as a conservative, stabilizing element and as a revolutionary, energizing element.

In sociological theory, functionality is regarded as one of the main characteristics of myth. According to Émile Durkheim, the purpose of myth is to preserve a high degree of solidarity in society, which is a necessary condition for social stability. Thus, myths are seen as "imaginary communities" which create "invented traditions" of common national consciousness.[101] According to Georges Sorel, however, the task of myth is not to stabilize but to provide an impetus for action – that is to say, to energize and serve as an instrument of social mobilization. According to Durkheim, the present which "wants" consolidation creates myths which are able to crystallize and preserve, and, according to Sorel, the present which "wants" revolution creates innovating myths.[102] In 1949, Ben-Gurion used the Messianic myth to achieve two goals between which there was a certain dissimilarity: first, to create a social homogeneity through the use of the political and pedagogical practices of the melting pot; and, second, to provide inspiration, to reinforce sentiment and to foster the avant-garde pioneering ethos of the first Israelis. The Messianic myth sought to fulfill both these functions at one and the same time.

Unlike historiography, which aims at an objective truth, myth represents a kind of interpretation, a perspective in which there is an inner unity and a spiritual topography which emphasizes or conceals whatever in its view is worthy of emphasis or concealment. Ben-Gurion preferred to play down the Messianic significance of the Bar-Kochba rebellion, in which there was a combination of Messianic pretension with a lack of political realism, and chose, rather, to emphasize the nation's Messianic aspirations and the universal principles inherent in the Messianic vision. Myth also has a certain liminal character: that is to say, it depicts a situation in which something is

changed into something else. In Israel's first decade, Ben-Gurion tried, by means of the Messianic myth, to transform the various sociological groups into a single national community.

Claude Lévi-Strauss suggested that "[w]e do not think up or create myths; myths are thought into existence through us."[103] Does this idea – that myths are structural systems intrinsic to every culture and society – also apply to the history of the Jews? The Messianic myth (or the "Messianic myths," as the scholar Moshe Idel describes this phenomenon) has found expression in words, metaphors, and writings in various Jewish diasporas throughout history.[104] This Messianic longing found in different Jewish diasporas at different times perhaps existed for the reason that Lévi-Strauss gave for the existence of myth: "The need for a comprehensive explanation is a basic need of human nature. We shall never be free from the need for mythology. I might say that the crisis in Western civilization is in large measure due to the fact that we as a collective are unable to find the comprehensive explanation that myth provided for humanity for such a long period."[105] Ben-Gurion tried to resolve the Jewish crisis by providing a "comprehensive explanation" in the form of the Messianic myth reflected in the Jewish universal vision, in the founding of the Jewish State, and later in the consolidation of its Israeli identity. In his political and social understanding, the myth was to bestow renewed vitality on modern Jewish history.

We have seen a similar attempt in another context. Hassidism and Kabbalah were two relatively modern attempts to give "artificial respiration" to rabbinic Judaism through a revival of myth. The writings of Martin Buber on the one hand and Gershom Scholem on the other are connected with these two historical phenomena; hence the central role given to myth in their work. Their work was revolutionary in its criticism of the idea that Judaism is a basically anti-mythical religion which aimed, as Gershom Scholem put it, at a liquidation of myth. Here came these two scholars who interpreted myth as a revitalizing element in traditional Judaism. In his rehabilitation of myth as the living and creative basis of all cultures, Nietzsche was a major influence in the formation of Buber's and Scholem's approaches to myth. We also know Nietzsche's great influence on Berdichevsky (and Berdichevsky's on Ben-Gurion), and the important role all three of them gave to myth in history. In his revival of myth, Berdichevsky was rebelling against the historiography of Ahad Ha-Am and seeking to promote a revolutionary national rebirth. Thus, we can understand why Berdichevsky gave Hassidism and Kabbalah an important place in his work as original syntheses of myth and Judaism, unlike Ahad Ha-Am, who represented the traditional approach. Scholem described the traditional approach as "the general tendency of the classical Jewish tradition, the tendency to liquidate myth as a central spiritual force."[106]

Although the revival of myth as a "comprehensive explanation" is not possible in the modern world, one should notice the words of Lévi-Strauss, in a different context: "If we want to find an area in which mythological thinking still exists, I unhesitatingly suggest history. We make a mythological use of

history, but in an opposite direction. History is used to justify the changes we make in our own society."[107] Through this concept of "making a mythological use of history, but in an opposite direction" we can understand Ben-Gurion's use of the Messianic myth in contemporary political history. He created a connection between the history of the First Temple and the Messianic idea that existed in exile, rehabilitated this idea in order to create the impetus for the preparation of the Third Temple, and finally, when it arose, used it to fuse different Jewish communities into a single national community. He saw the Messianic idea as a sort of meta-narrative of Jewish history, and also a means of fusing together different Jewish narratives. The idea was embodied and fulfilled in the renewal of Jewish *Mamlachtiut* in Eretz-Israel.

The modern myth sought to seize the unity of the modern Jewish individual and his modern world in an existential experience. Modernism was the product of the thinking of the turn of the century, which made a revolutionary use of myth. If previously the identification of modern development with the idea of reason seemed self-evident, in the first half of the twentieth century a revolutionary new possibility arose: the "new man" and hence the "new Hebrew" and the pioneer could build their modern world through collective myth and "community of experience."

Anthropological works distinguish in the case of certain societies between the historical past and the mythological past. They are two separate realms of time. The task of time in myth is to explain phenomena in the present and to grant legitimation to existing social and political institutions.[108] The historical past is a past that is gone, but myth continues to operate in history: the mythical event is a precedent that recurs constantly in the course of time. The historians of ancient Greece showed that every generation tends to emphasize the features of the past that correspond to its own concerns and ideas. There is a dialectical relationship between mythical time and historical time in which each fashions the other in its own image. Mythological time bestows significance and creates the basis for conservative or revolutionary forms of action in contemporary historical time, and historical time makes use for its needs of certain elements in existing myths and at the same time creates new ones. Historical time is the time known to us: measurable, chronological, and continuous. Mythological time has its own characteristics, such as the ten days of repentance, the Jewish-Israeli time between Passover – the ancient feast of liberation – and Holocaust Day, the Day of Remembrance and Independence Day, and the closeness of the Day of Remembrance to Independence Day. In a different context, the historian Ben-Zion Dinur pointed out this dialectical relationship in the sphere of Hebrew historiography:

> The starting-point of all historiography of any kind is a "knowledge of the past" which exists in the people in its own generation. Within the changes and permutations that take place in the situation, that generation's historiography or each generation in turn sees, or thinks it sees the past differently, and it wants to relate what is known, to add and to lay

greater emphasis on what was not sufficiently emphasized before, and on the other hand, to slur over things which formerly had great importance and now have less.

It is a known fact that all historiography speaks of "those days" from the point of view of "these days," and it interprets and explains them from this angle of interest and in accordance with this way of seeing things, although the "knowledge of the past" remains essentially as it was. And one need hardly say that the knowledge of the recent past is entirely bound up and interconnected with the self-awareness of the generation. In fact, all historical knowledge involves some historical awareness because every historical concern is a kind of answer to questions, a solution to problems connected with the special nature of the national collectivity, its path and destiny.[109]

But Dinur was not the first to think in this way. Within the context of Zionism, leaders from Herzl onwards showed much interest in the constructive role of myth in the process of nation-building, though Ben-Gurion of course brought the myth to its maximum effectiveness. One had to bring together the dispersed people and form the nation while contending with a great number of internal and external difficulties. The Zionist movement operated in difficult conditions both in the diaspora and in Mandatory Palestine, and even after the founding of the State of Israel, Ben-Gurion and other leaders had to deal with a geopolitical environment which refused to grant legitimation to the Zionist project. Likewise, before 1948, Ben-Gurion had to face the hostility of an internal opposition among the Jewish and Zionist leadership and the leadership of the Yishuv when gaining acceptance for his national agenda. It was in these conditions that the Israeli identity was formed and consolidated. This could not have been done without the powerful myths fostered by Ben-Gurion, such as the return to Zion, the ingathering of the exiles, the model society, and the chosen people. In his opinion, all of them derived from one common source, a meta-myth – the Messianic myth. Ben-Gurion's long-lasting leadership derived from the interworking of this Messianic myth and his political realism, and also of course from other qualities such as intellectual audacity, organizational ability, a sense of timing, an ability to persevere, and a willingness to compromise.

Ben-Gurion understood that only the renewal of Jewish political life in Eretz-Israel would permit the rooting of the modern Jews as a permanent vanguard and the preservation of their "surplus value" through their universal Messianic vision. The Messianic idea is thus an ontological principle and not just a metaphysical aspiration. In this there is a similarity between Ben-Gurion's Messianic vision and Ernest Bloch's principle of hope. Bloch (1885–1977), a German-Jewish Marxist thinker, thought that the idea of the human being is a utopian concept, a concept which in his opinion contains many unrealized possibilities (*Homo Utopius*).[110] The human being is an entity in process of self-realization. Bloch secularizes hope and believes that it

is realized through human actions. The utopian principle has an existential character. The human essence is a consciousness of hope; it is an essence that awaits discovery and realization. This philosophy of hope is not only theoretical or critical but it is action, achievement, and concretization. The "principle of hope" (the title of Bloch's book) is similar in many ways to Ben-Gurion's Messianic idea, which is more than merely an abstraction and is likewise not exhausted in a single action but is embodied, layer upon layer, in reality.

This being the case, Ben-Gurion believed that the "Messianic event" of the founding of the State was not the final stop of redemption on the Messianic path. Ben-Gurion had a unique approach, according to which redemption was a historical process realized in stages and not the end of history. This approach might be called "immanent secular Messianism." Ben-Gurion fell outside Gershom Scholem's well-known distinction between "restorative Messianism," which seeks to revive some political or social model from the past (as in "Renew our days as of old"), and "utopian Messianism" which appears after some apocalyptic crisis and reaches beyond historical time to another, metaphysical time dimension. In Scholem's view, Messianism, which belongs to the end of history, to a meta-historical time, is beyond humanity. Messianic redemption is transcendental and is connected to an eschatological dimension (the "end of days") in which "the world is set right."

The great religions place man as an individual and in general in a context of faith and redemption, and so history is seen as a human affair and not merely biological. These symbolic systems give meaning to human existence, mold it for long periods of time, and even take it beyond time.[111] The great revolution in the historical consciousness and in historical reality took place when human existence was delivered up to Providence. There is a great existential difference in the status of man if he sees himself as living within a system determined by religious criteria, whether monotheistic or pagan, or within a system in which human existence is seen as self-sufficient. From the religious point of view, history is a story which ends with the "end of days" and with the coming of the Messiah and the kingdom of heaven. It is a history with a purpose, and its linear contour leads to a definite end which is the completion of the beginning. In this Messianic or prophetic view of things, history has a lowly status. Until the modern era, it was deposited in Jewish history's exile from history. In the religious approach to history, man examines his actions not from the historical point of view but from the point of view of eternity.

Modernity, the Enlightenment, and self-emancipation, which were the historical and philosophical infrastructure out of which Zionism developed, made possible a secular political horizon which the modern Jew could strive for in history. The immanent secular Messianism of the Ben-Gurion variety is restorative – the Third Temple is authorized by the precedent of the First and Second Temples – but it is also selective: it selects and takes from the past only the parts that are relevant to its purpose. The immanent secular

Messianism is utopian, but it is not realized at a single stroke but in an infinite progression.

Ahad Ha-Am and Berdichevsky represent two different traditions of the conception of time in the historical culture of the nineteenth century. Ahad Ha-Am, following Hegel, declared that if time is open to infinity, continual improvement is possible, and thus the idea of progress is based on the assumption of perfectibility: we begin with the worst and move towards the good. Berdichevsky, following Nietzsche, rejected this value-judgment on history, which in his opinion was beyond good and evil. He claimed that the idea of progress was a mistaken attempt to give a meaning to history. If the main thing in the exercise of the will-to-power is overcoming, strengthening, the end of the historical process is not important, but only its course. In his immanent secular Messianism, Ben-Gurion drew on both traditions. The end of the Messianic process was not important but only its course, but that course was one of continual improvement.

3   J. L. Talmon, Gershom Scholem, and the price of Messianism

The leading scholar of the history of religious Messianism and the leading scholar of the history of secular Messianism both broadened the scope of their investigations – the first, Gershom Scholem, extending them into the history of Sabbataianism and the second, J. L. Talmon, into the French Revolution. Both reached a similar conclusion: they recognized, as Scholem put it, "the profound truth relating to the dialectics of history … whereby the fulfillment of one historical process leads to the manifestation of its opposite. In the realization of one thing its opposite is revealed."[1] The two great Israeli historians of ideas plumbed the depths of one of the most fascinating and at the same time tragic manifestations of la condition humaine: the human challenge of bringing the heavenly city down to the vale of tears, and the price that men have to pay for their Messianic passion.

Scholem and Talmon were also contemporaries and witnesses of the transformation of communism in the Soviet Union from a vision of egalitarian and universal redemption into a bureaucratic and nationalistic despotism. Nineteen thirty-seven was a key year for the two historians, for the formation of their outlook and their historiographical understanding. Scholem wrote his famous article "Redemption Through Sin" in 1937,[2] and Talmon gained the inspiration for his first book in the years 1937–38 at the time when the Moscow trials revealed to the world the bitter reality of what was happening in the Soviet Union:

> In 1937–38 when the minds of so many, and especially the young, were being deeply exercised by the terrible enigma of the Moscow trials, I happened to be working on an undergraduate seminar paper on the ultra-democratic French constitution of 1793 as seen against the background of the Jacobin terrorist dictatorship. The analogy between year II [of the French Revolution] and what was happening in 1937–38 struck one most forcibly … the parallel seemed to suggest the existence of some un fathomable and inescapable law which causes revolutionary Salvationist schemes to evolve into regimes of terror.[3]

The inspiration and the model for "Talmon's law" came from the Sabbataian dialectics developed by Scholem. In a letter addressed to Isaiah Berlin, describing the reactions of the Israeli leftist party Mapam to the Prague Trials in 1952, Talmon wrote: "They are like the followers of Shabtai Zevi when the prophet put on a tarbush and became a Moslem."[4] Talmon saw Scholem's field of expertise, Sabbataianism, as a historical precedent which contained a warning for the future of the State of Israel. He said he feared being "swept into illusions and a longing for deadening narcotics." Talmon declared: "I am very afraid of the time when we sober up and experience Sabbataian disillusionment with all that involves."[5] Exactly ten years later, in 1980, two years after the signing of the peace treaty with Egypt and two years before the first Lebanon war, Talmon repeated this warning in his final article, addressed as an open letter, to the Israeli prime minister Menachem Begin: "Is it an escape into a world of mythological thought patterns and emotions whose classical example may be found in Sabbataianism?"[6]

In the history of Sabbataianism, Scholem showed what could happen to the comforting Messianic idea when put to the test of reality. Speaking about this, Talmon, according to the late Israeli historian Joshua Arieli (1916–2002), remarked on the confrontation and opposition which arises in any attempt to impose a conceptual framework on a given reality: "This dialectical discrepancy between an outlook … and reality constantly increased in the age of ideology and became even worse with the advent of comprehensive schemes for a total change of the human reality in accordance with a Messianic vision."[7] Karl Popper's observation that attempts to create a heaven on earth inevitably create a hell captures his meaning perfectly.[8] The Israeli historian Hedva Ben Israel adds: "Messianic beliefs come into being with lofty intentions, but they are under a curse and always degenerate into tyrannies. Like all exclusive religions, they cannot take opposition, and hence the terror with which they are inevitably accompanied."[9]

When Scholem was asked about Talmon's letter to Begin, and whether he "agreed with Talmon that professors of history have something to teach politicians," he replied: "I am very skeptical about that, although I know that Jacob Talmon thinks otherwise. Politics requires a sense of moderation. I'm not sure that you can learn from history … I doubt whether professors of history can teach such things to anyone. I have been a professor of history too long to believe it."[10] Scholem was asked again on another occasion about Talmon's letter, and "about his [Talmon's] fears that a spirit of religio-national messianism has taken over parts of the Israeli population." Scholem answered: "Well, I agree with Talmon on this. I am less optimistic than Talmon about the power of professors to influence events. But as an analysis of the facts, I think he is quite right that the use of religious ideas is a most harmful and senseless thing in politics."[11]

In this chapter I wish to discuss Talmon and Scholem not just as historians who analyzed the abstract Messianic idea but also as an intellectuals who examined Messianism as a paradigm through which one can decipher modern

and current politics, Israeli and worldwide. My aim, also, is to explore Talmon's and Scholem's predictions about the price of Messianism in theory and practice through the Messianic dialectics and dynamics.

Talmon and the dialectics of secular Messianism

From the beginning of his historical work, Talmon raised a series of questions that troubled him throughout his academic and intellectual career: Why have revolutionary movements that sought to recreate man led to his enslavement? Why has the hope of total liberation and the attempt to realize these lofty expectations resulted in their reversal? Why did youthful dreams of the equality of man end with the shameful reality of gulags and labor camps? Why did aspects of the eighteenth-century philosophy of the Enlightenment and the nineteenth-century political ideologies pass from the zenith of theory to the nadir of reality in the twentieth century? How does one explain a noble ideal realized through an evil action?

The underlying theme of Talmon's historical investigations, which were a continuous attempt to solve these conundrums, was the secular Messianic urge of modern man who presumed to mold with his own hands both this world and the world-to-come within this world. The modern revolutionary ideologies translated the old religious yearnings into secular, political concepts. Religion was laicized and became history, the kingdom of heaven was exchanged for the kingdom of man, and transcendental salvation was transmuted into Promethean passion.

Talmon's work was basically concerned with one essential question, which he formulated in his first book, *The Origins of Totalitarian Democracy*, the first in a trilogy: namely, why did the Messianic vision, which was the active motivating force of the revolutionary ideologies, move in a short time into "unmitigated tyranny and serfdom?" It seems, he said, that there is a "curse on salvationist creeds: to be born out of the noblest impulses of man and to degenerate into weapons of tyranny."[12] The Messianic dialectic continued to trouble Talmon in the second book in the trilogy, *Political Messianism*: "Why does it [political Messianism] somehow always turn from a vision of release into a snare and yoke?"[13] In the third and last part of the trilogy, *The Myth of the Nation and the Vision of Revolution*, Talmon once again enunciated the dialectical "code" of Messianism from its "promise of a perfect direct democracy to assume in practice the form of totalitarian dictatorship."[14]

Talmon devoted his life to solving the riddle of secular Messianism. Political Messianism, which he saw as a secular religion from the eighteenth century onwards, sought to efface the contradictions and tensions in modern secular life between the individual and the community, between freedom and equality, and between unity and particularity. It sought to achieve this by political means through the creation of a harmonious utopia in history. The secular Messianic conception was based on a certain idea of the nature of man. It wished to create men not "as they are but as they were meant to be,

and would be, given the proper conditions."[15] The political and pedagogical shaping of modern man has been the common aim of ideologies of both left and right from the time of the French Revolution.

Talmon sought to emphasize, elucidate, and illustrate the Jewish presence in general history, revealing the Messianic principle in Judaism and its contribution to universal history.[16] He saw the Jewish idea of Providence overseeing history and moving it towards a redemptive solution as nurturing the revolutionary potential of the radical end-time movements that sought to achieve the kingdom of God within history.

Although major Jewish thinkers were not prominent in the philosophy of the Enlightenment in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, it prepared the way for the Jewish Haskalah, for the Emancipation and for a renewed interest in ancient Jewish prophecy, with its universal content. Talmon said he could not imagine European socialism "without the prophetic and Messianic elements represented by the Jewish Saint-Simonists, Karl Marx, Ferdinand Lassalle and so many other Jews."[17] Marxism's point of departure was not, according to Talmon, formal socio-economic analysis but a faith that moves mountains in the mission of history as a message of redemption. What motivated Marx was "the compulsive hold of a vision of an ultimate dénouement of the drama of history in a vindication of a providential justice."[18] In Marx, Lassalle, Rosa Luxembourg, and the other Jewish revolutionaries, the ancient Jewish dream of a general redemption which would happen all at once took the form of a classless society based on absolute justice which would come about in a single apocalyptic reversal.

Jewish Messianism, Talmon concluded, provided the Western world with a very powerful underlying element that was one of the special characteristics which distinguished it from the other great cultures. The vision of Jesus' return to the world at the end of days was derived from it. It formed the inspiration of apocalyptic and millenary movements throughout history, and in a different sphere paved the way for the idea of an infinite progress towards socialism and the expectation of revolution as the final redemptive stage of history. Shortly before his death, Talmon was chosen by the Committee of Scholars as one of the twenty greatest historians of the twentieth century. As an appreciation of Talmon's work, they wrote: "One cannot read his books without being deeply impressed by the true and frightening picture. He paints for us a picture of secular messianic religions."[19] The writer of the essay ascribes this to Talmon's Judaism and his experience as a child of life on one of the *shtetls* (the East European Jewish towns) that were wiped out during the Holocaust.

In a memorable though neglected personal confession, Talmon described the origins of his intellectual attraction to studying the Messianic idea:

> I began as a member of "Hashomer Hatza'ir" in a small shtetl, in an atmosphere full of longings, caught in a cross-fire from two sides: the Messianic fire from Eastern Europe and the fire of Zionism from

Eretz-Israel. When I reached bar-mitzva age I had an attack of religion, or, if you will, I began a search for God. I finally left "Hashomer Hatzair," and unfortunately, after a time I broke off my relationship with the Ruler of the Universe because, when I read the prayer of the Eighteen Benedictions I felt that I did not believe it and could not endorse it. This caused me to adopt a certain position that perhaps has been responsible for my interests, my spiritual image and my outlook.

... On the one hand one has a desire to be indispensable and unique, and on the other hand feelings of guilt and shame that one is different from others, that one is proud and rebellious.

From that time onwards I felt I had to combine the two, the urge to break away and the desire to carry on. I was seized by the Messianic "bug": the obsession, the "dybbuk" of the Messianic idea of redemption which I hoped would one day resolve these contradictions.[20]

Talmon now began to investigate whether the "dybbuk" (the Jewish term for abnormal possession) of the Messianic idea, which took hold of nice boys and was emasculated at the Moscow trials, was something immanent, beyond a specific historical explanation:

I have never been a communist, but I always felt that I had to justify the fact that I was not a communist, because in my shtetl I saw boys – some of the best – rotting away in prison and destroying their lives. They endangered themselves more than we Zionists. The challenge was very strong. But then the Moscow trials of 1937–38 took place, and everyone who thought a little said to himself: how can this be? If these people are guilty, then the whole revolution was something which had to be completely obliterated, and if they are innocent, it was those that did this to them who were the criminals. This thought led me to a structural investigation. Perhaps this did not reflect a particular historical situation, a specific combination of circumstances; perhaps it was something inherent. Perhaps it reflected retribution, a nemesis, to use classical terminology.[21]

Echoes of these autobiographical reflections may be found in his analysis of the Jewish Messianic heritage, which in the case of many Jews was expressed in a special sensitivity to social problems. At the end of the nineteenth century, the Jews' option of choosing between left and right reached Eastern Europe. In contrast to the situation in the west of the continent, the millions of Jews who lived there experienced economic hardship, national and social discrimination, and the oppressive régime of the Russian czars. This atmosphere, said Talmon, gave rise to Messianic longings and a readiness for revolution, a desire to overthrow the whole existing structure, and belief in the possibility of moving all at once from a world that was entirely bad to one that was entirely good. In no class or people was the response to the

Messianic revolutionary message as fervent and enthusiastic as among the Jews of Eastern Europe.

Talmon was an incorrigible disbeliever in the Messianic meta-narrative, whether nationalist-romantic or Marxist-Bolshevistic. The conclusion he came to was that the events in the Soviet Union revealed the true character of the communist régime. If these events cast doubt on the view, common among believers, that the Soviet Union was the vanguard of the world revolutionary camp, Talmon did not see this as a historical accident but as the outcome of a development whose seeds had been sown from the beginning. The main reason for the degeneration of the communist-Messianic idea was Promethean hubris:

> When men combine limitless power with a sense of their unique mission of universal regeneration, it is all too easy for them to mistake the promptings of their ambition for the voice of History, to rationalize their hatred and envy into Truth. Moreover, the very nature of unlimited power attracts to the regime self-seeking, power-hungry, sadistic men. The inevitable response of the masses to the unmistakable deterioration of the élite, the caretakers of their destiny, is disappointment and contempt. With every possibility of revolt cut off by a regime that possesses all the instruments of military and political coercion and controls all the means of production and distribution, the resultant mood of the people can only be apathetic and, in the end, nihilistic.[22]

Talmon disliked communism for the same reason he disliked Messianism: dialectics legitimate and rationalize the destructive and unmoral characteristics in human beings. An outlook in which the end justifies the means permits the relativism of values underlying all dictatorships. Dialectics are always used to prove that evil practical means are necessary and appropriate tools from the perspective of a general a priori scheme and are therefore objectively good. These observations, said Talmon, are occasioned by reflections on the tragic phenomenon of the degeneration and defilement of great human ideals in the course of their realization – a phenomenon history is full of. This may explain why Talmon felt such deep empathy towards "anti-Messianic" skeptic liberals such as Raymond Aron in France, Isaiah Berlin in England, and Lionel Trilling in the United States. "Were they, as Jews frightened by modern political Messianism?"[23] It is not surprising that Talmon was also among the thinkers and historians of anti-Messianic liberalism who sought to understand the inner logic and the explanation of the totalitarian mentality on the right and left. These two types of totalitarianism were based on the idea that there is a single truth and that it finds expression in politics. The left decreed the deterministic supremacy of matter and saw class as the motive force of revolution; the right believed in the decisive importance of blood and race and saw the nation as the motive force of history. Both ideologies were rooted in philosophies of history that were explained in terms of class warfare or the

warfare of races and peoples. Both ideologies were rooted in a Manichaean conception of history: because both of them claimed to possess the sole truth, both believed that anything that brought that goal nearer was acceptable and good and anything that hindered it was evil and corrupt. And the Jews, for their part, were ground to dust between the two camps.

Talmon saw the obsession with a "satanic" Jewish presence everywhere as reflecting a view of the Jews as an anti-race. The Messianic idea nourished by a belief in the unity and brotherhood of the human race was the focus of the attacks of the nationalist and racist right.[24] All arrows were aimed at Messianic Judaism, which created the revolutionary universalist idea of the singleness of the human race. If one continues Talmon's line of thought one can go further and say that the people that brought the Messianic idea into history was now spewed out by history. Jewry, which sought to promote the Messianic phenomenon that meant the triumph of absolute good – the perfection of the world – was now reviled as the embodiment of absolute evil.

Christian anti-Semitism permitted the Jew to exist for generations as a degraded witness, but the anti-Messianic anti-Semitism insisted on murdering the bringer of good tidings, the people identified with the Messianic idea. Talmon saw the Holocaust as the murderous crossroads of the historical encounter between Jewish Messianism and the "bastard" Messianism embodied in Hitler.[25] The Jews, the eternal people, represented for the Nazis the idea of the unity of all races and universal brotherhood. To kill them meant killing those who gave the world the universalistic commandment "Thou shalt not kill." "Judaism was an ideal and at the same time a disturbing nightmare, both a source of inspiration and a stimulus to aggressive impulses." The Jewish uniqueness that embodied the gospel of the unity of mankind was attacked by those who inscribed on their banner war against the unity of mankind and saw the Jews as the enemy – as well as the yardstick s view associated with the ideology of unity, although historically they found it difficult or were unwilling to abandon their uniqueness.[26] In the Soviet Union as well, the Jews embodied the original Messianic spirit of the Bolshevik Revolution (the disproportionate number of Jewish communists and revolutionaries is evidence of this), and for that reason there too they were the first victims of the revolution which went astray and became a bureaucratic dictatorship in one country. The dialectical distortion of Marxist Messianism found its full expression in the Soviet Union. Its first devotees, the Jewish revolutionaries, recalled by their presence the original Messianic Marxist-communist spark that had been distorted beyond recognition. For better or for worse, they were the litmus paper of the revolution; they were its vanguard and also its victims.

In the nineteenth century there was a tendency among some national movements to find their special quality in the universal Messianic idea, or, that is to say, in the special mission of each nation in the plan of world history. The "Messianic peoples," to use Talmon's expression, developed general visions: from Mazzini's and Mickiewitz's Messianic nationalism, to Fichte's

doctrine of the nation, and, among the Jews, Moses Hess' theory of Jerusalem as the vanguard of the nations.[27] Herzl, however, the prophet of modern Jewish nationalism, avoided making a metaphysical or meta-historical connection between the national revival and the workings of universal history.

It is perhaps against this background that one should see Talmon's long drawn-out debate with Arnold Toynbee, which lasted from 1956 until after the Six-Day War.[28] Toynbee attempted to discover the laws whereby the great structures he called civilizations rose and fell. Because he saw the combination of peoplehood and religion in Judaism as an expression of contempt for other peoples, Toynbee opposed anything which strengthened the existence of a Jewish nation.[29] The West, in his view, had always been aggressive and had drawn its Messianic inspiration from the Jewish concept of a chosen people. The paradox of his position is that he condemned the idea of a chosen people, yet expected the Jews to behave as only a chosen people could! Talmon never tired of refuting Toynbee's "Messianic errors" one by one. The first time he did so was in a lecture he gave in Beit Hillel in London at a meeting on the 300th anniversary of the resettlement of the Jews in England, at which the chairman was Lord Herbert Samuel (1870–1963), the first high commissioner of Mandatory Palestine, and whose subject was "Jewish History and Its Universal Significance."

Talmon, like Scholem, was careful in all his writings to refrain from attaching any meta-historical or Messianic significance to Zionism and the founding of the State of Israel:

> Israel has been seen as the fulfillment and ultimate dénouement of Jewish history, but it has also been seen as the greatest deviation from the course of that history. It may be altogether too metaphysical a pursuit for the scholarly historian to try to define the "true essence," the "authentic spirit," or the "preordained direction" of millennial history spun over such diverse epochs, civilizations, and regions, and to describe developments which do not conform to that "authentic core" as deviations, false starts, perversions, heresies, or culs de sac.[30]

The politicization of Jewish Messianism, added Talmon, was the result of foreign influences, as is clearly shown by the fact that all the historical declarations of Zionist philosophy were made following the triumphs of national movements.[31] One therefore cannot understand the roots of Zionism without understanding the mutual relationship between the Messianic self-perception of many Zionist circles, which wished to establish a "restorative utopia" in their historic homeland, and the political-Messianic intellectual climate of the national movements in Europe. According to Talmon, even if one does find in Zionism a vision of redemption or a revolutionary quality, this was not a product of old Jewish Messianism but, on the contrary, a product of secularization.

This is not to say that Zionism lacked faith in God's promises, and in the hope of redemption, or that it did not derive sustenance from prayers that speak of the return to the land of our fathers, but these were not the sparks that lit the great fires of political Zionism. On the contrary, it was the Jewish people's religious life that received new sustenance through these Zionist, and political, developments. It is quite reasonable to claim that the Jewish religion actually prevented the vision of redemption from being turned into a historical and political concept. The Jewish religion served as a substitute for redemption, the reliance on Providence, on the Messiah, and on miracles exempted Jews from acting in the here and now.[32]

Talmon was skeptical concerning the possibility of translating the vision of political Messianism into reality, and he was drawn to the thinker Reinhold Niebuhr, who had put forward a dialectic of political power in which its realization was in the final analysis bound up with the tragic destiny of the human race.[33] In the period succeeding the meta-narratives of Modernity (nationalism, fascism, and communism, whose decline Talmon had lived long enough to foresee), a skeptical attitude to Messianic politics became common and Talmon explained it as being, among other things, a reaction toward Hegelian political theory. In comparison to communism and fascism Talmon found the case of Israel encouraging, for even if it was not ideal or a full realization of the vision, it was not so distorted as to be beyond repair. Talmon explained this by saying that Zionism is a unique phenomenon, a movement of a special kind with regard to its reality, its place, and its significance.

In the intellectual debate which took place in the 1950s in Israel on the nature of Zionism, the State of Israel, and the Messianic vision, David Ben-Gurion, the founder of the Israeli State, and Talmon had a special place because of their personal interest in the subject and because of the complex discussion which took place between them on this matter. In the 1950s, Talmon already had a reputation in the country and abroad as a historian of the secular Messianic phenomenon and as one of the outstanding intellectuals in Israel. The encounter between the representative and spokesman of political Messianism in Israel and the trenchant intellectual critic of that phenomenon was fascinating yet at the same time impossible.[34]

In 1960, the year in which the "Lavon affair," the scandal over a failed Israeli covert operation in Egypt,[35] caused Israeli intellectuals for the first time to unite in opposition to Ben-Gurion, Talmon wrote to the Israeli leader:

> I am glad that the time has finally come, with the publication of my new book Political Messianism, when I am available for the task which your colleagues Nehemiah Argov of blessed memory, and Shimon Peres – may he be granted long life – asked me to perform three years ago, and that is to prepare a comprehensive work which will give a thorough account of all existing first-hand sources for the story of your life against the background of our action and turmoil-filled period, and for your role in the

drama of the revival of Israel and the renewal of its political indepen-
dence.[36]

Ironically, Talmon thought seriously of becoming Ben-Gurion's biographer,
and considered him a political Messiah. The irony goes even further, when on
another occasion Talmon, insufficiently cautious, drew an analogy between
Zionism and Messianism:

> Great importance must be attached to the fact that although Zionism
> was a Messianic ideology because it developed before we had means of
> political coercion and as a result of voluntary effort, it had a pluralistic
> tradition whose main expression was the coalition-structure which was
> passed on as an inheritance from Zionism to the State, with all its qualities
> and defects.[37]

About a month later, Talmon expressed his fears more directly in an article
in which he warned against "a totalitarian state in which the Head of State is
also the head of government and also the leader of the party."[38] He said he
was worried that a dangerous duality might develop between the formal gov-
ernment apparatus open to public scrutiny and a quasi-clandestine source of
covert activities and intrigues. Yet, despite these harsh criticisms, he added:
"The historical greatness of Ben-Gurion has been shown in the power of
decision he has revealed in fateful and critical moments." In Talmon's opinion,
Ben-Gurion was "not only a politician and a statesman but a visionary able
to see things in a historical perspective of generations." However, he called upon
the prime minister to resign, just as twenty years later he called on Menachem
Begin to step down.

Ben-Gurion responded in his own way. In his article "In Defence of Mes-
sianism," published some five years later in reply to Shlomo Avineri, the
Israeli historian and political scientist, he wrote:

> Mr. Avineri is a strong opponent of the messianic concept. He seems to
> have learned it from J.L Talmon, Professor of Modern History at the
> Hebrew University in Jerusalem, who was publishing three volumes
> condemning the "political messianism" of the leaders of the French
> revolution; he sees in the Messianic doctrine the origin of the political
> totalitarian outlook.[39]

Ben-Gurion ended the article with the following words:

> The fears of Professor Talmon and his students or friends that a messia-
> nic faith leads to despotism and dictatorship are the result of a mistaken
> and misleading reading of history. The French Revolution was a blessing
> for humanity. And without the Messianic faith, the last three generations
> of our people would not have done what they did.[40]

What was the difference between Ben-Gurion's Messianic outlook and the Messianic vision of Gush Emunim, the religious-political movement which was founded after the 1973 war?[41] Talmon, of course, was opposed to both of them, but in contrast to Ben-Gurion's secular Messianism, in which he discerned elements of pragmatism such as the emphasis on the return to history, he saw Gush Emunim as a political theology and an escape from history in which politics was subordinated to a religious group. The membership of Gush Emunim, in the words of Talmon, "were much relieved, for now this could argue that the Holocaust had been the 'birth pangs of the Messiah,' that the Six-Day War victory was the beginning of redemption and the conquest of the territories the finger of God at work—all proof that the vision of renewal and God's promises were being fulfilled."[42] In the "restorative utopia" of Gush Emunim, religious Messianism and political Messianism came together.

In the "deterministic Messianism" of Gush Emunim there was a radicalization, which was expressed in the change from the "historical necessity" of Rabbi Abraham Kook, the first chief rabbi of the British Mandate for Palestine, to the activization of history and "anticipation of the end" of his son Zevi Yehudah Kook (1891–1982), the mentor of Gush Emunim. This radicalization represented a shift – and also a decline and falling off – from the universal metaphysical-cosmic dimension of Messianism to the particular national-Israeli dimension.[43] The national-religious outlook saw the founding of the State as "the beginning of redemption," and the conquest of the territories in the Six-Day War as the redemption process in full spate. Talmon interpreted Gush Emunim's Messianic "anticipation of the end" as an obsessive desire to see the end of history within history.[44]

In Talmon's historical work and intellectual investigations, the Messianic mechanism was laid bare with a searching critical gaze, with irony, and with a deep awareness of its price. He subverted the Messianic meta-narrative but at the same time showed a certain empathy for the phenomenon and its actors, in the absence of which it would have been difficult for him to reveal the secret of the Messianic spell. Scholem already perceived that "all radical Messianism, if taken seriously, opens up a chasm in which through an inner necessity antinomian outlooks and anarchic moral attitudes accumulate."[45] Talmon revealed destruction as the other side of redemption, the apocalyptic ruin from which a cleansed and reformed world was supposed to spring forth.

In Messianism there is a discrepancy between the absolute and the complete and the attempt to achieve it, which involves the destruction of all that is not part of it; the hope of redemption is fulfilled at the cost of the elimination of all incompatibilities in human existence. Talmon discerned three such incompatibilities: that of liberty with equality, that of private property with the organization of the collective, and that of the freedom of the individual with historical determinism. The Messianic ideologies wished to reconcile these

differences. Talmon, however, reached the conclusion that the differences still remained as they were:

> My opinion and belief is that the Messianic expectation of a resolution of these contradictions, the belief in a critical period in which redemption is at hand, has been the common denominator of Marxism and the other movements of the revolutionary camp from the days of the French Revolution. Thus, any supporting superstructure of references to Hegelian philosophy or economical, historical or other proofs are only a rationalization of this lofty and profound expectation.[46]

The radical solution to human divergences, generally bound up with an existential crisis, is to carry out a political experiment in unification at a suitable historical moment when all prohibitions would be lifted and all contradictions resolved in a single revolutionary act. The subordination of a variety of narratives to a single narrative is only possible through coercion and rape, through violence expressed in revolutions and wars. The attempt to put a secular Messianism into practice, far from resolving the disharmonies, increases them, creates new dissensions, and leads to an automatic chain reaction of the imposition of force, counter-violence, and so on. Talmon hoped that the historian or the social analyst may be able to attack the human urge which calls totalitarian democracy into existence, namely the longing for a final resolution of all contradiction and conflicts into a state of total harmony.[47]

Secular Messianism provides an opportunity to exit from history, but it does so within history itself. The transcendence which until modern times was embodied in religious redemption and personal salvation was secularized into Messianic political ideologies which hoped to bring about the end of history within history. In many ways, Talmon anticipated the post-modernist intellectual climate that subverted the great Messianic meta-narratives.

What in fact is the mutual relationship between the historian and the intellectual? The historian looks at the past from the perspective of the owl of Minerva, the goddess of wisdom, which descends from its flight only in the evening, at the end of the historical process. The intellectual, for his part, operates in daylight, in the course of the historical process.[48] As an intellectual, Talmon could only point to the dissensions and contradictions in his own time; as a historian, he saw the comprehensive dialectical process of secular Messianism. The intellectual in Talmon drew upon his understanding as a historian to illustrate how universal history could provide good and bad exemplars for Jewish life. The exposure of the dialectics of secular Messianism in European history provides insights and critical perceptions that can illuminate the tensions of Jewish history in the present. Talmon was an intellectual and historian who in his essays and studies sought to decipher the enigma of the present together with the cunning of history.

Scholem and the Sabbataian dynamic

Gershom Scholem's radical historiography offered a new and refreshing perspective, and, to use Walter Benjamin's expression, his "brushing history against the grain" gave legitimization to the subversive narratives in Judaism such as Sabbataianism and Frankism and was a revolt against the hegemony that orthodox rabbinic Judaism wished to possess over the course of Jewish history. Scholem's revolutionary project sought to reinstate what the historian David Biale called a "counter-history."[49] If Benjamin wished to remember the oppressed and provide the narrative of "the others," Scholem sought to recover the memory of denied Jewish individuals and movements.

In his daring avant-garde essay "Redemption through Sin" (1937), Scholem wished to offer an explanation of the historical dynamics of Sabbataianism in the seventeenth century and of Frankism of the eighteenth century. In both of these, a Jewish Messiah was converted to another religion: Islam in the case of Shabbetai Zevi and Christianity in the case of Jacob Frank. Sabbataianism and Frankism, as religio-anarchic manifestations which were characterized as antinomian movements with Gnostic roots, were described by Scholem as paving the way for infidelity and secularism, and, by so doing, leading many Jews to the Enlightenment and to Zionism.[50]

In his research, Scholem described what I call "The Frankist Syndrome." In Judaism there was a nihilistic current, marginal but of great significance, involving quite a number of religious Jews in eighteenth-century Europe. Frankism was characterized by a nihilistic dialectical vortex and at the same time by an organized structural system. Scholem analyzed the circumstances which made possible this eruption of "mystical nihilism within so firmly organized and authoritarian a community as Rabbinical Judaism. Messianism and mysticism played equal parts in crystallizing these ideas, which sprang from the radical wing of the Sabbataian movements."[51] In his court, Jacob Frank created a semi-military order with uniforms which followed the ideology of "performing righteous acts through transgressions" advocated by its charismatic leader. Scholem's fascinating essay revealed the duality of the void and the absolute in Frank: on the one hand, "the anarchic quality of freedom from all obligations and the confounding of everything" and, on the other, "his enthusiasm for militarism, making the Sabbataian faith into a militaristic religion in both a mystical and a concrete sense."[52] Under Frank's Messianic leadership and charismatic inspiration, the new mythological reality was associated with omnipotence and eternal life, liberty, and redemption, new Messianic and other expressions of the new world as revealed to Frank. In this respect, there was a modernist dimension in Sabbataianism and Frankism because they were a liberating element from the shackles of tradition.[53] This type of consciousness, which I have termed "the nihilistic-totalitarian syndrome," is a synthesis of both concepts: the nihilist mentality, whether from inner compulsion or immanent logic, is driven to acceptance of totalitarian patterns and behavior, which are characterized by their extreme

dynamism. This syndrome reflects the totalitarian European ideologies and movements of the first three decades of the twentieth century.[54]

"Redemption through Sin" was not a study of a unique and marginal phenomenon, but may be placed, as S. M. Wasserstrom suggested, within the context of the intellectual climate of Europe in the 1930s.[55] In Palestine, Scholem linked Jacob Frank, the "liberator," with the French Revolution, and at the end of his life he published a book entitled Du Frankisme au jacobisme (From Frankism to Jacobism).[56] Major French thinkers and philosophers such as Pierre Klossowsky, Georges Bataille, Roger Caillois, Denis de Rougemont, Henri Corbin, Maurice Blanchot, and Jean Paulhan saw the Marquis de Sade as a model of total liberty. They were preceded by Guillaume Apollinaire, who described the French marquis as "the freest spirit that ever lived."[57] Klossowsky called his lecture in 1939, at which his friend Walter Benjamin was present, "The Marquis de Sade and the French Revolution," claiming, in this lecture, that de Sade celebrated "a utopia of evil."[58] In the same spirit, Scholem declared that Frank promulgated "a religious myth of nihilism" or "a mythology of nihilism." Klossowsky and Scholem, and, one may add, Hans Jonas and Eric Vogelin, thought in concepts of modern Gnosticism.[59]

The translation of "Redemption through Sin" into English triggered many comments which drew an analogy between Sabbataianism and communism, or, more specifically, between Sabbataianism and Stalinism. At the time when the essay was written, the antinomistic reasoning, the false Messianism and the "Frankist syndrome" of totalitarian nihilism were depicted as a common denominator between the two movements. Norman Podhoretz gave a good description of this in his journal *Commentary* in 1971:

> In the 1930's, when "The Holiness of Sin" was first published, Scholem produced the most illuminating analysis anyone had yet done of the Stalinist mentality, and was responding to such shocks as the massacre of the kulaks, the Moscow trials, the purges, and the Hitler–Stalin pact. Scholem, of course, made no explicit comparisons himself and was almost certainly not thinking consciously of Stalinism at all. Nevertheless, a reader of "The Holiness of Sin" in 1937 would have had to be very narrowly focused indeed in his thinking to miss the breathtaking similarities between the kinds of arguments the Sabbataians used in denying that the conversion of Sabbati Zevi to Islam proved that he was not after all the messiah of the Jews, and the arguments employed by the Stalinists in trying to persuade themselves against all the evidence of the senses that a socialist revolution was in fact being fulfilled in the Soviet Union under Stalin.[60]

Irving Howe, the cultural critic, joined Podhoretz's American conservative camp when in an interview with Scholem in 1980 he admitted that he could not avoid making the contemporary analogy when reading "Redemption

through Sin." He asked Scholem about "some similarities here to certain totalitarian movements," and specifically, "in the Stalinist view of ethics, is there not a parallel to the Sabbatian outlook?"[61] Despite Howe's skepticism towards the use of analogies between religious Messianism and political radicalism, he said, "I cannot totally reject them. Certainly, one can learn from your Sabbatian studies how dangerous, indeed, fatal, it is to mix apocalyptic visions with political energies." Scholem replied:

> When I wrote this essay, which was the first that got me a reputation beyond scholarship, I was not aware of what you say. But I was made aware by later developments. Remember I wrote it in 1936. It was published early in 1937 in Palestine. Later I was made aware of it when it appeared in Commentary with a preface saying we have seen this in Stalinism – which was true. But I was only made aware of this through what happened in the forties and fifties. It is obvious that there is a strong parallel between the dangers of apocalyptic Messianism and the dangers of apocalypse in secularist disguise.[62]

On another occasion, Scholem was asked explicitly: "do you see Communism as a Messianic movement?"[63] The metaphysician Scholem, a theologian in the eyes of many, who believed in the ability of ideas to change history, maintained that Marxist economical analysis was alien to him, and that his spiritual world-view clashed with those of his communist brother, Werner, and his best friend Benjamin, who was a Marxist, and thought that socialism has a Messianic pretension and is a kind of secular Messianism. Scholem answered:

> Many young people took Communism as a substitute for messianism. There have been times, places, and circumstances in which many people – not only Jewish youth, to whom this certainly applies – saw a messianic dimension in communism. The zeal with which they threw themselves into it had some of the enthusiasm of the messianists to it. And this is where the whole thing collapsed. Messianism is really a very big and complex matter, not at all simple.
>   I've written about this twice in my books. I've defined what I thought was the price the Jewish people has paid for Messianism. A very high price. Some people have wrongly taken this to mean that I am an antimessianist. I have a strong inclination toward it. I have not given up on it. But it may be that my writings have spurred people to say that I am a Jew who rejects the messianic idea because the price was too high.[64]

Scholem claimed that the failure to distinguish between Messianism and secular movements becomes a destructive phenomenon, and, like Talmon, he saw the Messianic idea as the source of the destructiveness. He told his friend Walter Benjamin of his attraction to "the positive and noble force of

destruction," and declared that "destruction is a form of redemption."[65] This was not very different from the "nihilist-totalitarian syndrome" marked by the ambivalence of the desire to destroy together with the desire for construction. On two occasions, Scholem dwelt on this price of Messianism: in his introduction to his monumental work *Sabbatai Zevi* (1957) and in the programmatic essay "The Messianic Idea in Judaism" (1971). In the introduction to his biography of the seventeenth-century Jewish Messiah, Scholem wrote:

> This book, however, was not written as a treatise on theology but as a contribution to an understanding of the history of the Jewish people. Insofar as theology is discussed – and a great deal of theology, for that matter – it is done in pursuit of historical insight. A movement which shook the House of Israel to its very foundations and has revealed not only the vitality of the Jewish people but also the deep, dangerous, and destructive dialectics inherent in the messianic idea cannot be understood without considering questions that reach down to fundamentals. I admit that in such discussions much depends on the basic outlook of the historian with regard to what he considers the constitutive elements of the historical process. Perhaps it is permissible at this point to say, with all due caution, that Jewish historiography has generally chosen to ignore the fact that the Jewish people have paid a very high price for the messianic idea. If this book may be regarded as a small contribution to considering a big question: What price messianism? – a question which touches upon the very essence of our being and survival – then I hope that any reader who studies it from this point of view will obtain some reward. Anyone who can appreciate the gravity of this problem will also understand why I have refrained from expressing opinions or drawing conclusions with respect to any contemporary issues bound to arise out of the subject matter with which this book deals.[66]

As well as praise, Sabbatai Zevi drew criticism from various quarters. The most famous example was that of the Orthodox literary critic Baruch Kurzweil, who discerned in Scholem "a tendency to a positive view of mythical and irrational factors," and thought that he showed "a certain sympathy for phenomena which are in fact a highly dangerous resurrection of nihilistic myths and irrational, meta-ethical principles."[67] The historian of religions Zevi Werblowsky also said about Scholem that "the accusation of dogmatism is a two-edged sword. If it is relatively easy to show that the orthodox or rationalist view distorted history, it is just as easy to show – or at any rate, to wonder – whether there is not some distortion in the new, revolutionary view."[68] Both in his reaction to these criticisms and in the development of his ideas on the subject, in 1972 Scholem continued to speak of the price of Messianism:

What I have in mind is the price demanded by Messianism, the price which the Jewish people has to pay out of its own substance for this idea which it handed over to the world. The magnitude of the Messianic idea corresponds to the endless powerlessness in Jewish history during all the centuries of exile, when it was unprepared to come forward onto the plane of world history. There's something preliminary, something provisional about Jewish history; hence its inability to give of itself entirely. For the Messianic idea is not only consolation and hope. Every attempt to realize it tears open the chasms that lead each of its manifestations ad absurdum. There is something grand about living in hope, but at the same time there is something profoundly unreal about it. It diminishes the singular worth of the individual, and he can never fulfill himself, because the incompleteness of his endeavors eliminates precisely what constitutes its highest value. Thus in Judaism the Messianic idea has compelled a life lived in deferment, in which nothing can be done definitively, nothing can be irrevocably accomplished. One may say, perhaps, the Messianic idea is the real anti-existentialist idea. Precisely understood, there is nothing concrete which can be accomplished by the unredeemed. This makes for the greatness of Messianism, but also for its constitutional weakness. Jewish so-called Existence possesses a tension that never finds true release; it never burns itself out. And when in our history it does discharge, then it is foolishly decried (or, one might say, unmasked) as "pseudo-Messianism." The blazing landscape of redemption (as if it were a point of focus) has concentrated in itself the historical outlook of Judaism. Little wonder that overtones of Messianism have accompanied the modern Jewish readiness for irrevocable action in the concrete realm, when it set out on the utopian return to Zion. It is a readiness which no longer allows it to be fed on hopes. Born out of the horror and destruction that was Jewish history in our generation, it is bound to history itself and not to meta-history; it has not given itself up totally to Messianism. Whether or not Jewish history will be able to endure this entry into the concrete realm without perishing in the crisis of the Messianic claim which has virtually been conjured up – that is the question which out of his great and dangerous past the Jew of this age poses to his present and to his future.[69]

Scholem thought that the Zionist enterprise did not aim to solve the Jewish question on the Messianic or meta-historical level. Zionism, unlike Messianism, did not claim that we live at the end of history. Ahad Ha-Am and Herzl, who were non-Messianic, did not operate on the metaphysical plane but sought to act within the historical process. Scholem considered "the beginning of redemption" – a phrase coined by a leading figure of the generation, Rabbi Abraham Kook – to be a "dangerous formula."[70] Scholem said that Rabbi Kook, whom he saw as "the example and model of a great Jewish mystic," wrote "an obscure and strange book," *Orot Ha-kodesh* (Lights for Holiness),

in whose three volumes, rather than "thoughts, there was a poetic effusion … and, behind all this, a deep mystical turbulence."[71] Rabbi Kook expressed mystical experience in human language, and understood the secularity of the Jews in Eretz-Israel as part of the process of setting up a modern nation. The halutzim (pioneers) transgressed the prohibitions of the Torah, but as the agents of Jewish nationhood they preserved Jewish continuity.

In the introduction that he wrote to Scholem's *Explications and Implications* (vol. 2, in Hebrew), the editor Avraham Shapira described a lecture Scholem gave to the intellectual circle at Kibbutz Oranim in 1975. In this lecture, Scholem said that the greatness of Rabbi Kook lay in his perception of the holiness of the profane, and his weakness was his "mixture of the Messianic element with Zionism … He created a confusion of concepts by authorizing a mixture of the ideal of building a society and state with contemporary Messianism." However, "the person mainly responsible" for this "was, of course, Ben-Gurion."[72]

Yet, at the same time, although Scholem recoiled from connecting the Messianic idea with actual history, his comprehensive investigation of the subject, the discussion it gave rise to, and his dominant personality provoked a Messianic discourse. Only from this point of view were Scholem and Ben-Gurion on the same side of the barricade: despite their warnings against mixing theology and politics, the thorough investigation of the Messianic vision, its language and accomplishments had consequences for the public and academic discourse on the subject. In founding the state, Ben-Gurion had made the most significant attempt at nationalizing the Jewish Messianic concept. Zionism was a historical experiment in nationalizing religious concepts and metamorphosing them into the secular sphere. Ben-Gurion brought the matter to its ultimate conclusion in his attempt to nationalize the Bible and Messianism.[73]

Scholem was frightened precisely of this nationalization of concepts:

> Messianism exists here only as a figure of speech. It was used a great deal by Ben-Gurion, who was responsible for this figurative use of Messianism. He made endless use of this figure of speech, which he understood in a totally secular way, as if he were a true believer … He used the term "Messianism" no less than the people of the religious camp, who perhaps really believed in "the beginning of redemption."[74]

In Scholem's opinion, the failure of Messianism in the seventeenth century invalidated the idea of a figure of flesh and blood. Ben-Gurion's Messianism was directed towards the State of Israel, whereas the Messianism of Gush Emunim focused on the Land of Israel. In 1980, in a rare political statement, Scholem replied to the question of whether he saw Gush Emunim as a modern version of the Sabbataian movement as follows:

> Yes, they are like the Sabbatians. Like the Sabbatians, their Messianic program can only lead to disaster. In the seventeenth century, of course,

the failure of Sabbatianism had only spiritual consequences; it led to a breakdown of Jewish belief. Today, the consequences of such Messianism are also political, and that is the great danger.[75]

After the Holocaust and the founding of the State of Israel, Scholem began to take an interest in Messianism and researched the personal and collective history of Sabbataianism. He made a distinction between historical time and mythical time. Zionism operated in historical time, restoring Jewish sovereignty and hence the total responsibility of the modern Jews for their fate, while Messianism operated in mythical, ahistorical time. Scholem rejected the universalistic approach of the school of Hermann Cohen, who gave Messianism a moral-universalist mission, but he also rejected the apocalyptic approach, which he feared.[76] Instead, he favored a third approach, the national approach to Messianism. According to him, the Messianic myth is the expression of a desire for national independence, for liberation from the yoke of the exile and political servitude. Messianism is thus a vitalistic *Lebensphilosophie* (philosophy of life) that is in contradiction to rationalist thought or a historical approach. It was the tension between mystical-Messianic time and historical-pragmatic time that actuated Jewish history.

Gush Emunim overturned the historical basis of Zionism by combining the mythical with the historical and the metaphysical with the concrete. Scholem's historical undertaking can also be understood as a warning to the Zionist movement of the danger of the Messianic expectation. In this connection, David Biale asked Scholem, the Jerusalem historian of Messianism, in 1980 if Messianism was still a Zionist enterprise. Scholem answered:

> Today we have the Gush Emunim, which is definitely a Messianic group. They use biblical verses for political purposes. Whenever Messianism is introduced into politics, it becomes a very dangerous business. It can only lead to disaster.[77]

When interviewed by Irving Howe, Scholem expressed his fears of "the extremists in Gush Emunim," who "use religious sanctions in order to justify their activities in the territories. There is nothing more contemptible or harmful than the use of religious sanctions in a conflict between nations."[78] Scholem shared Talmon's fears that the phenomenon could lead to a religious war. He warned that if Zionism blurred the boundaries between the religious-Messianic plane and the political-historical plane it would be liable to cancel out the significance of the Jews' entry into modern history. He said that action in the political arena of secular history and action in the spiritual-religious arena are like two parallel lines that should never meet: "It would be disastrous to mix them."[79] At the same time, the mystical aspect of Zionism is not necessarily identical with the Messianic aspect: it represents a renewal of spirit within history and not a situation that only comes about at the end of

history. In a lecture he gave in 1973 in the Center for the Study of Democratic Institutions in Santa Barbara, Scholem spoke of the importance of theological concepts in a secular form. He explained that although concepts like creation, revelation, and redemption were legitimate, they lacked the explosive charge they formerly possessed. "Yet, the messianic idea has maintained precisely this vehemence. Despite all attenuations, it has proved itself an idea of highest effectiveness and relevance – even in its secularized forms."[80] This, of course, was a late echo of Scholem's letter to Rosenzweig in 1926 in which he warned that the sacred tongue was "brimful of explosive material."

According to Scholem, the Messianic language could only be divested of the explosive charge that threatened to blow it up if the Jewish tradition of a constant tension in which none of its elements was neglected was preserved. In this tradition, there were attractions and tensions between different trends and currents. There was the tension between apocalyptic trends and trends that worked against them; the tension between restorative trends that sought to revive an ancient glory and utopian trends; the tension between sober and realistic Messianic trends such as that of Maimonides and apocalyptic or extreme utopian trends; the tension between a movement towards redemption as a process within history and ahistorical trends, including the redemption of nature as in the Kabbalah of Isaac Luria (1534–72), the mystical figure from Safed who is also known as the Ari; and, recently, the tension between secular or revolutionary Messianic trends such as those of Ernst Bloch, Walter Benjamin, Theodor Adorno, and Herbert Marcuse and liberalism. In all these trends, the conflict was not resolved or mitigated, and this also applied to the mutual relationship of Messianism and Zionism.

The price and the lesson

The young Talmon's 'structural search," to use Claude Lévi-Strauss' concept, was fulfilled in secular Zionism. History was not a mere accumulation of events but a structure, a non-human a priori mechanism that directs and controls events and their inner logic. It was a morphological form, as Oswald Spengler would have said, or, as Carl Schmitt put it in *Political Romanticism* (1919), "[t]he idea of an arbitrary power over history is the real revolutionary idea."[81] Unlike these two German thinkers who affirmed impersonal structures, Talmon and Scholem adopted a 'structuralist explanation" but, at the same time, undermined it. They formulated the Sabbataian code of "Messianism through sin" and "redemption through destruction" but they also warned of the price of Messianism. These two contrasting approaches to the Messianic idea, empathy and criticism, remained with them throughout their lives. Although they rejected a positive Messianic yearning, as a scholarly sublimation or an explanatory obsession it never left them.

The Messianic yearning and its various metamorphoses, whether as a philosophy of history or as a "structuralist explanation," eventually needed a

narrative, a detailed historical description. Jean-François Lyotard explained that all forms of legitimacy are connected with the telling of a story or a narrative presentation.[82] The narratives that bestow this legitimacy provide significance and content. All activity or reflection claiming authenticity requires legitimacy in the form of a narrative, and the more complex and universal the activity is, the more the legitimacy is strengthened. The meta-narratives of modernity, such as that of secular Messianism, are philosophical statements about the meaning of history.

Talmon, unlike Scholem, did not engage in the intellectual discourse about political theology that took place in Germany in the 1920s and 1930s, and in which thinkers like Carl Schmitt, Walter Benjamin, Leo Strauss. and others participated. At the same time, he forestalled the deconstructive discourse of postmodernism concerning the great political narratives of modernity, the attempt to set up moral political communities. It is doubtful if, in his affinities, his thoughts, and his language Talmon could have participated in either of these two forms of discourse, but in the thesis that he offered, "Political Messianism," Talmon provided an early formulation of political theology (as an explanation, of course, not as a recommendation) and a late, postmodernist formulation of "meta-narratives":

> The totalitarian democratic school, on the other hand, is based upon the assumption of a sole and exclusive truth in politics. It may be called political Messianism in the sense that it postulates a preordained, harmonious and perfect scheme of things, to which men are irresistibly driven, and at which they are bound to arrive. It recognizes ultimately only one plane of existence, the political.[83]

While the great religions offered a transcendental solution via a metaphysical explanation beyond the physical world, the secular religions offered a meta-narrative of contemporary politics via the modern ideologies. It was not the transcendental theology of the religions but a political theology of modern life.[84] Unlike Carl Schmitt, in whom there was a correlation between the understanding of this structure, the political theology, and the will to enforce it at the beginning of the twentieth century, Talmon, as a liberal, made a distinction between them, and resolved to understand, but not to accept. His historiographical starting-point was the French Revolution, and from there he began to examine the totalitarian dynamic. For Scholem, the French Revolution was the culmination of the Sabbataian apostasy, which resulted in the overthrow of systems, the modernization of the Jews, and the Zionist phenomenon.[85]

Although Talmon and Scholem were critical towards the Zionist movement, to which they saw themselves as belonging, they were committed intellectuals who did not wish to throw out the Zionist baby with the bathwater. Both had a complex attitude towards society, showing responsibility towards it from within because they saw themselves as part of it. The subject

of Messianism was close to their hearts because it was their way of revealing conceptual and historical dialectics. Both recoiled from a Messianic determinism imposed on history. As a result, Talmon wrote "pragmatic history" for his society, as Edmund Burke did in England and Alexis de Tocqueville did in France. In the liberal tradition of these two European thinkers, Talmon feared to deliver too strong a blow to accepted liberal and bourgeois ideas, while Scholem's biography and academic work can only be understood as a revolt against the liberal-bourgeois ethos on which he was nurtured as a youth in Weimar Germany. The liberal outlook caused Talmon to be critical of Messianism, and Scholem's critique of liberalism caused him to investigate Messianism.

The two historians' fear of a fusion of Messianism and history existed not only in the Jewish context but also in a world context. They identified communism (and also fascism) not only as a Messianic political religion but also as a kind of psychological manifestation: people need myths to follow.[86] In the course of their investigations, Talmon and Scholem discovered the danger inherent in the Messianic myth. In both cases, there is a connection between what they wrote as historians and the situation in their time.[87] At an earlier stage (in the case of Talmon) or at a later stage (in the case of Scholem) they acknowledged this. In this respect, they were thinkers of their time who were influenced by their period: the year 1937 was highly symbolic in their lives and work.

In the attitudes of both these scholars there is a kind of closure of a circle, for, as a historian of general history, Talmon decided at the height of his maturity to investigate Jewish history, and consequently sought the blessing of the "rabbi," Scholem. In 1972, in a letter to Gershom Scholem in Jerusalem, Jacob Talmon described his plan to write a trilogy about modern Jewish history in a universal perspective:

> I have been thinking a great deal about the trilogy I mentioned to you: the history of the Jewish people from the French Revolution onwards. I am struck by the way various people, Jewish and non-Jewish, with no connection between them and quite spontaneously, try to persuade and encourage me to embark on this great subject.[88]

This letter testifies to the mutual admiration of these two historians from the Hebrew University in Jerusalem, and shows their common scholarly interest in the Messianic phenomenon, in its historical dialectic, and in the price to be paid for it.

4   Isaiah Leibowitz and the critique of Canaanite Messianism

Isaiah Leibowitz was the most radical of the intellectuals who warned against making the "Canaanite Messianism" the dominant political theology in Israel. The Leibowitzian radicalism was not "extremism," as many have interpreted his opinions and insights, but fidelity to the original sense of the word "radical" – i.e. searching out the roots of things. Throughout his intellectual and public career, Leibowitz sought to expose the roots of the relationships between Judaism, Zionism, and Israelism, whether one was dealing with the affinities of religion and state or the conquest of the territories in the Six-Day War. This drive to expose roots led him to insist on the necessity of making a clear distinction between the sacred and the secular and not blurring the difference between the various categories. It was the supreme principle of his philosophical thought and the basis of his thinking on public affairs. His great fear was of idolatry: that is to say, ascribing sanctity or an absolute value to human affairs or to secular matters such as a territory or a flag.

Leibowitz's radicalism made him into a total intellectual whose philosophy demanded a critical involvement in almost every aspect of society and politics. Comprehensive thinkers of this kind generally have an a priori ideological or practical meta-narrative that governs their approach to human existence. From another perspective, he was also a "specific" intellectual, to use Michel Foucault's expression.[1] An intellectual of this kind focuses on particular issues, exposes the discourse of power or of the will-to-power, and is an indefatigable subverter of basic assumptions, whether utopian, ideological, or scientific. In Foucault, the intellectual does not identify himself with reason or with Rousseau's "general will." His task is to uncover the relationship between power and truth, which he does mainly through genealogy: tracing the roots of ideas and the histories of concepts. Leibowitz did in fact draw up genealogies of concepts in order to ascertain their original significance and demonstrate the manipulative use that had been made of them. His knowledge of the Jewish sources and his command of general philosophy and modern science helped him in this project of "subversion."

In his discussion of the role of the intellectual, Foucault switches the emphasis from a Promethean discourse on setting the world aright to an

analysis of the mechanisms of control which govern modern politics. The task of the intellectual, according to him, is not to advocate an ideological ethos but to dismantle mechanisms of power and step by step to build up a "strategic knowledge" which can serve as a means for subverting and opposing a hegemonic discourse. Instead of doing public relations for political ideologies, the intellectual has to suspect and subvert them. The intellectual's indefatigable subversion of the illusions of humanism, utopian dreams, and ideological visions is achieved through the dismantling of the forms of hegemony.[2] To the degree that Leibowitz can be classed with the postmodern breed that dismantles ideological and power structures, he can be considered a thinker and intellectual of the modern Enlightenment.

Religious and secular Messianism

Zionism as a secular Messianism embodied many utopian dreams. Describing Zionists as members of a kind of family, Amos Oz enumerated different types of Messianism in Zionism: "There were those who came here in order to sit humbly and wait for the Messiah, and there were those who came here not in order to wait for the Messiah but in order to take him by the beard, to force him to come now, whether he wants to or not."[3] It is thus interesting to compare Leibowitz's attitude to the Messianism of Rabbi Abraham Kook with his attitude to Ben-Gurion's Messianism. Leibowitz saw that in the process of making nationhood a supreme value "Rabbi Kook bore a heavy responsibility, because he raised Jewish nationhood to the level of something sacred."[4] Leibowitz summarized Rabbi Kook's political theology as follows: "What happens to the people of Israel today reflects processes taking place in the sacred sphere and not in human history." According to Leibowitz, the theologization of the political and the politicization of the theological gave birth to Gush Emunim, which was "nationalism in a wrapping of religious sanctity supplied by Rabbi Kook."[5]

   The source of inspiration for Gush Emunim was in fact Rabbi Kook, in whose Messianic approach the universal element and the national element were united: "The physical upbuilding of the nation and the manifestation of its spirit are one and the same, and all of it is part of the upbuilding of the world."[6] Where the national and Canaanite Gush Emunim version of Messianism was concerned, Leibowitz saw that

> [when] this Messianic bubble bursts, they won't have anything. They won't have Judaism, for they understand it only as an expression of "the greatness, the splendor, the eternity and the glory" of the State of Israel. These adjectives, which in King David's prayer describe the Holy One, Blessed be He, they transfer to the State of Israel, which is an extraordinarily idolatrous piece of manipulation. When it becomes clear that the State has no splendor, eternity or glory, everything will explode. This is exactly what happened to the disciples of Shabbetai Zevi, who suddenly

had nothing left. The people of Gush Emunim likewise have no knowledge of plain Judaism without the Messianic gleam. And it's an interesting fact that already today there's a rapprochement between them and the Christian fundamentalists.[7]

Leibowitz's comparison of Gush Emunim to Sabbataianism and Christianity was not simply an extreme way of expressing himself but was an attempt to expose, once again, the radical significance, as he saw it, of this national-religious movement which explained the sanctity of the land in Messianic terms: "For the incipient Sabbatean movement (prior to conversion), redemption had became the core of the faith … For Gush Emunim, the land and its conquest are becoming the core of the faith"[8].

Another religious thinker, Eliezer Goldman (1918–2002), a colleague of Leibowitz who wrote an informative introduction to a book of Leibowitz's essays published by the Harvard Press, also called the political theology of Gush Emunim a "simplistic Messianism," which sought

> quite literally to identify contemporary history with the promised Messianic redemption. Although attempts to give – in a broad sense and figuratively speaking – a Messianic significance to the State of Israel have not been unusual in religious circles, this simplistic Messianism only appeared after 1967. It is on the basis of such concepts that the *Gesinnungspolitik* preached by Gush Emunim should be understood. If modern historical developments are identified with the Messianic redemption, and all this has been pre-ordained by Heaven, who needs to give an opinion on the possible political consequences of a policy based on seeing modern history as Messianic? What we have here is a simplistic attitude – and not a figurative interpretation – which sees the events of our time as the events of the redemption in the Messianic sense.[9]

However, Leibowitz did not have to await the wave of Messianic enthusiasm that swept over certain circles of the Israeli public after the Six-Day War in order to warn against the nationalization of the Messianic idea. A decade earlier, in a gathering of the Zionist Organization which invited major intellectuals to discuss Israel–Diaspora relations, he denied that the State of Israel had the role of a Messianic vanguard among the peoples of the world: "Filling the air with slogans about the prophetic-moral vision of a Messianic mission, of the redemption of mankind through the ideals of Judaism, after these concepts have been emptied of their religious significance, must necessarily lead to cynicism and nihilism."[10]

These statements were aimed first and foremost at the prime minister, David Ben-Gurion. Leibowitz was totally opposed to Ben-Gurion's way of mobilizing religious, halachic, and Messianic concepts for national purposes. He reiterated his original claim that

there is no sanctity outside the observance of the Torah – "And ye shall be holy to your God." We have therefore no right or reason to make the founding of the State of Israel dependent on a Messianic mission in any possible sense of such a mission. We do not know if this state is "the first flowering of our redemption" or if it has arisen through divine Providence.[11]

(As was mentioned, Rabbi Yitzhak Herzog asked Shai Agnon to write the Prayer for the Peace of the State, in which the State of Israel is described as "the first flowering of our redemption"). According to Leibowitz, this phrase has an affinity with Sabbataianism which may be found in both the national-secular school of thought, which saw the founding of the State as a "Messianic event," and in the national-religious school of thought.

The concept of redemption was examined by Leibowitz on two levels: the empirical level – redemption as a fact; and the normative level – the future ideal redemption. While the historical redemption of the exodus from Egypt is known to us only incidentally in the context of the acceptance of the Torah by the people of Israel, the normative redemption – the ideal one – is a primary concern of the prophecies of Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel. There are also two ways in which these prophecies can be regarded as "Messianic visions": empirically, just as the exodus from Egypt is known to us as a redemption which took place in the past, so we are informed that the Messianic redemption is an event which will take place in the future. And normatively, the redemption is something ideal and a human aspiration which supports the work of God and the observance of the commandments. Christianity and Sabbataianism, which attempted to realize the Messianic redemption within the world, had a dual common denominator: a "Messianic vision," but also the annulment of the commandments. Leibowitz's starting-point was of course Maimonides: "The Messiah will always be someone whose arrival I will await every day, but an actual Messiah is always a false one."[12]

Only here do we find a point of similarity between Leibowitz's approach and the secular vision of the founding-father of the State of Israel. Ben-Gurion expressed it as follows: "The Messiah has not yet come, and I do not hope the Messiah will come … for the days of the Messiah are more important than the Messiah."[13] Unlike Ben-Gurion, Leibowitz did not give "redemption" a central place in Judaism. In his answer to a questionnaire of the student journal of Bar-Ilan University in autumn 1967, Leibowitz gave a summary of his views on "the significance of 'redemption' and of 'the beginning of redemption' in our time." In his opinion, the main thing in Judaism is not belief in redemption but the decision to serve God by observing the commandments. "Redemption" is therefore not essential to Torah Judaism. The national redemption of the people of Israel is consistent with redemption in the religious sense only to the degree that the people of Israel serve as an instrument for realizing the Torah. Like the conquests of Jeroboam Ben

Jehoash (who ruled the kingdom of Israel between 789 and 784 BCE) and Alexander Yannai (103BCE–76BCE), the founding of the State of Israel and the victory in the Six-Day War were not achievements motivated by a religious purpose, and in the religious tradition they do not count as steps towards redemption. The religious establishment of the secular state, which declared the founding of the state as "the beginning of redemption," was doubly sinful: in presuming to know heaven's intentions and in representing the Jewish religion as an adjunct to human reality. Leibowitz summarized his criticism of religious Zionism by recalling three examples which preceded and foreshadowed the Six-Day War: "It is not surprising that the voice of these religious people was not heard after the atrocity of Deir Yassin, nor after the incidents of Kibiyeh and Kafr Kassem."

Kafr Kassem and Kibiyeh as examples

Leibowitz considered arguments combining religious motivations with national Israeli ones a desecration of religion. Thus, in his opinion, religion became an instrument to serve human needs when it claimed to see contemporary events as the workings of Providence and the finger of God. There are two versions of the conclusion Leibowitz reached from this insight. The first, in the article "World Problems and Problems of the People," published in 1957, runs "therefore, I too support a separation of religion and State."[14] In the second, which in 1975 was appended to the book *Judaism, the Jewish People and the State of Israel*, there was a significant addition: "Therefore, I too, like some of the representatives of secular Zionism who have spoken here, but not for their Canaanite reasons, support a separation of religion and State."[15] This late addition, "but not for their Canaanite reasons," was of course not accidental. Like Kurzweil, Leibowitz thought that the secularity of the Jewish national movement would lead it in the end to Canaanism. Moreover, he felt that the political theology combining nationalism and religion embodied in the expression "Rock of Israel" in the Scroll of Independence would engender the hybrid of a Canaanite Messianism.

Leibowitz favored a confrontation "between the State, which embodies secular values, and the Jewish religion, which requires sanctity." He claimed that anything else was "a two-sided fraud symbolically represented by the 'Rock of Israel' in the Declaration of Independence":

> The "Rock of Israel" invoked by King David and by the prophet Isaiah, and incorporated in the benediction following the reading of Shema in the morning prayer, is not an attribute of Israel but is above Israel and transcends all human values and manifestations, personal and collective. The "Rock of Israel" of the declaration of Independence is immanent in Israel itself. It is the human essence and might of Israel; Israel as manifested in history. The use of the term from the Bible and the prayer book to designate values of our consciousness, feeling, and the forces

motivating our national-political activity leads people to transfer the connotations of holiness, the absolute normative force associated with this term, to these human values.[16]

In the intellectual gathering in 1957, Ben-Gurion confronted the pick of the intellectuals, such as Martin Buber, Natan Rotenstreich, and Leibowitz, who did not accept his approach to secular Messianism. Leibowitz wanted to bring the discussion down from the Messianic heights inhabited by Ben-Gurion to the shaky foundations of life in the young Israeli state. In his lecture, he suggested we

> [stop] the pyrotechnics of a 'theory for the goyim', and look at ourselves a bit … Let us at least remember the name Kafr Kassem in order that we should consider for a moment our value and our worth and our reality as they really are, and not as reflected in the Messianic vision, which is something very cheap as it does not commit one to anything.[17]

A few months earlier, the state had been shaken by the Kafr Kassem affair. On October 29, soldiers of the Israeli border police had killed fifty-one Arab citizens who lived in the Arab-Israeli village Kafr Kassem. They were returning from their work after the curfew had gone into effect: a curfew which had been imposed on a cluster of Arab villages known as the "triangle" at the beginning of the Sinai Campaign. In the trial that ensued, those responsible in the army were given only light sentences. The court's decision that it is obligatory to disobey an obviously illegal order "which carries a black flag," to use the judge's expression, has since then become a binding norm.

Leibowitz saw the Kafr Kassem affair as a litmus test of "the 'sanctity' of national security or the 'sanctity' of military loyalty, and discipline in the wake of which we have Kafr Kassem."[18] Simon's fear of "the stilling of conscience which results from bestowing an almost divine glory on human actions" and his belief "that the state and its leaders can make mistakes" were also expressed by Leibowitz after the action at Kibiyeh. The Israeli Defense Force's (IDF) reprisal action, in which more than fifty of the inhabitants of this village in Samaria were killed, was a reaction to the throwing of a grenade in Yahud, a rural town near Tel Aviv, resulting in the death of a mother and her two children. Leibowitz saw the IDF action as a test case of the "national liberation, political independence, and our military power." Exile, he said, had been a luxury without government responsibility, and represented a state of impotence. It was "an insulated existence in which we could cultivate values and sensibilities that did not have to be tested in the crucible of reality." It was a flight from history, an evasion of the decisive test, "a form of escapism reflecting the unconscious fear of such a test – fear of the loss of religious-moral superiority, which is easy to maintain in the absence of temptation and easy to lose in other circumstances."[19]

The importance of the article on Kibiyeh can hardly be exaggerated. Leibowitz saw the Kibiyeh episode as a test case for the society in which he lived, just as another intellectual in a different country, Émile Zola in France, was able to pinpoint the Dreyfus Affair as the ultimate test case for the Third Republic. The Dreyfus Affair decisively placed a whole system of values on the French public agenda, together with the necessity for examining the question "Who is a Frenchman?" It is hardly surprising if the concept "intellectual" came out of that affair. It was Georges Clemenceau who, in the shadow of the Dreyfus Affair, on January 23, 1898 bestowed on the writers of the petition in the newspaper *L'Aurore* the nickname "intellectuals." About a week later, Maurice Barrès, the nationalist anti-Dreyfusard writer, reacted with his own mocking headline on the petition – "Protest of the Intellectuals." On the one hand one had Barrès, Georges Sorel, and others who condemned the "intellectuals" who sided with the enemies of the Republic, including of course the Jews, and on the other hand there were Zola and his friends, who defended the universal values which derived from the republican principle. The intellectuals – Zola in France, Leibowitz in Israel – were people of conscience, guardians of the citadel of universality within the national conceptual systems.

Zionism was thus for Leibowitz an acceptance of responsibility not only in one's consciousness, but first and foremost from a practical point of view. The meaning of activization of Jewish life within reality was in his words "not only suffering for the sake of values we cherish but also of acting in accordance with them." This was not the attitude of an intellectual who shut himself up in a moral hothouse and condemned the actions of people of flesh and blood caught up in the maelstrom of necessity. But do we not have here a typical philosophical attitude that requires the critique of pure reason to be translated into a critique of practical reason, philosophy to be turned into morality?

The meaning of morality for Leibowitz was the necessity of not transferring responsibility to others but of dealing with problems independently in an unmediated way: "directing man's will towards that which he sees as his duty." In the article on Kibiyeh, Leibowitz quoted Kant in support of his views: "There is not in the reality of the world – and one cannot go in thought outside the world – anything that can unreservedly be called well except for good desires and intentions."[20] In an interview in the year 1993, Leibowitz was asked, "What is the most important point in Kant's teaching?" He answered:

> Kant did not ask what reality is but what I think about reality. And this answer is not fortuitous … Kant thought the categorical imperative derived from reason, and in this I think Kant was wrong. It seems to me a defect of practical culture that it does not recognize that man has a will that is not a function of reason.[21]

The post-Kantian mentality that paved the way for the belief that one can build – and therefore destroy – the world in one's consciousness extended all the way to Nietzsche and Foucault, but one can already find its roots in Rousseau. Rousseau thought that, because man is irrational, he has to be conditioned to accept rationality. This revolutionary idea was the basis of the modern Kantian ethics which replaced subservience to external commands: man becomes moral when he obeys his sense of duty. In the Kantian formula "Dare to know! Have the courage to use your mind!" there is both an element of understanding and an element of will. What mattered to Leibowitz was the Promethean exercise of will in the self-creation of modern man. He did not reject the decision of the will to return to history, or, in other words, to become a modern Zionist, or the will's decision to be moral – that is, to be humanistic. These things are not in opposition. Zionism must be judged on its actions and not according to theoretical considerations.

The test of Zionism

Leibowitz was the most important intellectual in Israeli society, and at the same time a fierce critic of it from the time of the Six-Day War onwards. With conceptual clarity and accuracy of judgment, he saw that Zionism had been subject to a character test for a generation. According to him, the meaning of Zionism was a state of national sovereignty in which others do not rule over you and you do not rule over others. There was an irony in the very success of Zionism: the Jews had now been liberated, but the Israelis put themselves back in prison by becoming lords over others.

Leibowitz was one of the last representatives of the Zionist humanists – Zionists of the Enlightenment who looked upon Zionism as the modern liberation movement of the Jewish people. There is often confusion between the concepts "Enlightenment" and "modernity," and one should make a distinction between them. The Enlightenment was a view of the world that prevailed from the eighteenth century onwards, and which promoted a system of values that strove for the universalization of mankind. However, according to Leibowitz, "values" are not "entities," and there is no certainty that they will be put into practice. It is merely desirable that they should be. As was his custom, he went back to the opening words of the *Shulchan Aruch* (the sixteenth-century codex of Judaic law): "'A man should strive like a lion to place himself in the morning at the service of God.' And why did it not begin, 'A man should place himself … '? Because he knew in the depths of his soul that a man did not have the capacity to serve God, so what should he do? He should strive."[22] The struggle for values is what is important. And that is what the Enlightenment was: an outlook that assumed that human beings do not have to be considered molecules alien to one another and separate from one another, and it is desirable that they should form a common humanity. They were no longer seen in terms of particular characteristics such as classes

and races but as part of mankind in general, for whom there was a single criterion applicable to all.

Modernity, on the other hand, is a neutral phenomenon which makes no value-judgment on the period in which we have been living for more than two hundred years. The salient feature of this period is man's capacity and will to create his own world. Nationalism, from this point of view, is an outstandingly modern movement. However, modernity and Enlightenment are not identical concepts: there is an enlightened, humanistic modernity and there is a modernity which turns against humanistic values. Similarly, there is a humanistic nationalism which is open, pluralistic, based on a social contract, and cognizant of the universality of the right to self-determination, and there is a nationalism which turns against the Enlightenment and which is tribal, integral, and egoistic.

In an interview on the occasion of his ninetieth birthday and his reception of the Israel Prize (an award that was eventually withdrawn due to his controversial beliefs), Leibowitz spoke about prophecy in the humanistic context. A prophet, he said, does not speak of what will be but what ought to be. Leibowitz was often called an "angry prophet," and it was said about him that "he sees his main struggle as being a continual and uncompromising war against the establishment, the entire establishment – a kind of perpetual war between the king and the prophet."[23] Was Leibowitz a prophet? "There are four things I am not," he used to say, "a humanist, an atheist, a pessimist and a cosmopolitan." In addition to these, the angry intellectual from Jerusalem rejected the appellation "prophet." He claimed that prophecy in Israel had come to an end and the expression was therefore anachronistic.

Among the many definitions of a prophet, perhaps that of Martin Buber is the most suitable in the case of Leibowitz. According to Buber, a prophet is a thinker or public figure who stands in the gate, points to two alternatives, and calls for one of them to be chosen. Leibowitz was not a prophet in the accepted, biblical sense, but he was closer than any other Israeli to being a prophet in the deepest meaning of the concept. He acted in this way in the question of the territories and of relations between religion and the state: the two major issues which affected, and which still affect, the character of the Israeli society-in-formation, which cut into its flesh. His basic concern was not the division of the land or its wholeness, but how the Jewish State fared in the test of humanistic Zionism.

Of the two types of nationalism which Israel had to choose between from 1967 onwards, Leibowitz called for the choice of a humanistic nationalism. The birth of Zionism took place in a paradoxical situation: it was precisely at the time when emancipation had been realized and the rights of the Jews had been made equal by law to those of the other citizens of the states in which they lived that the movement to separate from Europe was born. The claim to national specificity saw the light of day just as universality had been victorious. The Zionist claims were based on the equal claims of the French, the British, and the Germans: their claim to the right to national sovereignty in

accordance with universal human principles was valid for the Jews as well. The meaning of this claim to sovereignty was the transference of the management of one's affairs from an external power – a conqueror or a dynasty – to a collectivity which defined itself as a people.

Leibowitz said that he once told a British journalist who asked him the meaning of Zionism:

> You are speaking to a man who was a Zionist from birth, and that is why I came to Eretz-Israel more than fifty years ago. I participated with my little strength in various forms of public activity and also in military activities which finally resulted in the establishment of the State of Israel (I wasn't in a terrorist organization but in the "Haganah," like all members of my generation). I would describe Zionism in this way: We are fed up with being ruled by goyim. It may be that Gentile rule today is very good (ask any American Jew and he will tell you that this is indeed the case). But there are Jews who are tired of having goyim rule over us, and that is the whole essence of Zionism.[24]

This declaration by Leibowitz explains Zionism very well: in modern times, the Jewish people became tired of being ruled by other nations and decided, in the words of Gershom Scholem, who was also a modern humanistic Zionist, "to return to history." The modern Jew is responsible for his own fate, and creates a politics, an economy, a type of education, and an army in accordance with his capacities, his willpower, and his system of values. There is an end to the self-abnegation of the merchant before the landowner, the Jewish officer in the Czar's army, the religious Jew before the sultan or Caesar, the Jewish intellectual with suitcase in hand. Henceforth, the Jew is in charge of his own life, and he creates his own system of education, works his own soil, appoints his own officers, and directs his own security services. According to Leibowitz, the War of Independence was an unavoidable necessity because the Zionist ideology had to be transformed into Jewish sovereignty in practical terms. That is to say, it was needed to prepare independence.

Post-Zionism as an intellectual phenomenon developed after Leibowitz's death. Can one guess what his attitude to post-Zionism would be? Would he have approved of it or have joined its ranks? My belief is that Leibowitz, the humanistic Zionist intellectual, would have totally rejected both the starting-point and the conclusions of the post-Zionists. His point of view is clearly expressed in the passage I have just quoted: "We do not apologize for the blood shed in the war"; "Our war of liberation was the inevitable result … of the fact of our exile for two thousand years."[25]

Leibowitz would not have accepted the idea that the State of Israel was born in sin, and it is a central idea of post-Zionism that the original sin in the founding of the state was the expulsion of 700,000 Palestinians from their homes. According to them, this was not just a practical sin but a metaphysical

sin inherent in the establishment of the state. The repeated use some post-Zionists make of the concept of original sin reveals a theological intention. Original sin, as we know, is a sin of humanity for which there is no atonement. The only possibility of escaping it is through the crucifixion of the Son of God. The analogy is that the Zionist State cannot redeem its sin by returning any territories. A matter of principle is involved here. Zionism in Eretz-Israel was born in sin, which can be redeemed only with the annulment of the Jewish democratic state and its transformation into a "state of all its citizens," or, in other words, a secular-democratic state. Leibowitz would totally reject these basic assumptions and the conclusions drawn from them. He remained a Zionist until the day of his death, and at the same time was the most stringent critic of Israeli society precisely from the point of view of the Zionist principles underlying it.[26]

The Kibiyeh operation was carried out five years after the War of Independence and fourteen years before the Six-Day War. In many respects, one can see that the test case of Kibiyeh provided the main arguments for Leibowitz's criticism of the occupation of the territories in 1967. Leibowitz did not overlook Zionism's responsibility for the Kibiyeh reprisal action. It was not done by anyone except

> the youth raised and nurtured on the values of a Zionist education, upon concepts of the dignity of man and human society. The answer is that the events at Kiviyeh were a consequence of applying the religious category of holiness to social, national, and political values and interests – a usage prevalent in the education of young people as well as in the dissemination of public information."[27]

As with other events, in the case of Kibiyeh, Leibowitz analyzed with razor-like sharpness the essential significance of the incident: the banalization of the concept of holiness:

> The concept of holiness – the concept of the absolute which is beyond all categories of human thought and evaluation – is transferred to the profane. From a religious standpoint only god is holy, and only His imperative is absolute. All human values and all obligations and undertakings derived from them are profane and have no absolute validity. Country, state, and nation impose pressing obligations and tasks which are sometimes very difficult. They do not, on that account, acquire sanctity. They are always subject to judgment and criticism from a higher standpoint. For the sake of that which is holy – and perhaps only for its sake – man is capable of acting without any restraint.[28]

The period between the War of Independence and the Six-Day War was the most secular period in the history of the state, and therefore perhaps the most Zionist: others did not rule over the Israelis and the Israelis did not rule over

others. Until his death, Leibowitz waged an all-out war against the mythologization of the Greater Land of Israel, and called for a return to the Zionist rationale as he saw it: A free people cannot be an occupying people. Zionism, in his opinion, had been conquered from within and had lost its humanistic character. The Leibowitzian philosophy which aimed at clarifying concepts and distinguishing between sacred and secular fused with his political thinking calling for a withdrawal from the occupied territories. His main conclusions were: (1) "The claim that the idea of the Greater Land of Israel is the essence of Zionism is a total lie"; and (2) "This is because it is nationalism dressed up as holiness."[29]

Leibowitz and Isaiah Berlin both sought to understand the significance of the national phenomenon. On the face of it, a gulf separated the two Isaiahs. Both came from Riga and were counted among the most outstanding intellectuals of the twentieth century, but the former, as a religious Jew, could not, on his own admission, eat a meal in the home of a secular Jew such as Berlin. Leibowitz was a man of two cultures – humanist and scientific – who had made Zionism his practical choice: radical in character, ascetic and angry, biting in invective, eschewing the benefits of power, he was an intellectual of a type uncomfortable for the establishment. Berlin, for his part, was a secular Jew, a liberal scholar from Oxford, an expert in political philosophy remote from the exact sciences, a sociable man who liked his comforts, a frequent visitor at the courts of kings and presidents, close to the political authorities but shrewd enough to maintain a critical and ironic distance, a Zionist at heart who chose England as his physical and spiritual homeland. Berlin's insights on freedom illuminate Leibowitz's thinking on the metamorphoses of modern Jewish nationalism.

In his book *Four Essays on Liberty*, Berlin distinguished between "positive freedom" and "negative freedom." "Negative freedom" is somewhat similar to Leibowitz's definition of Zionism: "goyim [gentiles] should not rule over us." And what are we supposed to do after we have been liberated from the rule of others? With what positive content do we fill our independence? The answer is given by "positive freedom," which distinguishes between Jewish nationhood and formal Israeli citizenship: "I am speaking about Jewish nationhood and not about Israeli citizenship, which consists of my having an identity-card signed by an official of the Ministry of the Interior. That is Israeli identity."[30] He thought that the problem of Jewish nationhood today is that it has no Jewish national content. In his opinion, "the main achievement of Zionism was not the founding of the state. All kinds of wretched groups of people have succeeded in setting up a state for themselves, but restoring the Hebrew language to the position of the living spoken tongue of four million people is a unique phenomenon in history, and something that no other people has succeeded in doing." Thus, when Leibowitz wanted to point to the positive aspect of practical Zionism, he did not indicate the establishment of the state system but a creative act that had taken place within it.

But Zionism, in his view, had only been partly realized, as "negative freedom", liberation from the rule of others had been transformed through a tragic process into rule over another people. In this way, Zionism, in his opinion, had betrayed not only its purpose in the modern world – to fashion its own destiny – but also its humanistic principles: respecting the universality of mankind and the right to self-determination. Now it was the "other" (those who were conquered) who fashioned its destiny. Only in this context can one understand his scathing invective, in which he used the most radical expressions. The occupation corrupts, to be sure, but this was not an original argument, although Leibowitz was one of the first to say this. What was new and original in his criticism was the claim – made by a Zionist and not a post-Zionist – that the occupation was destroying Zionism! That was a far more radical charge, and he also made it against religious Zionism, which he felt had largely become a neo-Canaanite ideology with its sanctification of the trees, stones, and graves of Judea and Samaria.

Leibowitz's fear of Canaanism was shown in the concern he expressed in 1968 that "the state will no longer be a Jewish State but a Canaanite State."[31] Four years later, in his review of a book by Eliezer Livne (1902–75), a Labor activist and essayist, he declared that for young people "the main idea is that 'Israeliness' is the antithesis of 'Judaism', which is alien to it".

Leibowitz's criticism of the Canaanite tendencies of Israeliness was very similar to Baruch Kurzweil's criticism of the Canaanite roots of secular Zionism. Kurzweil identified Berdichevsky and the *Tze'irim* ("the young ones") as the secularizers of the Hebrew commentaries of Judaism, as the forerunners of Canaanism and as those who prepared the ground for secular Jewishness. He warned that in the end this Canaanite nationalism would fuse with the "Canaanite Messianism" which gripped so many Israelis after the Six-Day War.[32]

Political theology and political mythology

Leibowitz's political thought and Carl Schmitt's political theology are mutually contradictory. If some of the theological insights of the young Schmitt influenced Jewish thinkers like Leo Strauss, Walter Benjamin, and Gershom Scholem, Leibowitz held opposite views. Schmitt wanted to recreate the Gordian knot that held together theology and the state, because he held that the weakening of the central government and the breakdown of authority derived from the crisis of secularism. Leibowitz, however, hated concepts like dictatorship and theology to such a degree that he arrived at the most extreme universalist-humanist conclusions, almost the anarchist position: "In principle, I am an anarchist. I see all government as such, even if it derives its sanction from the majority, as being nevertheless despotism."[33] The starting-point of this philosophical and political anarchism was Leibowitz's basic position of opposing the domination of any group of people by others. His advocacy of the separation of religion and State and his radical approach to

democracy were other essential elements of his modern humanistic Zionism. A year before his death, he made an original vindication of democracy: the "positive" value it contained was the struggle for democracy, while its "negative" value was that democracy prevented dictatorship.

Leibowitz's prophecies, war cries, and struggles within the Israeli democracy should be seen in the context of a humanist-Zionist outlook throwing a spanner in the works of the system of government. His calls to respect the rights of man, citizens, and minorities, his loathing of the rabbinic establishment, his sympathy for the Palestinian struggle, his warnings concerning nuclear weapons, his warnings about a police state – to mention a few of the things he fought about – are different links in a clear and consistent chain of values.

In certain respects, Leibowitz's outlook resembled that of the German-Jewish philosopher Ernst Cassirer (1874–1935). Both were neo-Kantians who translated their philosophy into social criticism. Leibowitz warned of the fascization of society in Israel; Cassirer warned of political paganization in the twentieth century; and the source of their common fear was the mythologization of reality: how a symbol would rise against its maker, become a myth, and the myth become the reality. Cassirer thought that man was the reflection of his symbols. Man cannot bear the unmediated reality and therefore creates around himself a nimbus of figures of speech, artistic forms, mythical symbols, and religious ceremonies.[34] Man is *homo symbolicus*. Only when man creates symbols does the chaos of life become a meaningful structure, a cosmos. The symbol-creating man bestows a meaning on the world by means of his symbols. Kant taught us that we can never know the thing-in-itself: our knowledge depends on structures of consciousness. According to Cassirer, the philosopher made a distinction between the role of the symbol in myth and its role in science. While science recognizes the symbolic element, myth has no consciousness of symbolism. Science is a processing of reality and not a higher form of it, as is claimed by myth.

Cassirer investigated myth twice in his life, in his youth and in his maturity. In 1925, when his work *Mythical Thought*, the second part of his trilogy *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*, was published, he made no attempt to criticize the *völkisch* mythical thought which was then beginning to be current.[35] The early Cassirer was unable to distinguish between the philosophical and anthropological examination of myths and the mythologization of the *Volk*. Believing in German liberalism, he was careful in the 1920s not to go beyond the confines of the academic ivory tower even when he appeared at political gatherings. But gradually, he felt the approaching storm threatening to shatter the flimsy structure of the young German democracy. In his famous debate with Martin Heidegger, one sees that he perceived that the symbol had ceased to become an allegory and had become real. It was only a matter of time before pagan idolatry would become a political reality.

Like Cassirer, Leibowitz feared an attempt to replace the empirical reality with another, mythical reality. He also believed that myth had not created

ritual and religion, and therefore again and again he stressed the distinction between the sacred and the secular:

> Life modeled on the halakhic demarcates a domain of things and deeds that pertain to holiness. Holiness, in the religious sense of this word and against its figurative secular meanings, is nothing but halakhic observance; the specific international acts dedicated to the service of God. Any other deed – whether regarded as good or bad, whether material of spiritual – that a man may perform in his own interest or for the satisfaction of a human need is profane. Sacred and profane are fundamental religious categories … the idea of holiness as an immanent property of certain things – persons, locations, institutions, objects, or events – is a magical-mystical concept which smacks of idolatry.[36]

Leibowitz thought that the attempt to ascribe sanctity to the Greater Land of Israel was idolatry, a mythological interpretation which tried to turn a philosophy of history into an ideology. Leibowitz wished to expose the philosophy of history of Gush Emunim as a Messianic ideology which sought to turn politics into myth and myth into reality. His great fear was that the Messianic myth of the Greater Land of Israel would become a genetic mutation of Zionism. In a conversation held on the occasion of his seventy-fifth birthday, he explained the starting-point of his anti-Canaanite position:

> Moses broke the tablets of the Law when he saw the people worshipping the golden calf. The sin of the calf was not the idea that God does not exist, but ascribing holiness to the calf. There was no denial of God but there was the mediation of a material object. Moses, coming down from the mountain, thought that the tablets of the Law would take the place of the golden calf. This led him to the conclusion that the people were not at that time able to grasp divinity without physical mediation, and in that situation there was no meaning to the tablets of the Law as the people were unable to meet the requirement of accepting the yoke of heaven without any material value.
>
>   The last verse of the Pentateuch reads: "And all the mighty hand and all the great and terrible deeds which Moses wrought in the sight of all Israel." Rashi made the following comment: "What is the mighty hand? It is the breaking of the tablets of the Law." The event was as central as that in the life of the people of Israel. We see, then, that worshipping God through mediation leads to breaking the tablets of the Law.
>
>   A similar event happened close to our time, about two hundred years ago, and in relation to a faith which, like Judaism, believed in the One God – Islam. 'Abd Al-Wahhab Al-Tamimi (1703–1792) was the founder of the Wahabites in Arabia, a sect which fought to cleanse Islam of the foreign elements and idolatry which had entered into it. When he conquered Mecca and Medina at the end of the eighteenth century, he gave

the order to destroy the mosque built over the grave of Mohammed because prayer over a man's grave is idol-worship. There are no holy places, there are no holy buildings; only God is holy. This is an instructive lesson where the dreadful cult of the Wailing Wall in our own time is concerned: the grave of Rahab the harlot will yet become a holy place in order to establish our right to Arab Jericho!

The essence of Judaism is the rejection of all these things: the rejection of the sanctity of anything other than God. The classic logos here is "in order that you will remember and do all my commandments, and you will be holy." The land of Israel is not holy. The State of Israel was not founded in this land because of the sanctity of the soil but because empirically speaking this land is the land of the Jewish people.[37]

Leibowitz does not return here to the well-worn practice of making a distinction between "Israeliness" and "Judaism," but exposes the process of Canaanization paradoxically resulting from the domination of the land of Israel by the Jewish Torah. This surprising dialectical development to which Leibowitz drew attention represented a penetration of the Canaanite ideology to a central position in the State of Israel. This was due not to the pressure of the secular Canaanite movement on the centre but precisely to the annexation of the historical homeland by religious Zionism:

There is no longer any awareness of the meaning of the Torah of Israel which is beyond any interests or needs of the people and state, and therefore nothing remains of it except those very interests and needs, but wrapped up in a religious phraseology. The people have replaced God, the land has replaced the Torah and nationalism has replaced faith.

In the second Book of Kings, chapter eighteen, it is said of Hezekiah: "He removed the high places and broke the pillars, and cut down the Asherah. And he broke in pieces the bronze serpent that Moses had made." Here was a bronze serpent made by Moses himself, but when the bronze serpent was made, it was not ascribed any sanctity. For that reason the Midrash says, "Was it the serpent that killed and gave life? It was rather when the Israelites looked upwards and turned their hearts towards the God in heaven that they were healed (from the bites of the serpents)." But in the course of time the Israelites began to ascribe sanctity to the material object, as we read in the Book of Kings: "For until those days the people of Israel had burned incense to it; it was called Nehushtan."

Therefore Hezekiah broke in pieces the serpent that had become a sacred object to the people, and it was said of Hezekiah: "He trusted in the Lord the God of Israel; so that there was none like him among all the kings of Judah after him, nor among those that were before him."[38]

Underlying Leibowitz's thinking, there was a fear of two things: a political theology such as one finds in Carl Schmitt and a political mythology such as Ernst Cassirer warned about. The theology and the mythology were liable to become Janus-faced: the transcendental face glanced towards the Shechina (the dwelling or settling presence of God) and the idolatrous face looked towards the tangible. The concretization of the land became Canaanism and the concretization of the state could lead to fascism. But Leibowitz understood very well that the secret of fascism's attraction lay not only in its deification of the state but also in its definition of it "in the spirit of Mussolini who described a nation as a brigade that fights together." More than Leibowitz feared a glorification of the state, he was disturbed by the fascist experience in which "we would be united by the tank we are using, which is the only thing we all have in common."

The critique of reality on the one hand and the fixing of true values on the other were basic to his outlook. Leibowitz was critical of reality – any reality – and he strove for the ideal in the best tradition of the Enlightenment. As a radical intellectual observing his society, he was able to draw practical conclusions from his religious beliefs and philosophical investigations. He warned against making a means into an end, whether it was an ideology or a state, an army or a political party. He gave no rest to the society in which he lived, calling upon it to continually measure itself against its basic principles. He warned of the corruption that accompanies power and demanded a division of spheres, rendering unto Caesar that which is Caesar's and separating the abstract from the pagan, the Messianic from the Canaanite, and theology from politics.

5 Israel Eldad and the Nietzschean Hebrew Messianism

There is a strong correlation between the presence of Nietzsche in the life of Israel Eldad (Scheib) and his adoption of Nietzsche for the Israeli Messianic radical right. Although Eldad is known, in the Israeli Nietzschean context, first and foremost for his splendid achievement in translating Nietzsche into Hebrew, I wish to show how he adopted intellectual and stylistic elements of the Nietzschean *Lebensphilosophie* suited to his view of the world and his radical ideology, the way in which the voluntaristic currents of philosophy shaped his conceptual and political outlook, and the place they had in his espousal of the voluntaristic-Messianic current in Zionism and Judaism.

Three biographical elements are interwoven in the life and thought of Eldad: his position in the leadership of *Lehi* (acronym of "Lohamei Herut Israel," Fighters for Israel's Freedom, known in English as the Stern Group), his national-existentialist outlook, and his translation of Nietzsche into Hebrew.[1] This interrelationship between his biography and philosophy is paralleled by what he wrote about Nietzsche in his introduction to *Beyond Good and Evil*, the first book of Nietzsche's he translated:

> There have been few philosophers whose personal biography had such importance for their work as that of Nietzsche, although it may also be said that conversely there are few philosophers whose biography has been as much influenced by their thought as that of Nietzsche.[2]

The will-to-Hebraism

Although he was already drawn to Nietzsche when he was a pupil in the Gymnasium in Lodz, Poland, it was only as a student of philosophy and history in Vienna in 1929–35 that Eldad began to be engrossed by Nietzsche's writings in the university library. He read them enthusiastically, but as his proposal to write his doctoral thesis on Nietzsche was not accepted, he chose as his subject "The Voluntarism of Eduard von Hartmann – Its Debt to Schopenhauer."[3]

He returned to his main preoccupation in 1937, when he was twenty-seven, in an article entitled "Schopenhauer and Judaism." In his contrasting

treatment of Schopenhauer and Nietzsche in this article, one may see the first expressions of his Hebrew-Nietzschean outlook:

> The commandment of life is so strong in Judaism that it found an echo in the words of Nietzsche, Schopenhauer's disciple and major opponent. He is full of praise for Judaism because of the strong sense of life that is in it; so much so that he decides that the only sin of the Jewish people was that it gave to the world Jesus of Nazareth and his teaching antithetical to life.
>
> Does it follow that in Nietzsche's system Judaism is questioned on account of this? Far from it! Schopenhauer denies the value of life because of its lack of purpose and its suffering, while Nietzsche affirms life despite its purposelessness and suffering. The value of life resides in life itself (Greek teachings, Goethe).[4]

Eldad claims that Schopenhauer views the world as dominated by the blind lust of the will. This eternal and immanent passion of the will is different in his opinion from the concepts of the will one finds in Jewish philosophy such as the "rational will" of Solomon Ibn Gevirol (1022–68) the Andalucian Hebrew poet and Jewish philosopher, and the religious "holy will" of Rabbi Isaac Hacohen Kook. The cause of the Schopenhaurian pessimism is the impossibility of satisfying the desires of the will, which can only give way to new desires. Desire is inseparable from suffering, for it longs for what is not, with the result that suffering is eternal and inescapable. This is the reason for the negative value of life in Schopenhauer's philosophy. The arbitrary nature of life results in a lack of taste and purpose. Schopenhauer's morality is "a morality of the desperate who are doomed to die; the morality of Judaism, a morality of development and confidence, is a morality of justice." The Nietzschean *amor fati* finds the value of life in life itself. The Schopenhaurian will is a nihilistic will, a will for will's sake, while the Nietzschean will is a will-to-power, a will-to-life. This is the background to Eldad's continual fascination with Nietzsche, the admirer of Judaism and the will-to-life it contains.

In 1937, Eldad published a short article entitled "Berdichevsky the Rebel," a self-testimony containing an early exposition of the Hebrew-Nietzschean principles which reached their full development in the idea of national existentialism. At this early stage of his career, four years before his immigration to Israel, Eldad, writing in Poland, perceived Berdichevsky's slogan "the transvaluation of values" as a call to the Jewish public in *fin-de-siècle* Eastern Europe. "Berdichevsky took his manifesto for the revolt of the Hebrew people from the school of the German scholar, Nietzsche."[5] The starting-point of the article was the importance of the will in the life of the individual and of the nation. The will is supreme, for life is movement, and all movement derives its force from the will, whereas reason holds back. Two thousand years of exile upset the balance between will and reason in the Jewish people and emasculated Hebrew vitality. Life was centered in the spirit, in the intellect. But the revolution in the Jewish people which gave rise to the Jewish national

movement Zionism recognized this sickly dominance of the intellect over the will. According to Eldad, the Jewish philosopher Ahad Ha-Am and the national poet Haim Nahman Bialik were representative of this spiritual sickness which led to a weakening of the national will. This, said Eldad, was the background to the call to rebellion made by Berdichevsky, who identified the contraction of the will and the weakening of the spirit as the national malady. Thus, Eldad wrote, echoing Berdichevsky:

> Straighten the Jew's back which has become hunched from poring over books! Lift off his shoulders the burden of study and philosophy and open his eyes to the beauty around him! Will is more important than spirit. Beauty has precedence over abstract speculation; a healthy body has precedence over a refined intellect. Laughter has precedence over a sigh, the future is more important than the past. We must shake off the burden of the past, of exile, of sadness. Burn the rotten old before the entry of the new.[6]

Some thirty years later, Eldad dealt with the "Hebrew revolt" once again in his article "Micah Joseph Berdichevsky, Between Egypt and Canaan" (1971). In linking Nietzsche and Berdichevsky, Eldad wished to show how harmful Ahad Ha-Am's historiosophy had been to Jewish life, and how beneficial Berdichevsky's historiosophy was to Hebrew life. Eldad developed the theme of rebellion which had preoccupied him in the first article. Berdichevsky represented for Eldad the principle of individualism in rebellion, the revolt of the individual against the mass, for the individual takes precedence over the mass, and the world was created for his sake. Berdichevsky, who was concerned with the particular rather than the abstract, with the differentiating rather than the uniting factor, belonged in his opinion to the romantic current in Judaism which broke away from the Haskalah (the Jewish intellectual movement in Europe in the Enlightenment era), which by its very nature was rationalistic. Reason abstracts and generalizes: will and feeling motivate and create, and the power of the will is thus preferable to the power of thought. Not "*cogito, ergo sum* – I think, therefore I am – but I will, therefore I am." Life is decisiveness, and decisiveness is feeling, imagination, will, and individuality. Eldad concluded: "Through this, Berdichevsky places himself within the most recent current in philosophy, the one we call existentialism."[7]

According to Eldad, Berdichevsky's disillusionment with the Haskalah was chiefly due to its abstract nature. Its excessive rebelliousness and admiration for the foreign led to self-hatred. As a natural rebel, Berdichevsky could not help admiring the maskilim (the people of the Haskalah), who dared to break out of the constrictions of traditional Judaism. All that was conventional or institutional was a straitjacket for him, but he did not call for rebellion for its own sake. Eldad commented: "And so the Haskalah came along and destroyed an old building, and that was a good thing, for Berdichevsky took

as his motto Nietzsche's saying, 'If you want to build a temple, you have to destroy one first', but what temple did it build in place of the old one?"[8] In his search for particularity, Berdichevsky agreed with his great rival Ahad Ha-Am that redemption was not to be found in imitation of the West and its culture. Their disagreement was about the nature of that particularity. Berdichevsky put the Jews before Judaism, the concrete before the abstract, existence before essence.

Eldad instinctively concurred with Berdichevsky: "My genes revolted against Ahad Ha-Am. I later learnt from Klausner [Joseph, the Israeli historian] why this was so."[9] Eldad disliked the abstract and historicistic approach of Ahad Ha-Am, which aimed at a "universal prophetic morality" or a "prophetic monotheism." He sided with the national existentialism of the Berdichevsky school of thought: "Not universality … but the idea of the specific, belief in [God's] national character, in the rebuilding of the city of His majesty, Jerusalem."[10]

Eldad adopted Nietzschean motifs from Berdichevsky to support his national-existential outlook. Thus, unity is not the most important thing, but separateness, zealousness against foreign gods. There is a perpetual conflict between heaven and earth, between the book and the sword, but all opposing principles are legitimate in Judaism. Those who wish to base Judaism on a single principle or system do it an injustice.

What are the reasons given by Eldad for Berdichevsky's war against "Judaism"? Abstract Judaism is an escape from life and antithetical to nature in its modern Jewish form, its traditional religious form, and in the form of Ahad Ha-Am's "spiritual centre," which bases Judaism on abstract ideas like the unity of God and prophetic morality.[11] In order to prove the non-existence of a unified, conceptual, and abstract Judaism, Berdichevsky went in search of a different Judaism or a "Judaism of the other." Adopting Nietzsche's historiographical approach as expressed in the essay "On the Use and Abuse of History for Life," Eldad, like Berdichevsky, pointed to the currents of opposition which always existed next to mainstream Judaism: opposite the "true" prophets one had the "false prophets," opposite the Pharisees one had the Sadducees, and there were the Kairites, the "false" Messiahs, and Spinoza. For Eldad, Berdichevsky symbolized this "opposing current" in Judaism.

His attraction to Hassidism, for example, exemplified this spirit of revolt. Eldad wrote: "Hassidism, while remaining within the limits of observant Judaism, was a revolution, almost in accordance with the concept of a transvaluation of values: it went out into nature, raised the value of the individual and of the emotions and made the *tzaddik* almost into a Nietzschean superman."[12] The historian of the Kabbalah Moshe Idel interprets the hassidic *tzaddik* according to Nietzschean concepts. Hassidism, like Nietzscheanism, is characterized by a union of opposites: a view of existence as nothingness on the one hand and will-to-power on the other. An understanding of the nothingness in existence paradoxically makes for a strengthening of the

will-to-power. In Hassidism too there is a negation of the world which does not lead to a total metaphysical nihilism because there is a source of meaning in the world through which man exists. Nihilization and the exercise of power are two necessary stages in the making of a complete life. In the hassidic world, there is an unusually strong dominance of a mystical-magical leader who combines the two opposites: nihilization and the will-to-power. The interesting common factor in both Nietzsche and Hassidism is the totality of life.[13]

It was not only a matter of demonstrating the many-sidedness of Judaism but also of supporting the rebellious and belligerent parties. Eldad finds in Berdichevsky an affirmation of controversy and conflict: "For, behold, war is the mother of all that lives, as we learn from Heraclitus … and life is war, and whenever one ceases to fight, life is at its last gasp or is unworthy of being called life."[14] Behind these words one may perhaps perceive the Nietzschean–Dionysian–Heraclitan formulation in *Ecce Homo*: "The affirmation of passing away and *destroying*, which is the decisive feature of a Dionysian philosophy; saying 'yes' to opposition and war; *becoming*, along with a radical repudiation of the very concept of *being* – all this is clearly more closely related to me than anything else thought to date."[15] In Eldad's opinion, *Yavne* (which symbolizes the priority of spiritual Judaism over national considerations at the time of the revolt against Rome), was not representative of Judaism's will-to-power: the national morality was expressed in the militant and aggressive character of Jerusalem and its Jewish zealots, and not in the spiritual *Yavne* and its sages.

The two alternatives are thus an active freedom as the expression of the self-will of the individual or a passive freedom which is imposed from outside: we have here the positive will-to-power versus a negative will-to-power. Eldads's Nietzschean starting-point was a nationalism not derived from *ressentiment* (a concept of Nietzsche's meaning an introverted and repressed sense of animosity) or from a consciousness of others, but based on "the positive and very physical foundation of the national entity, of the Jewish people as an actual concrete people and not only as a spiritual or moral idea." In opposition to this Hegelian approach, Eldad set a self-conscious Hebrew nationalism motivated by the will:

> Not as one banished among the nations, not as a refugee, the victim of pogroms, not because the nations do not want it to exist but because it itself wants to exist and return to living a full life, which is only possible on its soil and with its own sovereignty. Berdichevsky therefore sanctions Zionism not as the 'Jewish problem' requiring a 'solution' but as the independent sovereign will-to-redemption of the people of Israel. The will-to-sovereignty is the product of the sovereign will, something derived in him from the voluntaristic philosophy, which sees the will as the motive-force of the whole of existence, and, needless to say, of a free man.[16]

Berdichevsky's revolutionary proposition was to turn the last Jews into the "first Hebrews." In Eldad's opinion, this phrase "became the progenitor of the new Hebrew ideology, or, to give it its more extreme title, the 'Canaanite ideology' in Israel." The origins of the anti-Zionist Hebrew "Canaanism" of the Canaanite poet Yonatan Ratosh (1908–81) and of the Jewish-Hebrew Messianic nationalism of *Lehi* were the same, but their ramifications were different. The Hebrew ideology of Avraham Stern (1907–42), the leader of *Lehi*, was Zionist-Messianic and not "Canaanite."[17] In 1941, relations between Ratosh and Stern were broken off, but after Stern's murder by the British during the period of the British Mandate in Palestine, Ratosh saw him as a tragic hero sacrificed for the revival of the Hebrew kingdom. *Lehi* used the Hebrew discourse a great deal, and spoke of "Hebrew lordship," "the Hebrew people," and the "Hebrew freedom movement."

Baruch Kurzweil, who first traced the roots of Canaanism to Berdichevsky, wrote that "'the Young Hebrews' movement is simply the logical and consistent conclusion of spiritual and aesthetic tendencies which have existed for a hundred years in our literature."[18] Kurzweil also saw how Nietzsche's influence impregnated these "Hebrew" tendencies. They represented an attempt to revive a "Hebrew Hellenism." The original Hebrews were seen as "the generation which conquered Canaan in a whirlwind," in the words of the Hebrew poet Saul Tchernikovsky. This view that the beginnings of Judaism can be traced to the "Hebrews," a tribal people of warriors and farmers rather than of priests and scholars, originated with the historiographical writings of the biblical scholar Julius Wellhausen (1844–1918). Wellhausen directly influenced the thinking of Nietzsche, who admired the ancient biblical Judaism for its natural, spontaneous, belligerent, and "barbaric" character, and who considered the growing dominance of the priesthood a sign of degeneration.[19] Wellhausen's theory was also reflected in *The Birth of Tragedy*, in which Nietzsche traced the same development in ancient Greece.[20]

This romantic primitivism, which rejected abstract Judaism and admired the ancient Hebraism, making a distinction between the Jews and Hebrews, attracted many, beginning with Tchernikovsky, including the scholar of the ancient Orient Adolph Gourevitch Horon (1907–72), who had a decisive influence on the Hebrew ideology of the Israeli poet Yonatan Ratosh, the founder of the group known as the "Young Hebrews," and ending with Eldad and wide circles in *Lehi*. Berdichevsky called for a transformation "from Judaism to the Jews, from abstract Jews to Hebrew Jews." In his reply to the Jewish thinkers Morris Lazarus and David Neumark, his fellow student in Berlin, who wrote the first Hebrew publication on Nietzsche in the journal *Me-Mizrach U-me-Ma'arav* (From East and West, 1884), Berdichevsky wrote: "They have both forgotten that the early Hebrews preceded the advent of Judaism and had a different path from that of Judaism."[21] The romantic-primitive dichotomy between nature and civilization was adopted by Eldad and was common to all the Hebrew Nietzscheans, and first of all to the "Canaanites."

Eldad took a further step towards Berdichevsky's "Canaanite" interpretation, seeing it as having a religious basis. The Nietzschean *amor fati*, which hints at the "existential formula," as Eldad described it, throws light on certain passages in a diary written by Berdichevsky: "Judaism is my fate which I carry with me, but despite this I am free to act." This is where the paths of the "Hebraism" of Eldad and Ratosh separate. Unlike Ratosh, who called for a Hebrew revolution which would sever the umbilical connection between Judaism and Hebraism, Eldad respected the Jewish religion, which had preserved the Jewish culture, and therefore called on everyone in Israel to honor the Jewish religion even if they are not observant.

Nationalistic, all too nationalistic

The name of Nietzsche cropped up in the debate in the Yishuv (the Jewish community in Mandatory Palestine) on the murder of the British envoy Lord Moyne. At a meeting of the Zionist Executive on November 11, 1944, Eliyahu Golomb (1893–1945), chief architect of the Jewish defense forces in Palestine, linked the attempt on Moyne's life with the fact that that the *Lehi* group, and especially Eldad, were devoted to the concept of the Nietzschean *Übermensch* (overman). This had also been said about Abba Ahimeir, an intellectual and leader of the radical right.[22] Speaking of "the attitude of the national institutions and the authorities to the attempt on the life of Lord Moyne," Golomb said:

> Nazism and fascism: I still remember an article which appeared in praise of the Nazis which said that there was only one thing wrong with them, and that was that they were antisemitic. In the journal *The Last Front* I saw something similar, not in connection with the Nazis but with a philosopher on whom the Nazis depend: the Stern group have become Nietzscheans … They say, there is no such thing as the masses; the masses are a herd. There have to be "supermen" who are able to impose their authority on this herd.[23]

In the same year that Golomb made this accusation, the hundredth anniversary of Nietzsche's birth, Eldad wrote in the *Lehi* journal: "There are not a few of us who exercise their scorn – and, what is worse, their pens – in making the following judgment: 'Nietzsche, spiritual father of the Nazis and antisemite, created the concept of the superman, who is a blond beast.'" This article, called "Content and Envelope in Nietzsche's Teaching," did not carry the author's name, as it appeared in the *Lehi* underground journal.[24] Eldad wrote it in the infirmary of the prison in Jerusalem. At that same period, towards the end of the Second World War, when Nietzsche was depicted in Europe and the United States as one of the intellectual progenitors of the Third Reich, in Israel of all places Eldad came out with an article

enthusiastically defending the German philosopher and clearing him of any connection with the Nazi ideology. On the same occasion, Eldad also answered his critics in Israel: "Anyone who sees the slightest resemblance between the idea of a *Führer* and the idea of the *Übermensch* must be closer to understanding the soul and character of a *Führer* than he is to understanding the soul and character of an *Übermensch*."[25]

In his article, Eldad warned against the prejudices that Hebrew readers might have about Nietzsche which would exempt them from a philosophical reading of the *Übermensch* and from understanding the true nature of Nietzsche's "antisemitism." A more profound study would show them that Nietzsche and nationalism were antithetical: "If our readers were wise and our writers honest, they would undoubtedly be surprised to learn that there were few things as much hated by Nietzsche as Prussian militarism and modern nationalism of the kind found in the Kaiser's Germany, and of course how much more, in Hitler's Germany." Eldad distinguished between metaphorical Nietzschean concepts like "blond beast," "slave-morality," and "superman" and their distortion and adoption by National Socialism: "If Nietzsche disdained the morality of the masses as a slave-morality, how much more would he disdain and abhor Hitler's morality as the morality of the slave of slaves. For if the herd was beneath consideration for Nietzsche on account of its weakness, the shepherds were beneath consideration because of their loathsomeness." Eldad's criticism was twofold: it was directed both against the lukewarm reception of Nietzsche in Hebrew culture and against his emasculation in the Nazi ideology. His adoption by the Nazis made Nietzsche totally unacceptable to his readers of both the right and left, and gave them a reason not to confront his writings.

Eldad also asked the reader to view Nietzsche's "antisemitism" in a different way and to distinguish it from the anti-Semitism of his "disciple," Hitler. According to Eldad, the Nietzschean anti-Semitism is not emotional like that of Schopenhauer or racial like that of Dostoevsky; it is derived from Nietzsche's hostility "to all superficial rationalism, to all that is petty-bourgeois and complacent. And that is really what western Europe was like at the end of the nineteenth century." Eldad claimed that Nietzsche's anti-Semitic reputation is contradicted by the philosopher's positive evaluation of Judaism as a life-affirming religion, unlike Christianity. In support of this claim, Eldad quoted Nietzsche: "Judaism's one unforgivable sin is that it gave birth to Christianity." He thought that in the history of the Hebrew people there were many more individuals who resembled the ideal of the *Übermensch* than among the Germans.

It is interesting to note that the term Eldad used here has frequently been translated as "superman." Twenty years later, however, the translations of Nietzsche favored the term "overman." In his opinion, it was a mistake to place the *Übermensch* at the centre of Nietzsche's teachings. The concept became famous because of its attractiveness, because of the opportunity it gave the decadent to seek their image in the mirror of that ideal. Eldad's

obvious aim in the article was to distinguish both textually and in principle between content and envelope in his interpretation of Nietzsche.

The fundamental principle in Nietzsche's philosophizing, according to Eldad, was the announcement of the death of God, and consequently of the danger of the death of man. Monotheistic religion, and especially Christianity, fetters man, and the doctrine of original sin emasculates the will-to-power. The One God fights against nature, gains victory over man by means of fear, and, as a result of all this, religion gives rise to hypocrisy and depression. In view of this critique of monotheism, it would be reasonable to suppose that Nietzsche would try to revive the pagan gods, but he was not caught up in the surface of things. The Nietzschean revolution was above all directed against the dictatorship of the divinity. If "man was created in the image of God" is a limitation and restriction, Nietzsche made it his purpose to break down the barrier and unseat this divinity: "For it leads to the wretchedness of man, to the wretchedness of the image." What was important for Nietzsche was "life, and not just life, but life full of a sense of purpose. For holy above all that is holy is life, and life is development, and where there is no development there is degeneration, petrification and death."

From the very beginning, Eldad's interpretation of Nietzsche was an existentialist interpretation. His criticism was aimed against the idea of humanity in the abstract and he favored a concrete conception of man. Society, nation, and humanity are merely stages in the development of man. "The whole world bears the image of man": according to Eldad, the identification of the will-to-power both as an anthropological principle and as a cosmological principle is the basis of Nietzsche's existentialism, which rests on three foundations: man is identical with his world, the existence of man takes precedence over his essence, and man is a unique creation who writes the book of his life. Eldad concluded: "Nietzsche's ideas on man as the centre of the creation do not seem anything unusual, but one should remember he is its centre, not its purpose." The centre is the bridge between man and the superman. Man does not have a single essence, and this invalidates both the religious idea of man, that he is but dust and ashes, and Western culture's optimistic view that he is the lord of creation.

Darwin's influence on Nietzsche, says Eldad, is liable to give us a false image of the latter. Nietzsche, for example, saw war as an agent of development, and in his colorful way even declared: "I hate peace: give me war!" The essence of war for Nietzsche was the strong replacing the weak, the whole replacing the defective. But this was a matter not of reason, the product of intellectual abstraction, but of creation. Eldad explains: "What is done unconsciously in nature, we must do consciously: conscious creation. But reason does not create, it only points the way, and conscious creation means will." The Nietzschean evolutionism is transforming necessity into will, and this is one of the paths leading to the *Übermensch*. In addition to the dictatorship of God, the great enemy of the *Übermensch* is a materialistic and mechanistic outlook. Nature is anti-materialistic and anti-mechanistic; nature

creates, and man too must be a creator. There is an echo here of Nietzsche's cry – "Give me the creative man!" – which arises out of a fear of human uniformity. Equality is a desecration of the image of God in every man, and it brings in its train petrification and death. Where war and competition have disappeared, there is no development and no will to act. It is not the question "Where have you come from?" that determines a man's worth, but the question "Where are you going?" Not a propelled force but a propulsive force; not necessity but the will.

Eldad placed the will at the centre of the Nietzschean morality. Already in this early article one finds the first signs of his hostility to Kant:

> Those who want to find the source of Nazism would do better to look for it in Kant than in Nietzsche. The moral doctrine of the 'categorical imperative' suits it and in fact derives to a far greater extent from Prussian, militaristic sources, while Nietzsche's teachings are a direct though extreme outcome of both individualism and idealism, and represent the purest morality.

Eldad adopted Nietzsche's genealogical approach to morality: thus, the concepts "good" and "evil" had no moral value in themselves, but simply a more or less utilitarian and functional value. Morality is the product of man's will, and the morality of the future would be a morality of masters, motivated by the sentiment "this is my will!" Values are determined by man's action and his will, and not by the nature of the action. Thus, the idea of morality is fused with the idea of development: what matters is not the good of the mass but the development of the individual. Where morality is concerned, the good is whatever emerges from the depths of the will of a free man: his will for life, creativity, liberty. The *Übermensch*, according to the young Eldad, is the product of the concept of free will.

Eldad's "new Hebrew" sought to achieve a seemingly impossible fusion between Nietzscheanism and Hebrew nationalism. In the days of the *Lehi* underground, Eldad called upon ebrew youth to raise "to the heights of Zarathustra, that clear and bracing air – not only for aesthetic enjoyment but in order to learn – the concept of the free man." In his opinion, the Hebrew exemplar of Nietzschean individualism was Berdichevsky, "in whose heart the motive-forces of Judaism ran deep. This Nietzschean was both very old and very new, very late and very early. Ahad Ha-Am's attempt to adapt Nietzscheanism to Judaism, to replace the idea of the individual with the idea of the people, to replace the 'superman' with the 'superpeople', did not succeed." It is usual to associate Eldad with integral nationalism, but it is more appropriate to connect him, like Berdichevsky, with "national existentialism": the combination of a personal existentialist outlook with a nationalist radicalism, with an emphasis on Nietzschean principles such as will, style, the individual, and existential experience. He consequently preferred the "wisdom of life" of Berdichevsky to the "professorial wisdom" of Ahad Ha-Am.

Lehi's basic political approach before the founding of the State of Israel was that British rule in Palestine was alien and hostile to Zionism, so that "fighting it until its departure became the essence of *Lehi*'s existence."[26] His participation in the nationalist radicalism of Avraham (Ya'ir) Stern, who described this great enemy as the "anti-Zionist reign of wickedness," brought Eldad to some absurd conclusions: "It is not Hitler who is the hater of the kingdom of Israel and the return to Zion, it is not Hitler who subjects us to the cruel fate of falling a second and a third time into Hitler's hands, but the British."[27]

The original ideology of *Lehi* was crystallized by Stern in the manifesto of the Jewish renaissance, *Principles of Rebirth*,[28] but Eldad took it upon himself to give them a broad interpretation. At one of their nocturnal encounters in 1941 at which only Stern's silhouette was seen and only his voice was heard, Stern gave Eldad the "Principles of Rebirth" and asked him to fill them out.[29] Despite the difficult atmosphere, with the closing of the gates of Palestine to Jewish immigrants and the victories of Rommel, Stern sought to impart an optimistic tone to the *Lehi* manifesto, which had eighteen points and aimed, in his words, "at rearing a generation of fighters who would be true to the idea of the revival of the kingdom of Israel." In the sixth principle, Eldad's Nietzschean touch may be discerned:

> As with the bravery with which they sacrifice their lives in time of war, as with the amazing strength, refreshing the spirit to the depths of the soul, with which they go out joyfully to their deaths, the entire world, dancers and poets, are amazed and astounded at the strong will-to-life that exists in these afflicted and oppressed. It lives in them and will not die in them. 'And choose life': a supreme commandment to the nation.[30]

Many people disliked this Eldadian pathos.[31] Some fifty years later, he commented in his passionate way: "Our impotence in this country and in the lands of exile produced this pathetic tone, and it represented a kind of escape into pathos."[32]

Eldad and the national radicalists intended the *Principles of Rebirth*, steeped in Nietzschean concepts and those of Berdichevsky and the ultra-nationalist poet Uri Zvi Greenberg, to be a turning-point in the history of the Hebrew people, which had been corrupted by the influence of the Haskalah, cosmopolitanism, liberalism, and socialism. Eldad sought to transpose Berdichevsky's revolt from the literature of rebirth at the turn of the century to the Hebrew national struggle in the mid-twentieth century and to effect a politicization of his call for a transvaluation of values. From the hypocrisy of servility Eldad wished to pass to a national will-to-power and a revival of the ancient Hebrew image. According to him, the father of the Hebrew race (Eldad preferred the term geza – race – to that of "chosen people"), the patriarch Abraham, embodied the idea of election. This was the historic mission of the people of Israel from Abraham and Joseph to Disraeli and Trotsky. The will-to-existence is the motivation behind the right to the land of

Israel. From the war against the British conquerors of Palestine there would arise a new and strengthened Hebrew race whose aim would be the revival of the kingdom. A state is a concept foreign to Judaism: the Hebrew race hopes for a kingdom, which is more than a political framework: "The Third Kingdom is the kingdom of the Hebrew race." The Kingdom of Israel is essentially Messianic and is the product of the will and not of necessity.[33] It is the organized will of the return to Zion that underlies the conquest of the homeland. Such are principles of existentialist nationalism according to Eldad.

To become masters of Europe or to lose it

The "Fighters' Party," which comprised many of the people from *Lehi*, obtained only 5,363 votes in the first elections of the State of Israel in January 1949 – about 1.5 percent of the total votes cast. In a speech at a special meeting called after the elections to prepare the party committee, Eldad returned to the *Principles of Rebirth*, inserting some Nietzschean motifs. He asked the members of the "Fighters' Party" to look at their role as Jews and freedom-fighters in the perspective of the story of the patriarch Abraham's breaking of idols. Unlike political Zionism, which had been raped, the special quality of this movement was that it was a movement of the will. There was a Nietzschean ring to his words: "Man is king of the universe … Man is the lord of nature. Man is incapable of creating something out of nothing, but in the world of what exists man is free to create, and there is no limit to his capacity. This idea of the lordship of man-the-creator is a Hebraic idea."[34] Zionism had failed in its mission to transform "thou hast chosen us" from a religious concept into a national concept. His conclusion was: "Humanity has not reached the cultural level attained by the creators of the Bible even thousands of years afterwards."

A year later, in 1950, Eldad wrote the article "The Nietzsche Polemic: Between Degeneracy and Madness," which he published in *Sulam*, a journal he edited. The failure in the elections and the growing distance from the glorious days of the underground made him think of Nietzsche and preoccupy himself with him. Through him he sought to be consoled "by the company of the great thinkers." His starting-point was his repeated attempts

> to prove again and again that the pretension of the Nazis to be the heirs of the prophet of the 'superman' was a lie. Even if this pretension was based on a distortion – and anyone who knows Nietzsche and his hatred for the Prussian militaristic spirit and for the 'fetish of State' in general will have no doubt that there is a distortion here – even then there is still no justification for making his teaching an educational lesson for us.[35]

In that case, why should we trouble ourselves with Nietzsche?

The first reason, thought Eldad, was that Nietzsche foresaw the defilement of Europe. He smelt the odor of degeneracy and was the first to tell Europe

that its idols had been shattered. Europe had passed the peak of its development, and Nietzsche was looking for a way out:

> He looked for it in a strong man, but did not – heaven forbid – mean a dictator. A dictator is merely the slave of the masses. Anyone who associates the idea of a dictator with the idea of the superman must be considered a crude forger, and it has rightly been observed amongst us that the hassidic *tzaddik* in the days before the degeneration of hassidism was a type close to that of the superman.

Concerning the comparison between Zarathustra and the prophets of Israel, Eldad said that the biblical prophets like Moses, Elijah, and Jonah were true to their missions even when they wanted to escape from them – "A man like me does not flee" – whereas Zarathustra fled from the masses to isolation on the mountain-tops, to escapism. Nietzsche, for his part, escaped into madness and Europe sank into the degeneracy he foresaw.

A second reason was the strong attraction to Nietzsche which had existed amongst the young Hebrews since the turn of the century. There was no other foreign thinker, writer, or artist who had caused such a stir, even amongst the members of "Hashomer Hatza'ir" (the youth movement of the Jewish left in Europe and Palestine), despite Nietzsche's loathing for social-ism. What attracted the Hebrew youth to Nietzsche was not his positive atti-tude to the life-affirming spirit of Israel or his aesthetics beyond good and evil. Instead:

> The secret of this attachment to Nietzsche lies in the enormous fascina-tion of innumerable Jewish youths with life, with manifestations of power. These latent forces were aroused in contact with the sun-rays of Zar-athustra. The wild water-springs of this poem refreshed the soul and the blood after the writers and poets of Hebrew literature at that time. And, above all, there was the release from chains. The audacity of a great heresy which does not leave despair and nihilism in its train.[36]

Vitality, power, audacity – all these Nietzschean qualities help to explain the enthusiasm of the Hebrew youth. But, as for Nietzsche himself, according to Eldad his powers failed. But Berdichevsky and the *Tze'irim* (the followers of Nietzsche who rebelled against Jewish conservatism at the *fin de siècle*) succeeded because their feet were planted in the Hebrew soil and their heads were not in the clouds.

At the end of the article "The Nietzsche Polemic: Between Degeneracy and Madness," Eldad gave a translation of a short text, "Nietzsche on the People of Israel," taken from *Daybreak* (1880):

> Among the spectacles to which the coming century invites us is the deci-sion as to the destiny of the Jews of Europe. That their die is cast, that

they have crossed their Rubicon, is now palpably obvious: all that is left for them is either for them to become the masters of Europe or to lose Europe as once a long time ago they lost Egypt, where they had placed themselves before a similar either-or.[37]

Section 205 in *Daybreak* is one of the passages in Nietzsche's writings which are instructive for an understanding of his attitude to Judaism. A comparison of the analysis of this section by the Israeli historian J. L. Talmon with that of Eldad illustrates their opposing views on the subject of Nietzscheanism and Judaism. Talmon, in his article "The Jewish Aspects of Nietzsche in a Historical Perspective," written in 1969, quoted section 205 as it is, and was surprised that:

> Walter Kaufmann, the great expert on Nietzsche, gives this passage in his anthology of Nietzsche's writings but omits the key sentences concerning the decisive event which will take place in the twentieth century: either the Jews will dominate Europe or they will be expelled from it. What remains of the passage is a hymn of praise to the Jews. The question is: is this a case of slavery within freedom – a terrible misconstruction – or the manifestation of a strong prejudice? Kaufmann's whole endeavor is to divest his hero of his monstrosity, but Professor Kaufmann never tires of condemning the dishonesty of others with regard to Nietzsche.[38]

Talmon's observation is illuminating, but he too is not exact in translation. Both in the German original and in Eldad's translation, which Talmon describes as "excellent," it is not said that "[t]he Jews … will be expelled from Europe," but that they "will lose it." Whatever the case, Nietzsche's reference to the Jews was taken by Talmon as a portent of things to come and a paradigm of the historical drama of the twentieth century:

> Think for a moment of the way the matter is stated: either they the Jews or us will be the masters of Europe, and now it is close to midnight. There still ring in the ears of those who still remember Hitler's horrible speeches his threats and warnings in 1939. In the coming war, either we or the Jews will be consigned to limbo, and I promise you that it won't be us.

Boaz Evron, a member of *Lehi* and a devotee of Hebraism, was also concerned with Nietzsche's views on the Jews' relationship with Europe.[39] In his opinion, Nietzsche thought that Europe needed more Jews, as their contribution to Germany and Europe had been considerable and of the highest quality. Evron took this as an endorsement of his national definition of the

Jews, for Nietzsche, he claimed, recognized their national identity which distinguished them from the Germans. Nietzsche, he said, regarded anti-Semitism as a passing phenomenon arising from a weakness of national consciousness, unlike the Zionists, who foresaw that anti-Semitism would prevail through a strengthening of nationalism. In *Human, All Too Human*, Nietzsche remarked on the Germans' lack of self-confidence and on the weakness of their national consciousness.[40] The consequence of this was the rotten fruit of anti-Semitism, a sign that Germany was unable to digest any more Jews. The solid national consciousness of the Jews and their self-confidence represented a threat to the self-consciousness of the Germans. Nietzsche therefore bypassed German nationalism and envisaged a united Europe into which the Jews would be constructively integrated.

In one respect, Eldad supported Nietzsche's idea of the possibility of a Jewish dominance of Europe. The context was Eldad's attempt to explain why Nietzsche admired exilic Judaism. The reason was that the Jewish people – which was known to be "a people of warriors and farmers,"[41] close to the soil and almost Dionysian – did not undergo much denaturalization in exile, and consequently retained its national existence even in difficult circumstances. The Jewish people continued to contribute to human culture, claimed Nietzsche, according to Eldad, "and continues to mold the face of Europe to the point where it might be possible for it to dominate it through the power of its *Geist* (spirit)."[42]

Talmon drew a revolutionary contrast between two opposing paradigms: Rousseau versus Nietzsche, order and harmony versus power and vitality, democratic radicalism versus aristocratic radicalism, unity versus singularity, and revolution versus counter-revolution. If there are no eternal truths common to all humanity, and if in the world of relative values one truth is the same as another, then, according to Talmon, myth is the Archimedean point. Judaism as the advocate of monotheism – the basis of the universalist revolution – presented a challenge to the polytheistic, relativistic world of myth. On the one hand one had a clear morality and a universalist ethic, and on the other, relative utilitarian values and aesthetics creative of particularity; on the one hand a single truth, and on the other, pluralistic paganism; on the one hand the commandments of the One God, and on the other, the wills-to-power which came with the various myths.

Talmon's reading of Nietzsche was that of an angry prophet. According to him, there could be no compromise between Judaism and Nietzsche, but only a decision one way or the other. Talmon considered it wrong to place the "responsibility" for the Holocaust on Nietzsche because his attitude to Judaism and the Jews was nevertheless ambivalent, because he was contemptuous of anti-Semitism, and because he was full of wonder at the Jewish phenomenon, but he could not be exonerated completely because he was one of the creators of an intellectual climate. All political ideologies are illegitimate children but they are not born without father or mother.

Judaism via Hellenism: "but not a single Messiah"

Judaism, said Talmon, is one of the major axes in Nietzsche's teachings. Eldad accepted this basic premise but he came to opposite conclusions. Contrary to Talmon's thesis that there is a dichotomy between Nietzscheanism and Judaism, Eldad saw a biblical-Dionysian synthesis in Nietzsche. In his opinion, Nietzsche eschewed the usual idea that "Judaism" represents a single uncompromising teaching and morality and "Hellenism" represents an aesthetic and intellectual multiplicity. Both Nietzsche's translators – Eldad in Hebrew and Kaufmann in English – found in him an admiration for the will-to-power of historical Judaism, both biblical and exilic.[43] But Eldad also made the original and surprising claim that Nietzsche's admiration for the Old Testament was a product of this classical philologist's admiration for the culture of ancient Greece.

As a central theme of his article "Nietzsche and the Old Testament," Eldad indicated that the mutual affinity of Judaism and Hellenism was a major axis of Nietzsche's thinking, and, in his words: "Again and again, Nietzsche throws a surprising bridge between the Jews and the Greeks."[44] It is not surprising that he said "again and again," for Eldad suggested finding the explanation for this in section 475 of *Human, All Too Human*. There Nietzsche stated that Judaism gave birth to Western culture and linked Europe to the Greek heritage. The Greek connection in Nietzsche's admiration for Judaism comes, according to Eldad, from the will-to-exist, the Dionysian life-force creative of new values that he finds in it: "This life-force is so great that Nietzsche does not shrink from proposing it as a model even for the Greeks." In other words, Eldad took the Nietzschean concept of the Dionysian love of life to such an extreme that he believed that Nietzsche thought that Judaism was even more Greek than Hellenism itself! As proof, he quoted section 72 of *Daybreak*, where Nietzsche wrote: "The Jews, a people which clung to life … like the Greeks and even more than the Greeks." Even the Greeks could learn from the heroic image of the Hebrew Patriarchs, claimed this admirer of Greek culture.

The Greek philosophers and the biblical prophets were a turning-point in the Greek culture and the Hebrew culture, respectively. Until they appeared, said Eldad, these ancient cultures were outstanding for their heroic character. The rationalistic philosophizing of Socrates and Plato impaired this instinctive and creative vitality, just as the fulminating prophets disapproved of the heroism, dancing, and lustfulness of the Dionysian David. To Eldad's question of how Nietzscheanism was possible in the Holy Land, Kaufmann answered with a biblical verse describing David dancing frantically before the Lord, and in this way the secret was revealed of the connection between the Hebrew translator and the philosopher from Princeton.[45] Eldad also saw Nietzschean dance as a central principle in *The Gay Science*, and to support his case he quoted Zarathustra, who would only have faith in a god that danced.[46] Nietzsche and, following him, his translators – Eldad in Hebrew

and Kaufmann in English – were drawn to a Hebraism intermixed with Hellenism, and this was the reason for their heroic interpretation of the history of biblical Israel. And this also explains Eldad's participation in the Hebrew–Nietzschean–Hellenizing tradition which began with Berdichevsky and the poets of the "Young Hebrews," Tchernikovsky and Zalman Schneur.[47]

The next stage was to contrast the Old and New Testaments. The Old Testament – as seen by Eldad, echoing Nietzsche – is heroic, belligerent, and authentic, and represents a philosophy that is life-affirming, while the New Testament is ascetic, moralistic, and degenerate, and represents a philosophy that is life-denying. Jesus is the Jewish-Christian exception that proves the rule: his holy anarchism is beyond good and evil.[48] The decline of positive Judaism began with the appearance of the concept of sin, and from there it penetrated into Christianity. The priests were the heirs to the prophets, but the key to the degeneration does not lie with the Jewish priests but with the Aryan outlook, which regards the "sacred lie" as the manifestation of a decadent will-to-power. In seeking (again and again!) to distinguish between Nietzsche and his falsification by the national socialists, Eldad quoted section 142 of *The Will-to-Power*, condemning the corrupting Aryan influence, saying that "this judgment on Aryanism" is enough to disprove any possible idea of the influence of Nietzsche on Nazism.

The Eldadian reading of the Jewish–Greek synthesis is a subversive reading, parallel to the Aryan–Christian synthesis we have just mentioned. In his introduction to his translation of Nietzsche's four last works, written in 1888, Eldad returned to the struggle between Hellenism and Christianity, or, as he put it, between Dionysius and Jesus. According to him, the circle was closed here which was opened with the Apollonian–Dionysian disposition in *The Birth of Tragedy*. And on the very threshold of his collapse, Nietzsche finished "Dionysius or the Cross." Here we have a fascinating struggle over the Greek heritage: on the one side Eldad and the tradition of the Hebrew rebirth which annexed Hellenism to Judaism, and on the other side Heidegger and also the Nazis, who sought to annex Hellenism to Germanism.

In the German tradition there was a strong current which had an obsession with the ancient Greeks. Beginning with the Romantics and up to the national socialists, it was believed in many circles that Germany should remake itself by creating a modern mythology, as Homer did in his time when he united the Greeks. Heidegger, like others, saw Greece as the model: perceiving an inner connection between the German language and Greek language and thought,[49] he believed that fate had summoned the Greeks in the past and the Germans of his day to embody the vision of the mystery of being. Heidegger feared that the West was declining. Europe was in a period of "forgetfulness of being," a sickness which had been spreading in the West since Plato. The Christian-Platonic tradition had degenerated, and the West was sunk in the dark age of technology. The "mystery of being" was hidden, and the task was to reveal it. The place of the profound pre-Socratic circles had been taken by the cheap substitute of metaphysics. Western philosophy

had reached exhaustion and had ended in nihilism. Fate had chosen Germany for the assignment of saving the West. At the beginning of the history of being, the Greeks had brought, as the Germans were to bring now, being into a new era.[50]

This self-created mythologization also led to the national-socialist desire to create a totalitarian polis. When Heidegger began his course on Nietzsche in the 1930s, he chose to quote the following sentence from *The Antichrist*: "For almost two thousand years there has not been a single god." This was a new cry on Nietzsche's part, and a proposal to create a revolutionary era in the twentieth century: no longer the familiar narrative of "God is dead," but a call for a return of the gods who would bestow a new meaning, this time through politics, on human existence. Hitler also claimed that anyone wishing to create an authentic model for the renewal of the West would have to turn to Greece. He saw himself as the heir to the Greeks, and like them he wanted to fuse "form" with politics. His national-socialist creation sought to produce a new race of heroic men, contemporary images of the Greek gods.[51]

Eldad proposed another interesting synthesis, a synthesis of *Zarathustra* and the New Testament. *Zarathustra* was the Third Testament: despite the centrality of the Persian prophet, it was full of elements from the New Testament. Thus, Eldad pointed out that there was an abundance of prophets and heroes in the Old Testament, "but not a single Messiah."[52] From this negative we deduce something positive: Zarathustra came forward as the new Messiah, exemplifying "Nietzsche's wish to be a prophet, the giver of a new teaching," a creator of new values who overturns all the old ones.

In the dichotomy he saw between the biblical *Zarathustra* and the anti-Nietzschean "Ecclesiastes," Eldad perceived the development of Jewish thought from the concrete nature of the creation narrative to the nihilistic conclusions of "Ecclesiastes": "Every nihilist will undoubtedly find something to get hold of in the Book of Ecclesiastes." "Ecclesiastes" was said by Eldad to be pessimistic and Nietzsche's "eternal recurrence' to be optimistic. In his introduction to his Hebrew translation of *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, Eldad dwelt on the quasi-prophetic rhetorical form of *Zarathustra* and on its nihilistic content: a rebelliousness which arose out of intense moral suffering, a zealousness for truth and a hatred for hypocrisy and conventional lies: not nihilistic denial for its own sake but denial almost "for the sake of heaven."[53] Zarathustra created an Aryan, pagan, nihilistic religion, as against the Old Testament, which gave birth to Judaism, a religion of life. Eldad's subversive comment: the nihilism of Zarathustra is in that case also connected to the religiosity of the New Testament.[54]

It is hardly surprising if in the days before his outbreak of madness Nietzsche did not identify with the Persian prophet but with the Hebrew prophet Moses, who laid down a new law for mankind. The Nietzschean Moses was in Eldad's opinion the father of Hebrew national existentialism. Unlike Christianity, "which spread among the peoples and races and lost any vestige of nationhood or race, the Old Testament with its concept of a jealous

and vengeful God … preserved in this way the existence of the people."[55] The Jewish religion, which constitutes a nation, is contrasted by Eldad with the cosmopolitan Christian religion. And in one place – the first quotation given by Eldad at the beginning of his article "Nietzsche and the Bible" – Nietzsche exults over the Old Testament because "I find a nation in it." And at the end of that article, Eldad sings a hymn of praise to the Nietzschean fusion of the necessity to be what you are, *amor fati*, and the image of God in man. God's answer to Moses at Sinai, "I am what I am," is the basis for Jewish existentialism. Thus, Eldad, through the figure of Moses, linked Nietzschean existentialism with an understanding of Judaism as nationhood. This link-up led to the crystallization of a national existentialism.

Thus spake Nietzsche

In all the seven volumes of Nietzsche he translated, Eldad began with an introduction or ended with a postscript. He was not satisfied with the traditional role of a translator, who discusses in his introduction difficulties in the text or problems of transcription from language to language, or who hesitates with his readers over the choice of a word or a particular expression. Eldad did much more: with much use of analogy and with great self-confidence, he expressed his opinions on methodological and philosophical matters and on questions connected with Nietzsche's biography. A summary of some of the salient points of his commentary shows to what an extent, during more than twelve years of translating Nietzsche, Eldad kept up a continuous, consistent, and intelligent reading from the point of view of conceptual interpretation and philosophical content.

   Nietzsche, like Plato, was classified by Eldad as one of the "philosophers of problems" rather than the "philosophers of systems." He did not create a system like the great modern schools of philosophy, but, on the contrary, destroyed them all and came close to denying the possibility of creating a philosophical system.[56] His question "How does one create a philosophy with a hammer?" translates in practice into shattering the foundations of conceptions of "truth" and undermining habits of thought and common assumptions. Nietzsche was preceded in this by skeptical and critical circles that placed a question mark over various kinds of philosophy, but these remained within the limits of logic and factuality. Nietzsche's chisel was sharper than those of the previous analytical philosophers because he dared to "cut into the areas of the thinking and feeling soul" – areas still annexed to the field of legitimate philosophy. Thus, Nietzsche paved the way for and heralded two apparently contradictory orientations in modern thought: the logical-semantic orientation, concerned with the conceptual genealogy of familiar and accepted terms, and the psychological orientation, concerned with stripping off masks and penetrating the depths of the soul.

   Eldad saw Nietzsche as the forerunner of psychoanalysis. The objective psychological penetration of his essays *Beyond Good and Evil* and *The*

Genealogy of Morals, which was something which Freud admired in Nietzsche, undermined the basic assumptions on which religion, morality, and law are based to this day. Nietzsche was no longer willing to shut his eyes to the flaws and hypocrisy in the old moral principles and sought to go down to the roots of morality. This radical genealogy was a turning-point for the modern reader, who from that time onwards has no longer been able to "relate to the problem of truth in a dogmatic way as something existing beyond life in eternity."[57] Eldad believed that these acts of exposure were undertaken by Nietzsche not only out of a concern for truth but out of a deep love for the human race, liable to descend into the chasm of the animalistic modern society. As he saw it, Nietzsche, like Freud, was a representative of the Enlightenment and not its enemy, a believer in the universality of humanity, but one whose path was nonconformist, revolutionary, and destructive of systems. A reading of Nietzsche's writings was recommended by Eldad as liberation from preconceptions, a sort of philosophical exercise in self-liberation.

According to Eldad, the perception of the will-to-power as a comprehensive metaphysical idea is liable to cause Nietzsche's philosophy to be regarded as a philosophical system like Schopenhauer's philosophy of the will, which is a philosophical construction with a central idea: blind will is the force which moves everything. There are some who have seen Nietzsche not only as the creator of a philosophical system but as the founder of a new religion whose gospel was *Thus Spake Zarathustra*. Eldad saw in this tendency to turn Nietzsche into the creator of a "system" or "religion" a danger which could destroy the very basis of his revolutionary enterprise. Nietzsche himself, who was aware of the dangers inherent in his radical ideas and images, is compared by Eldad to a sailor or to a bird that flies above. The images of distant voyages and icebergs they encounter express Nietzsche's personal feelings but also objective dangers, and the audacious bird flies high and looks far ahead, a fact that gives him the critical distance for philosophical contemplation. Nietzsche loved heights because they rose above the mists, and Eldad observed: "They said he was not a philosopher at all but 'only' a writer. This is because it was generally thought that it was usual for philosophers to be unreadable and misty."[58] Nietzsche wrote a poetic prose, full of pathos, and used a figurative language with conundrums and images which only someone who knew all his writings would be able to decipher. This aphoristic language has entranced many, but it has also served others as one more reason to "drive him out" of philosophy and place him in aesthetics.

And indeed, Nietzsche's most aesthetic work, *The Birth of Tragedy* (translated into Hebrew in 1969), was the third essay translated by Eldad. It is impregnated with the spirit of Schopenhauer and Wagner, who, with their anti-Semitism, Nietzsche later saw as "symbols of decadence and vulgarity," to quote Eldad. This was soon followed by the translation of *The Gay Science*, which Eldad understood to mean "creative science." Despite Nietzsche's

liking for the clarity and exactitude in science, he was unable to admire gra-
dualists, who were enslaved by facts, and preferred true, adventurous men of
science who sailed the seas and discovered continents of the spirit. The two
essays on the roots of morality in Western culture, which were the first works
translated by Eldad, in his opinion constituted the central pillar of the
Nietzschean philosophical edifice. He also compared them to excavations
conducted beneath the most entrenched fortresses of accepted philosophy and
to towers, but not ones which rise up into the air. The next works he trans-
lated – *Daybreak* and *The Use and Abuse of History for Life* (translated into
Hebrew in 1968) – were a kind of intellectual laboratory in which experiments
were made, involving a re-examination in which the putting of the questions
was even more important than the answers. The questions and rejoinders were
not only the means but also the content of the will-to-power as a basic prin-
ciple underlying existence, and self-overcoming as an educational anthro-
pology was a kind of bridge to the superman. Nietzsche's four last works
written before his breakdown – *The Case of Wagner*, *The Twilight of the
Idols*, *Ecce Homo*, and *The Antichrist* (translated into Hebrew in 1973) – were
not the expression of a poetic experience full of images and spectacles, as
Eldad described *Zarathustra* (translated into Hebrew in 1970), but were pithy
in style and content. Their polemical intensity and egocentricity reached the
point where Nietzsche idolized himself as a kind of Zarathustra-prophet or
Dionysian god.

The main gist of Nietzsche's ideas – the critique of religion, moral relati-
vism, and utilitarianism, the demand for the transvaluation of values – is
systematically expressed in *Beyond Good and Evil* (translated into Hebrew in
1968). The conclusion to be drawn from the book, according to Eldad, is
that there is no single universal truth. In an interview with his biographer,
Eldad declared, "Whether owing to Nietzsche's influence or independently of
his influence, I recognize the relativism of truth."[59] The main question to be
asked with regard to this observation as well as others is: Is there any uni-
versal validity in a denial of the anti-Semitic, racist, and national-socialist
"truths?" In other words, why should one subjective truth be preferred to
another? Without entering the quagmire of postmodernism, we must
acknowledge that Nietzsche – and, following him, his Hebrew translator –
put his finger on a philosophical problem of the first importance, the conclu-
sion to be drawn from which attained full self-consciousness with modern
nihilism.

The Eldadian Nietzsche passed beyond nihilism. In Eldad's opinion, only
someone who has crossed the threshold of good and evil with Nietzsche,
someone who, together with him, has penetrated to the roots of morality, can
rise out of the chasm of nihilism, and, moreover, not as a nihilist. Self-over-
coming is the essence of Nietzschean power, which is creative of morality and
does not negate life. As a prophetic monk – not as a priestly monk –
Nietzsche descended into the vale of tears of the modern reality in order to
uncover its nakedness. In this philosophical exposure there is the danger of

infection by the *nihil* and by degeneracy. Eldad's answer to this was expressed in Nietzschean terms and with Nietzschean enthusiasm:

> A love of life, with an extreme opposition to a mass-aspiration sought in all kinds of religious and material ideologies: an aspiration to comfort, to convenience, to casting all suffering out of life. As against this, a love of life with knowledge of the suffering it contains, which is almost a necessary precondition to progress in life, whose true meaning for man is the elevation of man as an individual and of cultured humanity as a whole. With all the extreme criticism, with all the merciless exposure, without nihilism, without relativism, but with a line, a bridge leading upwards. Not to the closed-up heavens but to real existence. A bridge for man to erect and go up on, to raise himself up and together with him to raise up the human race.[60]

The will-to-power is deemed to be the answer to nihilism, and, according to Eldad, "a turning-point in the history of the spirit, in human culture, a kind of Copernican revolution in moral teaching and the human mission."[61] There is no relation between the will-to-power as an ideological and cosmological principle and the national-socialist distortion of it. National Socialism was a combination of the two things most detested by Nietzsche: the two mass herd-doctrines, nationalism and socialism. Hitler, who was convinced by Elizabeth Förster-Nietzsche that he was the embodiment of the Nietzschean "superman," would have been shocked if he had read what Nietzsche wrote to his friend Overbeck: "Just now I am having all antisemites shot."[62] In the Jewish people, the Eldadian Nietzsche saw an elect group, so superior that he recommended mingling German blood with Jewish blood in order to improve the former. It is no accident if among the reasons for Friedrich Nietzsche's break with his sister Elisabeth and Wagner was the anti-Semitism with which they were imbued; there is nothing surprising in the fact that his first pupils and those who published him were Jews. These reflections by Eldad are almost totally devoid of criticism, do not indicate the possibility of different interpretations, and are really only a kind of warm recommendation to read Nietzsche. In this respect, they resemble the "soft" interpretation of Walter Kaufmann. This reading of Nietzsche's translators into Hebrew and English, important in itself and important in its time, leaves the philosopher of the will-to-power without teeth to bite with or a hammer in his hand, and makes him humanistic, all too humanistic.

From Dionysius to Zarathustra in the holy tongue

On January 1, 1963, Eldad received a letter from the Schocken Press asking him to translate Nietzsche. This was just after the Eichmann trial, which prompted Eldad to make a personal examination of the intellectual sources which led to the Nazi phenomenon, and his conclusion was that Eichmann

was the epitome of the Kantian philosophy. In the Eichmann trial, the name of the philosopher of the "categorical imperative" came up in the course of the proceedings. Eldad, who quoted Heine, who compared "his mechanical, almost abstract, orderly bachelor existence" to a precise cathedral clock, took this way of thinking to an extreme: "Just as in Kant's world of pure reason there was no room for God, for free will or for morality, so there was no room for any of these in the world of the Nazi régime which was managed according to rigidly determined descending levels of authority."[63]

The role of Kantian philosophy, or, to be more precise, of the Kantian and national-socialist philosophers, came up for discussion again with the appearance of Hans Sluga's book, *Heidegger's Crisis: Philosophy and Politics in Nazi Germany*.[64] The book claimed that about ten neo-Kantian philosophers and admirers of Fichte, appointed by the Nazis in 1933 to serve as rectors of universities, enthusiastically supported the Hitler régime without being obliged to do so. They provided the régime with philosophical legitimation based on "ontological value-structures" and "objective moral principles," concepts drawn from neo-Kantian thought. The journal *Kantstudien* continued to be published throughout the Nazi period. These revelations do not lessen the seriousness of Eldad's judgment that Eichmann's actions had Kantian motivations. What Eldad recoiled from doing to Nietzsche – make him responsible for Nazism – he did to another philosopher, Kant.

The Schocken Press's proposal to Eldad was made close to the end of the Eichmann trial. Eldad hesitated to accept, because in the public atmosphere of Israel at that time Nietzsche was regarded as the father of National Socialism, and he therefore decided to seek the advice of his colleagues on the right, the historian Y. H. Yevin and the poet Uri Zvi Greenberg. Yevin was against accepting the proposal because of his fear that Nietzsche's anti-Semitic reputation would attach itself to the national camp, but Greenberg encouraged him to undertake the translation in the hope that it would serve as an intellectual stimulus and encouragement for their "national body."

The first book translated by Eldad consisted of the essays *Beyond Good and Evil* and *The Genealogy of Morals*. The publisher Gershom Schocken was enthusiastic about the translation and responded quickly:

> In my humble opinion, this is one of the most successful translations from a foreign language into Hebrew. The pungency, the brilliance, the glitter of Nietzsche, all this is wonderfully captured in the Hebrew version. You have produced here a great cultural achievement. I am very glad that I have a part in this, and I am only sorry that my late father who always read Nietzsche's writings to his last day cannot see your work.[65]

But negative criticism was not slow in coming. The critic S. B. Urbach condemned the appearance of the book in Hebrew in the strongest terms: "It required no little audacity to render the crazy reflections of Nietzsche in the

language of the holy prophets. Even assuming that the Hitlerian interpretation of him was distorted, Nietzsche was responsible for that interpretation, and it is most probably the right one."[66] And again:

> This mad philosopher is the epitome of idolatry and the height of barbarism; he preaches the will-to-dominate, force and control of the masses, the blond superman who lords it over the flock of idiots. Although Jews like Berdichevsky or Yiddish and Hebrew writer Hillel Zeitlin (1871–1942) admired his style, the language is a "rough" German which Eldad's fine translation does not make any clearer.

Nietzsche's innovation was that "he dared to revive the philosophy of wickedness after two thousand years of Judeo-Christian culture, and thereby served as the herald of that most terrible of manifestations of idolatry, Nazism." These observations, and Urbach's summation given below, only serve to demonstrate Eldad's courage in doing the translation:

> It is doubtful if it is necessary to pollute the Hebrew language with the slanderous words of this supreme source of evil, especially as Eldad, in his short introduction, instead of consigning him to utter disgrace, expresses admiration for him and only gently suggests that it is possible (!) not to agree with some of his principles … And do we need this obscene literature to poison the minds and souls of our youth, most of whom are unprotected against it owing to a lack of basic knowledge of the treasures of Judaism?[67]

Why, then, should one translate a writer so mired in controversy? In his short introductory essay to *Daybreak*, Eldad gave five reasons: (1) Why not? Nietzsche is not different from any other great philosopher that one has to read in Hebrew without agreeing with everything he says; (2) as a critical modern prophecy of the future of mass civilization and culture; (3) as an educational model of rebelliousness and revolt against accepted ideas; (4) as a symbol of love of life and hope of the elevation of man; and the fifth reason was:

> So that the real Nietzsche can become known to the Hebrew reader, who needs it for general human reasons in this generation of confusion and despair, which are perhaps justified among the gentiles but not among us, and for clear Jewish-Hebrew reasons, since because of the factors mentioned above the image of this great spiritual rebel has been distorted, and his true high opinion of the Jewish people and its capabilities is almost unknown, in contrast to our own self-abasement before various strange gods.[68]

Eldad now answered his critics:

I have not toned down anything, for one can always find far greater accusations made by Nietzsche against the German people, the Prussians and their militarism, which he loathed with all his heart. I have indeed been able to allow myself to be true to my source. For Nietzsche admired Heine, as I do, and likewise Spinoza, and he wanted to save the German economy by exporting the antisemites.[69]

Translating Nietzsche into Hebrew was different from the translation of a typical philosophical text. Eldad described the difficulties: "Certain provocative formulations which Nietzsche used in the final stages of his creative thought, and the constant revolution without dogmatic petrification have undoubtedly given rise to misunderstanding and revulsion on the one hand and wicked distortion and exploitation for evil purposes on the other."[70] The preconceptions people had about Nietzsche in Israel arose, in Eldad's opinion, from the absence of Hebrew translations of his work:

> Where respect for Jewish existence is concerned, here too the genuine, complete, original writings of Nietzsche would probably surprise them, as, unlike in previous generations, they no longer form part of the consciousness of present-day Hebrew writers and readers, either through ignorance owing to a lack of translations or revulsion at the "bad name" he has acquired among the pseudo-progressives here.

Eldad hoped that his translations would succeed in conveying to his readers of the right and left something of the power and beauty of the original. The task was very difficult as Nietzsche was recognized as a writer and poet unique of his kind in the history of philosophy. Eldad chose to translate entire works and not a selection of writings in order not to fall into the trap of making a subjective or possibly arbitrary choice.

The translation of *Thus Spake Zarathustra* met with criticism in Israel not because of the pretentious nature of the prophet of the new religion but because of a comparison with the previous poetic-biblical translation of David Frishman.[71] *Thus Spake Zarathustra* was published in Hebrew for the first time in Frishman's translation in the years 1909–11. Frishman (1859–1922) – writer and critic, aesthete and translator – saw Nietzsche's work as a late biblical book, a "Third Testament" after the Old and New Testaments. The Nietzschean Zarathustra was intended as a rebellion against Judeo-Christian ethics in order to proclaim the birth of a new civilization. Aesthetes such as Frishman, who sought to create the "new Hebrew" by placing him in opposition to the "old Jew," took as their inspiration "Hebrew" history as expressed in the Bible rather than the exilic period.

Eldad initially rejected Schocken's proposal for a new translation of *Zarathustra*. He believed that Frishman's "biblical" translation had already influenced several generations, and, second, that the translation required a poet. He was finally persuaded to re-edit Frishman's translation. When he

began editing, however, he realized that the task was impossible. The high-flown biblical language violated the text and impaired its accuracy. Eldad recalled his excitement as a youth at the translation, "an unforgettable youthful experience in which form and content were combined. Any mis-understanding of the text passed unnoticed in the general excitement."[72] In the meantime, the Hebrew language had been renewed, and Nietzsche's Zar-athustra did "not entirely fit the image of an ancient prophet." The anti-quated Hebrew needed to be brought up to date, and, even more important, a change of direction was required.

Eldad took upon himself the work of translating *Zarathustra* in the knowledge that he would not translate it in a biblical style, nor in a poetic style, for not all the book was written in prophetic rhetorical language, and sometimes even the biblical language is used to express anti-biblical senti-ments. He thought that one of the achievements of the new Hebrew literature was breaking out of the rigidity of previous stylistic molds.[73] He found sup-port for his opinion in Walter Kaufmann, who also retranslated *Zarathustra* and who declared that one of the reasons for the strangeness of *Zarathustra* for the contemporary English reader was the classical biblical "King James" language.

Thus Spake Zarathustra had been the most popular of Nietzsche's works. Eldad ascribed this to its literary uniqueness: "The surprising and fascinating dress in which this philosopher and classical philologist clothed his revolu-tionary ideas – figurative, narrative, poetic and reflective by turns – a rheto-rical-prophetic style interwoven with pearls of aphorism and biting satire, attracted many people and facilitated the reception of his innovations." This was the only work of Nietzsche's which until then had been translated into Hebrew in its entirety, apart from a few aphorisms translated by Jacob Klatzkin.[74] The Hebrew reader was drawn at that time to this quasi-prophetic rhetorical style, and this was reflected in a very strong critical review of Eldad's translation entitled "A New Hebrew Zarathustra":

> Take from this poetic prose its ancient character, its prophetic-biblical idiom, and it immediately loses much of its charm, its beauty, its magic and its rhythm. Frishman understood with the intuition of a poet by divine grace the poetic, ancient, florid and also artificial character of *Zarathustra*. Hence the artistic beauty of Frishman's translation even if it cannot boast of being a dry and exact philological rendering. When a philosopher-poet like Nietzsche puts the promptings of his heart and his nightmares into the mouth of an ancient prophet, the biblical style of a prophet of Israel is the most fitting.[75]

The question of the translation of essential Nietzschean concepts into the Hebrew language is loaded with significance and depends on the historical context. For instance, David Frishman's *adam elion* (superman), before the Second World War and the racist associations it acquired in that period, was

changed by Eldad into an *al-adam* (overman). This was a translation sensitive to the historical context, but was it still accurate? It is worth noting that in 1967, in his translation of *Beyond Good and Evil*, Eldad, in his foreword to the book, did use the term *adam elion*, although he specifically said that it was only a metaphor. He thought that Nietzsche's provocative formulations were also connected with his relentless desire to reach the truth and to strip away all taboos.

With all Eldad's criticism of Elisabeth Förster-Nietzsche's editing of *The Will-to-Power*, he preferred her version to that of Karl Slechta, which he found unreadable.[76] In translating this term, Martin Buber used the formula *ratzon le-shrara* ("will-to-rule"),[77] while Eldad used the formula *otzma* (*Macht*, might) in preference to *ko'ah* (*Kraft*, strength). He said that

> in the translation of terms of this kind one must try to get as close as possible (without full congruence, naturally) to the intention of the author. Nietzsche's fate in the years when they tried to link him with the Nazis made terms like 'rule' and 'power', which are central to Nietzsche, repulsive to the point of total unacceptability. But in the word itself there is still something which is very characteristic of Nietzsche, and that is fidelity to oneself.[78]

Of the connection between power and truth-to-oneself in Nietzsche, Eldad spoke in 1977, ten years after he began to translate him. At the ceremony for his reception of the Tchernikovsky Prize for his translation of Nietzsche into Hebrew, the judges said in their address:

> Of course one can take exception here and there to some things in Dr. Israel Eldad's translations, but one cannot help but be amazed at the quantity of the translations and at this vast undertaking … On the whole, one can say in all sincerity that Eldad entered the *pardes* (the acronym formed from the initials of these four approaches to Biblical exegesis in rabbinic Judaism) of Nietzsche and came out of it with these translations safe and sound.

(This is a reference to the talmudic legend about a group of rabbis who entered the *pardes* [orchard] of esoteric knowledge. Only one of them came out sane.) In his reply, Eldad summed up the place of Nietzsche in his life: "And this is what we are so much in need of today: to be true to ourselves, to our individuality. Let us be very much ourselves, and through this individuality of spirit, soul and body we shall also find the power that belongs to us and which exists within us."[79]

6   The critique of political theology

After the war of independence the Israeli intellectuals were ensconced in the warm bosom of *Mamlachtiut*, with the exception of a few individuals like Israel Eldad and Yonatan Ratosh who opposed the prevailing ethos. In the mid 1950s, the Israeli intellectuals left the safe enclosure of *Mamlachtiut* and began to play a critical role in the public discourse. In 1960, Ben-Gurion was at the apex of his career. For four decades, he had held the top positions in the public sphere as secretary-general of the *Histadrut* (the general federation of laborers in the land of Israel), as head of the Jewish Agency, and as prime minister; Mapai, the ruling party, was assured of its hegemony of power; the myth of the "founding leader" was well embedded in the youthful Israeli consciousness; the Israelis believed in the rightness of their path.

Only once did Ben-Gurion abandon his usual caution and permit himself to indulge in political rhetoric in connection with his Messianic vision. At the end of operation "Kadesh," the military campaign in the Sinai desert against Egypt in 1956, he declared that "Yotvat, called Tiran, which was an independent Hebrew state until a thousand, four hundred years ago, will now be part of the third Kingdom of Israel." On November 7, 1956, he also declared in the Knesset that this, "the greatest campaign in the history of our people," was like "the revelation of Sinai." It must be said to his credit that he immediately retreated from these Messianic declarations; he did not allow the Messianic enthusiasm to affect his pragmatic policies.

A year after the Sinai campaign, Ben-Gurion launched an ideological campaign against the Zionist Organization. He had a golden opportunity to do so when the Zionist Organization invited Jewish intellectuals from Israel and abroad to an ideological gathering in August 1957.[1] Ben-Gurion exploited the occasion to declare to the participants that the Zionist ideology had exhausted its historical role and that the decisive factor in the history of the people of Israel was and remained "the Messianic vision first proclaimed by the prophets of Israel." In that same year, he made pragmatic speeches in the same vein as this declaration, which involved him in a dispute about Messianism with the Israeli intellectuals. Questions of identity which had been deferred with the establishment of the state and the absorption of the great

Aliyah (wave of immigration) now came to the fore. In 1958, he turned to the Jewish thinkers in Israel and abroad with the question "What is a Jew?"[2]

Some two years later Israel found itself in the midst of the stormy political scene of the "Lavon Affair." The Lavon Affair was a failed Israeli covert operation in which Israeli military intelligence planted bombs in American- and British-owned targets in Egypt. The failure of the "Affair" caused major political disturbances in Israel through the 1950s and early 1960s. A special ministerial committee was appointed, and eventually led to the resignation of Pinchas Lavon (1904–76), minister of defense and one of Mapai's leaders, and, in the aftermath, to Ben-Gurion's final withdrawal from the government. Things were happening in the Givat Ram campus of the Hebrew University in Jerusalem. There, the intellectual élite organized petitions, letters to the newspapers, and protest meetings against the line Ben-Gurion was taking towards Lavon.[3] Until that time, the Israeli intellectuals had taken very little part in the public discourse on the distress of immigrants or on alternatives to the accepted view of the Israeli–Arab conflict, or in questioning the concept of *Mamlachtiut*. On the contrary: previous to the "Affair," they had been accessories to the dominant Israeli culture. Until the beginning of the 1960s, the intellectual élite saw itself as part of the collective effort in forming the nation.[4]

In the "Lavon Affair," many Israeli intellectuals severed the umbilical cord which bound them to their respected father, but, as yet unwilling to separate from him completely, they agreed in their meetings to disagree. This, then, was the revolt of the intelligentsia, the first uprising of the Israeli intellectuals against the establishment which had been flesh of their flesh and bone of their bone. Having previously seen themselves as part of the Jewish rebirth and having consequently identified themselves with the political establishment of the State of Israel, they now took up an opposing position. The sight of them breaking away from the warm embrace of the father-leader provides a rare intimate glimpse of the pains suffered by these intellectuals in the process of growing up and gaining their independence. They are sorry that the leader no longer has his paternal authority but has adopted his own independent political stance. In the first stage of their liberation from the embrace of the establishment, one finds them in a defensive posture. Previously there had been isolated intellectuals who had acted in self-awareness; in the "Affair" they functioned for the first time as a political group displaying social responsibility. Ben-Gurion himself was conscious of this change and spoke about it in a meeting he had with them in 1961. He was only sorry that their meeting had taken place in the wrong context. In the light of this, one can understand Jacob Talmon's comment in a symposium with the prime minister that intellectuals are not a military band marching in step!

Central to the controversy concerning Messianism was the intellectuals' fear of the fusion of this grand and elevated idea with the power of the leader.[5] They recoiled at the new turn the prime minister had taken, which embodied political Messianism: from dealing with ideas he had gone to

dealing with problems of power. In this period, Ben-Gurion referred to the army a great deal in his speeches and conversations. He was obsessed with the thought that Lavon had desecrated the name of the army by soiling the reputation of a senior officer. Already at his meeting with the writers in 1949, he had praised the army in its function as a melting pot, and, already then, Martin Buber expressed surprise and dismay that it was at all possible to discuss normal sociological processes within a military framework. In this connection, one should also remember Ben-Gurion's proposal in 1922 to set up an "army of labor" within the framework of Hevrat Ha-Ovdim. All this teaches us something about his attitude. He saw the army as a desirable social model, an instrument by means of which one could forge a young nation.

The intellectuals saw the dangers inherent in a Messianism of State joined to political power. They witnessed the Kibiyeh operation of 1953 and the colonialist adventure of 1956; some apprehensively followed the nuclear project which was coming into being far from the eyes of the crowd; they perceived the increasing strength of the military-industrial complex in Israel; they observed the younger generation of politicians who surrounded the "old man," Ben-Gurion, casting angry looks at the minister of defense, Lavon, who was seen as really representing the civilian sector; they saw the launching of the "Shavit" rocket at the height of an election campaign. All these facts were visible to the Jerusalem intellectuals who were not at all close to the army. It is against this background that the vicissitudes of the "Affair" may be understood.

The intellectuals were alarmed by the Promethean golem which the State seemed likely to give rise to, and no less by its leader, who did not shrink from using the power of the State. Ben-Gurion, for his part, was determined in the stand he took and was not frightened of joining political power to Promethean Messianism. Although he thought that atomic weaponry might be a two-edged sword, he was not afraid of linking power and ideology as such. It should be remembered that he was a product of Zionism, which sought to give the Jews the power to shape reality in their own image. This was Ben-Gurion's sphere of action, and in this arena of power wedded to ideas he was an outstanding player. He did not fail in the potentially adventuristic enterprise of joining the vision of "redemption" to "doomsday weapons,"[6] but the intellectuals who now emerged into the daylight of the young civil society felt that they had lost their innocence.

The founding fathers had laid a time-bomb in their use of Messianic terminology; the intellectuals of the Hebrew University in Jerusalem wanted to dismantle it as soon as possible. They had traveled a great distance from the days when they had the pretension of educating the great Aliyah (the mass immigration wave in 1949) to the time when they understood that their task as intellectuals was to abandon the monopolistic discourse in which they themselves had taken part, that the role of the intellectual is to reveal the problematic nature of the obvious, to distinguish the reality from the idea and realities from "values," and to promote the view that all is contingent and

possible rather than natural and self-evident. In the first decade of the State, the Israeli intellectuals evolved from creating and mapping out the hegemonic field of power to clearing the field of mines.[7] At the center of this field lay the Messianic terminology.

The Messianic essence

In his article "Buber and Ben-Gurion," Akiva Ernst Simon, the pupil and friend of Martin Buber and Ben-Gurion's opponent, gave a good description of the relationship between the philosopher and the statesman:

> it seems that these two, the philosopher and the statesman, may be considered two of the greatest Jews of the first half of the twentieth century. Some have said that they complimented one another, that each one had what the other lacked; others see them as the personification of two contrary outlooks which cannot be reconciled.[8]

The intellectual and the prime minister were on opposite sides of the fence on many political questions: Buber's position on the Arab question as shown in his membership of the radical leftist intellectual group *Brit Shalom* (1925–33) and the *Ihud*, founded in 1924; the affair surrounding Ben-Gurion's accusation of the Israeli scholar Aaron Cohen (1910–80), who was sentenced and imprisoned for spying; the nuclearization of the Middle East; the execution of Adolf Eichmann, the Nazi official who was tried in Israel (1961), and other controversial subjects.

Buber's intellectual and scholarly interest in Messianism was intense and it can also be said to have been methodical. Messianism and its universal essence were the very foundation of his thought. His methodical treatment of Messianism encouraged the idea that his dialogic approach to philosophical enquiry was an authentic philosophical method.[9] In his early *Three Speeches about Judaism* – "Judaism and the Jews" (1909), "Judaism and Mankind" (1910), and "The Renewal of Judaism" (1910) – we find a peculiarly Buberian combination of the idea of redemption as a cardinal principle for the individual and of the Nietzschean concept of the will-to-power. Already in 1895, the young Martin Buber, like many of his generation, had been excited by Nietzsche's writings and had even taken the trouble to translate the first part of *Thus Spake Zarathustra* into Polish. Buber described the work's effect on him as follows: "This book did not influence me as a gift might but as an invasion which robbed me of my liberty and it was a long time before I could free myself from it."[10] In "The Renewal of Judaism" (1910), he stated: "Messianism is the most original and profound idea in Judaism."[11] Buber's enthusiasm for the First World War was also, like that of his generation, ascribable to his attraction to Nietzsche's *Lebensphilosophie* (philosophy of life).

At least three books by Buber – *The Kingdom of Heaven* (1932), *The Teaching of the Prophets* (1942), and *The Messiah* (1964) – dealt with the connection between the Messianic idea and the philosophy of history. They were preceded by the lecture "The Messianic Mystery," given on March 6, 1925, in Berlin on the occasion of the opening of the Hebrew University in Jerusalem. Theodor Dreyfus, the translator of the lecture, declared that "it is not by chance that Buber chose a 'Messianic' theme for his lecture in honor of the opening of the Hebrew University. The central axis of his system is creating a true spiritual life in each and every society until the spirit guides the whole of humanity."[12]

In 1927, Buber gave a speech in memory of Ahad Ha-Am in which he pointed out at an early stage the use that Zionism made of Messianic terminology. He protested against the secularization and nationalization of religion and warned against the transformation of religious language into nationalist language. It was the same danger of the banalization of the sacred tongue that Walter Benjamin and Gershom Scholem had complained of early in the twentieth century and that Simon, Baruch Kurzweil, and Leibowitz were to protest against in the middle of the century. This is what Buber said:

> All national movements are merely copies of religious movements … All trends of liberation are simply secular reprints of longings for redemption … These reprints are unlikely to be particularly faithful. One cannot transfer the qualities of religious language to nationalist language. Every mixture creates a confusion which is disastrous.[13]

Buber's book *The Kingdom of Heaven* (1932), his main essay on Messianism, appeared during his period of activity in *Brit Shalom*. Right at the beginning of the book, he declared, "The most important, in my opinion, of all the problems which have been ripening within me and which I now want to solve, has been the problem of the development of Messianism among the people of Israel."[14]

One can see this question "ripening" in Buber in a series of lectures he gave at the University of Frankfurt in the winter of 1924–25, and in a course he gave about four years later at Ponte Teresa. In the introduction to *The Kingdom of Heaven*, the first volume in his Messianic trilogy, he described the first part of his program, an examination of the popular religious concept of the divine kingdom in ancient Israel. He expressed his intention to explore in the future (which he did in the two succeeding volumes, *The Teaching of the Prophets* and *The Messiah*) the relationship between the sanctified character of the king of Israel as the Messiah of God and this concept, and the way in which these two elements were transferred from the sphere of history to the sphere of eschatology. His dialectical argument was that the Jewish and general eschatological hope originated in hope in history, and with a growing disappointment in history it became eschatological. Eschatological faith comes out of historical faith. Historical phenomena create the vision of the

end of days and become myth: the Messianic myth is both the medium and the representation of the end of days.

According to Buber in his article "Jewish Myth," the basis of myth is not imagination but historical memory. Thus, the monotheistic myth is fundamental to the Jewish outlook. In his desire for a vivid monotheism, Buber claimed that myth is not the product of aesthetic or psychological factors: myths are vestiges of real historical memories handed down from generation to generation. He saw myth as a living phenomenon existing in each individual.[15] He believed that the Jewish Messianic myth signified a belief in "the existence of a connection between God and the world through the absolute rule/kingdom of God."[16] This unique faith of the people of Israel was based on a real historical memory which had been given mythical clothing. The Messianic quality of the Jewish tradition is not to be understood religiously but nationally: the national mission of the people of Israel is the universalizing of this Messianic factor.

The main area in which Buber investigated Jewish myth was Hassidism. In his book *For the Sake of Heaven*, he contrasted the active Messianism of the "seer of Lublin" with the "holy Jew," who embodied the opposite pole, love and compassion: "One must pity the human beings who make a god of their desires, for it is hard for them to be with the Living God." It is not difficult to see on whose side Buber is on. He warns against the Promethean arrogance of the man who seeks to rise against his Maker: "We are not entrusted with the areas within the purview of holiness but with the area which is not holy in order to correct it." Give to God the things that are God's and to man the things that are man's. The "seer of Lublin" was concerned with the Messianic urge, and the "holy Jew" was concerned with human responsibility. These were the two aspects of the Jewish idea of redemption. Avraham Shapira distinguished between the utopian principle and the Messianic principle in Buber's teaching: utopian life concerns people operating in the historical reality; Messianic life relates to the end of history. Utopia is "a place which is entirely good"; eschatology envisages "a time which is entirely good." Both elements – the utopian and the Messianic – appear in his writings.[17]

Buber did not live in an ivory tower, and his writing reflected the Jewish and general environment in which he lived. He related that he wrote *For the Sake of Heaven* during the Second World War. He said that "the signs of a false Messianism abroad and at home" are what drove him to write the book, in which he described how "I received the decisive push when suddenly, half-dreaming, I saw the figure of a false messenger, mentioned in the first chapter of my book – a sort of devil with a peculiar Goebbels-like face."[18] Already on May 1, 1933, when Hitler came to power, he declared at a public meeting in Frankfurt:

> The Jewish belief in the redemption of the world does not mean that this world will be replaced with another, but it is a belief in a new world in the

same place. There is no concept of this world and the world-to-come in the Hebrew language … We are not obliged to have a special "Messianic" policy. But there is a kind of participation in public life in which we direct ourselves towards the kingdom of heaven while dealing with the world and politics.[19]

National Socialism was not the only false Messianism for Buber. In his lectures at the Hebrew University in 1938 he spoke of the dangers of the "scientific Messianism" of the dialectics of Marx and Hegel. The Messianic goal, he said, was liable to justify any means of attaining it. The source of this secular Messianism was in Christianity and the apocalyptics of predestination. The secular man, with his Promethean philosophical thrust, is sure that "this very defective world is moving towards its total rectification."[20] Buber observed that "Messianism was secularized" in the Marxist philosophy of history.[21] The Marxist Messianism was the continuation of Christian secularism, "a utopian modern metamorphosis of apocalyptics."[22]

Buber and Albert Camus both saw the dangers of the "scientific Messianism." In his function as editor of translated works of literature for the Mossad Bialik publishing house, Buber wrote to Camus and asked his permission to publish his *L'Homme revolté* in Hebrew: "Your book *L'Homme Revolté* is of such importance to human existence at the present time that I would like to recommend it to Mossad Bialik." (Incidentally, Ben-Gurion planned to edit the Mossad Bialik translated literature series with Buber after he retired from politics.) Three weeks later, on February 22, 1952, Camus replied, "I read your book *I and Thou* with much appreciation, and I did not expect to receive from you something that would give me such pleasure and do me such an honor." *L'Homme revolté* was finally published in Hebrew by the Am-Oved publishing house. In Buber's library there were two books with signed dedications by Camus. In *La Chute* was written, "To Mr. Martin Buber, painter of the portrait of our time, with respect and admiration," and in *Discours de suède* (Camus's Nobel Prize acceptance speech) was written, "To Martin Buber from an admirer."[23] Marxism was a "scientific Messianism" as understood by Camus. Camus had grasped that the lofty visions were a nightmare, that Prometheus had betrayed his Messianic mission. Marxism had a value as one of the legitimate heirs of the Promethean urge, the modern revolt, and Stalinism had corrupted that value. The Marxist Promethean aspiration had exceeded the limits of humanity.

After the Second World War, Buber testified before the Anglo-American Committee of Enquiry which visited Palestine in 1946. He declared to the Committee that Messianism is "the most productive and most paradoxical of human ideas." Its universal mission is to command "every generation to contribute to the upbuilding of the future."[24] The original aim of the people of Israel, added Buber, was Messianic-ideological: "Action towards the coming of the kingdom of God on earth." This was the faith that united the Jews in exile and which gave them the hope of eventually returning to Zion.

The historian Shalom Ratsabi pointed out that in Buber's statement to the Committee

> he stressed first and foremost the special nature of Jewish nationalism which aimed at renewing the connection between the people of Israel and its land within the framework of the Messianic process, which seeks universal redemption. Its first consideration, therefore, is not statehood but the building of a model society, the precondition to which is the concentration of the national forces capable of renewing their creative power in Eretz-Israel.[25]

Buber explained to the Committee that the Zionist enterprise in Eretz-Israel in the 1940s was also "important for the future of mankind."[26] Only in Zion could the Jews realize the Messianic idea through their universal mission. The Messianic people were seen as the enemy of anti-Messianic anti-Semitism, and it was consequently natural to attack the messengers of Messianism.

A year after his testimony to the Committee of Enquiry, Buber spoke on Dutch radio about the special nature of Zionism. Zionism, he said, represented a people that had unity and faith, both of which had a connection with antiquity: "These are two things that are as one for the beginning of redemption, for the beginning of the reformation of the world in the Realm of the Almighty."[27] Together with this idea that Zionism was a means to a universal end, he adopted a point of view opposed to the nationalization and politicization of the Messianic principle. He called for "political work," which meant "a politics of depoliticization," saying that the domination of Jewish–Arab relations by politics would lead to a national state. He thought a bi-national state was preferable; hence his membership of *Brit Shalom*.[28] He explained in a letter to Mahatma Gandhi in February 1939: "We do not have a specific Messianic policy, but that does not mean that politics are outside the sphere of holiness."[29]

As soon as the Jewish State arose, he declared that a moral "boundary line" was necessary. The state, he believed, was not an end in itself, and was justified only if it produced a "Hebrew humanism" – i.e. a genuine rebirth, the renewal of a living tradition, as little injustice as possible and a striving towards wholeness and the categorical imperative. This was the "purpose," the aim of the original Zionist vision.

Buber was one of the outstanding participants in the meeting with the writers and intellectuals arranged by Ben-Gurion in 1949. Like Rabbi Abraham Kook, who saw the pioneers as furthering the Messianic idea, Buber thought that although the pioneers did not intend to continue the Jewish tradition, they did continue it in practice, and through their labor continued to fulfill the very same purpose. Although the pioneers did not acknowledge their affinity with the Patriarchs, this connection existed nevertheless. However, the values represented by the pioneers were being voided of their content

and were now becoming "national slogans." Buber protested against this nullification of the "added value" of the "purpose" which constituted Zionism's universal-Messianic dimension. Less than ten years later, at an international intellectual gathering which took place in Jerusalem in the summer of 1965, Buber again protested at the subordination of the theological to the political and at the secularizing tendencies of Ben-Gurion's Messianism: "The spirit in all his ideas and visions is degraded and becomes a matter of politics." He expressed the fear that Messianism would be nationalized and its universal aspect would be neutralized and profaned.

In his reply to Buber, Ben-Gurion said that he was glad to know "that I am in agreement with the great in seeing the Messianic vision as one of the foundation-stones of Judaism," and he agreed that "the Messianic vision does not separate the redemption of Israel from the redemption of humanity." Ben-Gurion thought that, unlike himself and Buber, the young people, workers, and intellectuals in Israel did not always recognize the Messianic vision as such, although it lived within them. He acknowledged that the political theology of the Messianic vision was shared by him, the statesman, and the philosopher. Buber, in his letter to Gandhi mentioned above, had also opposed compartmentalization: "We shall be able to labor for the kingdom of heaven only if we labor in all the spheres allotted us." He believed that the modern world suffered from a sense of alienation precisely because of the dichotomy between the religious dimension and the secular, between the sacred and the profane. In his article "Hebrew Humanism," he stated that the roots of political theology, which did not recognize an artificial compartmentalization, were to be found in the Bible. He thought that a renewed study of the Bible might bring Israeli nationhood closer to the universal-Messianic principle in which it was so lacking.

Between a State vision and political theology

The theory of language developed by Walter Benjamin from 1915 onwards is a lament over the devaluation of language, which degenerated from a divine tongue which expressed the essence of things to a functional human language of signs. From being the Word of God, it became a mere nomenclature. These insights were expressed about a year later in a letter to his friend Gershom Scholem and were published after Benjamin's death under the title "On Language in General and on the Language of Man."[30]

About ten years after Benjamin's letter to Scholem, Scholem sent a letter to Franz Rosenzweig for his fortieth birthday, entitling it "Declaration of Faith in Our Language." These were the years of *Brit Shalom* during which the young Kabbalah scholar expressed his fears of "a blurring and confusion of religious and political concepts. "I strongly deny," he said, "that Zionism is a Messianic movement, and that it has the right (if it is not just a matter of flowery language) to use religious terminology for its political purposes." It was in this intellectual climate that Martin Buber, like Benjamin and

Scholem, expressed his dislike of the nationalization of religion and its language. The copying of Messianic language by secular language, he wrote, is "unlikely to be particularly faithful. One cannot transfer the characteristics of Messianic language to nationalist language. Every mixture creates a confusion which is disastrous."[31]

This is what Scholem wrote to Rosenzweig on the secularization of the Hebrew language:

This country is a volcano, and language is lodged within it. People here talk of many things that may lead to our ruin, and more than ever of the Arabs. But there is another danger, much more uncanny than the Arab nation, and it is a necessary result of the Zionist enterprise: what of the "actualization" of the Hebrew language? That sacred language on which we nurture our children, is it not an abyss that must open up one day? The people certainly don't know what they are doing. They think they have secularized the Hebrew language, have done away with its apocalyptic point. But that, of course, is not true: the secularization of the language is no more than a *manner of speaking*, a ready-made expression. It is impossible to empty the words so bursting with meaning, unless one sacrifices the language itself … But if we transmit the language to our children as it was transmitted to us, if we, a generation of transition, revive the language of the ancient books for them, that it may reveal itself anew through them, shall not the religious power of that language explode one day? And when that explosion occurs, what kind of generation will experience it? As for us, we live within that language above an abyss, most of us with the steadiness of blind men. But when we regain our sight, we or our descendants, shall we not fall into that abyss? … This Hebrew is heavy with impending catastrophe. It cannot and will not remain in its present state: our children have no other language left, and it is truly they alone who will pay the price for that meeting we have arranged for them, without ever having asked them, without asking even ourselves. The day will come when the language will turn against those who speak it. There are already moments in our own life when this happens, unforgettable, stigmatizing moments, when all the presumptuousness of our enterprise is suddenly revealed. When that day comes, will there be a young generation able to withstand the revolt of a sacred tongue?

… And yet, out of the spectral degradation of our language, the force of the holy often speaks to us. For the names have a life of their own; if they did not, woe to our children, who would be abandoned, hopeless, to an empty future.

Hebrew words, all that are not neologisms but have been taken from the treasure-house of our "good old language," are full to bursting with meaning. A generation that takes over the most fruitful part of our tradition – its language – cannot, though it may ardently wish to, live

without tradition. When the day finally comes and the force shored up in the Hebrew language is unleashed, when the "spoken," the content of language, takes form once again, our people will find itself confronted anew with that sacred tradition, signifying the choice before them: either to submit or to perish. Because at the heart of such a language, in which we ceaselessly evoke God in a thousand ways, thus calling Him back into the reality of our life, He cannot keep silent. This inevitable revolution of language, in which the Voice will again become audible, is the only subject never discussed in this country. Because those who endeavor to revive the Hebrew language did not truly believe in the Judgment to which their acts are summoning us. May the levity that has accompanied us on this apocalyptic path not lead us to our destruction.[32]

On the Jerusalem autumn evening of November 21, 1951, some of the outstanding Israeli intellectuals of that period, including Joseph Klausner, Natan Rotenstreich, and Isaiah Leibowitz, met to discuss the question Simon had raised a few months earlier: "Are We Still Jews?" Simon had asked his question in his classic essay in *Luah Ha-Aretz* (Tablet of the Land), and in the preface he had said:

> In this article I have asked many questions and given few answers. But the question is being asked in our state today … Very, very many of the young people who have grown up in this country feel themselves to be solely Hebrews, Israelis, even if they do not define themselves as "Canaanites." Their national sentiment is very strong, and an Arab who has been born in the country is closer to them than a Jew who has come to the country from nearby or than a Jew who lives in New York.

More than fifty years ago, Simon clearly recognized the radical option available to Israeli Jews at the time when some of them were forging themselves a state: the Canaanite option which favors geography over history, an enlarged identity over cultural or religious continuity.

In his article, Simon, like Benjamin, Scholem, and Buber before him, pointed out how the sacred tongue had degenerated into a vehicle for secular nationalism. In the religious-secular language of Rabbi Kook he saw an "actual (concrete) Messianism," as he called it, and warned against voiding the concept "days of the Messiah" of its moral content and religious intention and identifying it with the political dimension alone.

The Messianic significance of the State

Ben-Gurion's Messianic vision on the one hand and the doubts of religious Zionism concerning the Messianic significance of the State on the other, caused the educational philosopher Akiva Ernst Simon to warn against political theology in both its secular and its Messianic-religious forms. Without

specifically mentioning the concept "political theology," Simon added a chapter to the history of the concept in the historical context of the birth of the Jewish State in the mid-twentieth century. In his opinion, the crisis of the Jewish religion was revealed in the failure of the old "Catholic" Judaism, which subordinated the political to the theological, and in the weakness of "Protestant" Judaism, which separated the political and the theological. Simon went on to examine the attempt to resolve this crisis in the early years of the State by giving Israel a Messianic flavor.

In his classic article "Are We Still Jews?" (1951), Simon postulated a brilliant typology of two states of mind, two phenomenological religious concepts: the "Catholic" situation, which sanctifies the profane as well as the sacred, and the "Protestant" situation, which differentiates the sacred from the profane. A religion of a Catholic kind seeks to sanctify all areas of life, clasps in a bear hug the life of the individual and society – eating, drinking, dress, work, rest, the community and State, love and war. In such a religion, the sacred and the profane are infused with one another. As the Dutch historian Jan Huzinga said in his description of the waning of the Middle Ages: "Life was so infused with religion that there was always a danger that people would lose sight of the difference between the sacred and the profane."[33] Simon believed that this Catholic situation – in both Christianity and Judaism – was likely to produce within itself the seeds of its own destruction, "for the time comes when various spheres cast off the yoke of religion, assert themselves as autonomous forces and absorb religion as they previously had been absorbed in it."[34] Religions of a Protestant kind come into being in a period of protest against the decay of the Catholic religion, for which they find compensation "in a special emphasis on the importance of the individual's special relationship with God and on the salvation of his soul through faith." One's personal and social life ceases to be connected with divine commandments and results in areas of culture divorced from religion.

The two major crises of "Catholic" Judaism took place in the period of the Haskalah, when it lost its absolute authority, and in the era of nationalism, when it came to an end. Simon's phenomenological analysis focused on these crises – especially in areas like the Hebrew language, art, love, and work – and his conclusion was that at these times the relationship between the sacred and profane had become unclear.

Simon demonstrated how, linguistically, the name of the people or the state or the rabbi replaced the name of God. Already Onkelos translated the verse "you will be God to him" (Exodus 4:16) as "you will be a rabbi to him." In this spirit, the holy tongue soon conquered numerous spheres, but on its way to secularity it lost its holiness. Simon gave three examples of this secularization of language. The song "Who Will Declare the Heroic Deeds of Israel?" was the secularization of a verse from psalm 106, "Who will declare the heroic deeds of the Lord?"; some Zionists broke up the word "Maccabee" into an abbreviation, falsifying a biblical phrase referring to God: "*Mi camocha be-amim Yisrael?*" ("Who is like unto you among the peoples,

Israel?"); in the "Yizkor" for the slain of the Warsaw ghetto, one reads, "May the people of Israel be remembered, who sanctified the name of Israel." The name of the people brought down the name of the Holy One, Blessed be He, from his throne on high. Simon made a similar analysis in the spheres of work, art, and love.

According to Simon, the failure of "Catholic" Judaism is demonstrated by its inability in the modern period to control all areas of life. It renounced the totality of its demands and had been forced to give up its sway over central areas of life such as commerce, technology, society, the army, and the State. Into this no-man's-land entered "Protestant" Judaism, "which dared to acknowledge this state of affairs and to draw the appropriate secular and religious conclusions." The main conclusion was the importance of "compartmentalization," to use Israeli philosopher Avi Sagi's expression; that is to say, the distinction that has to be made between religion and culture, between the sacred and the profane, between the theological and the political, and between the Messianic and the real.[35]

But these strong points of "Protestant" Judaism were also its weaknesses. It drew "the appropriate secular and religious conclusions" from the failure of Catholic Judaism, but it failed to direct its protest towards a positive end. A Lutheran may have good reason to say he is a better Christian than his Catholic friend, but the Liberal Jew of today admits that he is a less faithful Jew than his observant co-religionist. The adoption of the morality of the prophets cannot replace the unique Jewish content of Orthodoxy. The absence of a central institution deciding the principles of faith, of dogma, and of organized conversion also reveals the weakness of "Protestant" Judaism.

"Protestant" Judaism did not produce a complete and systematic theology. Its weakness stemmed from the enormous difficulty of dealing with the national character of the Jewish religion and the religious character of the Israeli nation. Zionism tried to solve the problem by promising the Jews to "renew our days as of old," but the national "return to history" in turn raised the question of what a Jewish society within the framework of an independent state would be. Perhaps the most impressive challenge presented by "Protestant" Judaism was the integralist solution offered by the religious kibbutz movement: the fusion of social Zionism with the observance of the commandments of the Torah. Simon thought that this group was territorially, socially, and professionally isolated from the majority of Israeli society. From the beginning, it turned its back on the idea of Israeli society as a total entity in which all members had a mutual responsibility.

Simon felt that Catholicism is liable to lead to a frozen orthodoxy, to withdrawal, to factionalism, to the ultra-Orthodox Mea Shearim. Protestantism, on the other hand, is liable to lead to a negation of the sacred, and in place of God one gets the homeland, and in place of a future-oriented transcendental Messianism one gets a "Canaanite" Messianism that stresses the concrete, the here-and-now. "Protestant" Judaism encourages secularism and denies transcendentalism. "Catholic" Judaism is liable to lead to total

haredism (ultra-orthodoxy), to the alienation of religion and to the ascription of Messianism to the State.

An important element in Simon's article is his attack on the early views of Isaiah Leibowitz in the first years of the state, which were gathered together in his first book, *The Torah and Commandments at This Time* (1954). In that period, Leibowitz was seeking a renewal of *halacha* (the practical codification of religious law) and hence the creation of a state based on Torah. At the same time as being worried about Ben-Gurion's attempt in those years to give a secular Messianic significance to the State of Israel, he was also disturbed by what he saw as the attachment of a Messianic significance to the state in this early approach of Leibowitz, but this time from a religious direction:

> With what arguments does Professor Leibowitz approach the secular majority, in whose journal he has published his opinions? The only positive argument Dr. Leibowitz uses is the religious affirmation of the State of Israel. He too sees it as being at least an important station on the road to redemption … One finds here the same political contraction of the full Messianic idea that we have pointed out in the secular political Messianism.[36]

Simon expressed the fear that "their partial and one-sided use of Messianic formulas for the State of Israel conceals a lack of fidelity to the principles of faith and morality." He warned against the Leibowitz approach, "in which, to some extent, his political Messianic idea is likely to increase, without his intending it, the dangers with which we are now threatened by the imaginary 'days of the Messiah.'"

One should bear in mind that this refers to the early phase of Isaiah Leibowitz, in which he thought that if *halacha* was to be changed to accommodate the State of Israel, the state had to be given a religious importance, for, otherwise, what justification would there be for changing religious norms? In this, Leibowitz was logical: one cannot change halachic norms for a secular system, but only for something which has a religious value.[37] Rabbi Kook transformed the pioneers – human beings – into sacred objects, but Leibowitz, for his part, was unable to accept a Messianic-fetishistic basis of this kind. The state, in his opinion, was part of the process of redemption, but not the people involved. The Messianism of the early Leibowitz was utopian. It was influenced by the tradition of Zionist Messianism: a halachic state is a kind of ideal society. Leibowitz, like most Jews, began as a Catholic and became a Protestant.

In Rabbi Kook, Simon saw a mixture of "concrete Messianism," as he called it, and an original approach to the relationship between the sacred and the profane. Zionism, in Rabbi Kook's religious philosophy, restored the equilibrium between the sacred and the profane, for, in the exile, secular concerns and the responsibility for economic, political, and social affairs ceased to have their proper importance. In the Yishuv, secularity, dialectically

speaking, had a religious function, and as Rabbi Kook said in the opening statement of his book *The Lights of Holiness*, "the worldly holiness which sanctifies the profane is the holiness that is in nature and which reveals itself in the Holy Land."

According to Simon, Rabbi Kook was the sole representative of Catholic Judaism who took the fact of Jewish secularity seriously. As the sphere of the secular increased, so did the sphere of sanctity. In other words, these spheres do not limit one another but draw on one another. There is, however, a clear intermediary: "A person who truly reveres God … will link the profane to the sacred." Through this dialectic of the people of Israel and the land of Israel, the "concrete" Messianism was shown to be present in the Yishuv, and the secular pioneers in the Land of Israel were "*tzaddikim* despite themselves."

But this, concluded Simon, was just the trouble. It was this position that made Rabbi Kook think that no Jew could be capable of murdering Arlosoroff. Someone who saw the people of Israel as a kind of *corpus mysticum* and thought that all its members were sanctified could not believe that a Jew could be guilty of the political murder of another Jew. Similarly, Rabbi Kook did not believe that the pioneers' good deed of redeeming the land could come about through a bad deed. Simon's conclusion was as follows:

> This unfortunate detail demonstrates the results necessarily produced by the "concrete" Messianism, which stamps the Zionist project of rebirth with the seal of total redemption … The tragic outcome of this Messianic-religious-actual doctrine is manifest in its new secular metamorphosis: the generation of the birth of the State of Israel is crowned as "the days of the Messiah." There is a great danger in this political-actual Messianism … precisely because of the honesty it contains, without which it would be unable to function.[38]

As a pupil of Franz Rosenzweig, he did not think that sticking the label "false Messianism" on the phenomenon was helpful. Simon's seven years in the "Free House of Study," where he assisted the sick Rosenzweig from 1922 until his immigration to Palestine in 1928, were formative years. In those years, he formulated his basic position of "reaching out towards redemption within the pre-Messianic world." Underlying this position, says Yehoyada Amir, "is an acknowledgement that the world is pre-Messianic, unredeemed and incomplete, that the reality as such does not justify a 'Messianic' interpretation … and on the other hand the recognition that this position cannot be content with this acknowledgement of a given reality."[39] This being the case, Simon thought that a possible meaning of Messianism is this: sanctity is striving towards a Messianic goal in the future, and secularism is satisfaction with this world and a renunciation of any pretension of bringing down the heavenly city to this vale of tears. Simon warned against the justification of Messianism in the practical sphere in order to sanction all means to its realization:

> To drain the concept 'days of the Messiah' of its moral content and religious form and equate it with a strictly political achievement, would open the door wide to a danger that threatens every human action: the greatest of all such dangers – the stilling of conscience deriving from the bestowal of an almost divine glory on human works. Freedom of criticism is based on the assumption that the state and its leaders can make mistakes.[40]

Simon learnt from Maimonides that one cannot know in advance what the days of the Messiah will be like. He criticized those who were so convinced that the founding of the state was the manifestation of Him who "records the generations" and "orders the cycles of time" that it was seen as the approach of the "days of the Messiah" where the distinction between sacred and profane no longer exists. In his opinion, the vitality of historical Judaism was shown by its rejection of every contemporary call for redemption, whether from Christianity, Islam, Shabbetai Zevi, or communism. It was through the power of its rejection that the people of Israel remained the people of redemption because it preserved the concept of redemption in an unredeemed world. To ascribe a Messianic character to the State of Israel was therefore to lose one's criterion of a true redemption. Simon's attitude towards a Messianic political theology could thus be summarized as follows: give the next world the Messiah and give this world the expectation of a Messiah.

Jewish nationalism and Messianism

Underlying the debate between the literary scholar Baruch Kurzweil and David Ben-Gurion was their different conception of modern Jewish nationalism. Ben-Gurion rejected Franz Rosenzweig's view, which Kurzweil also held, that Judaism is meta-historical. Ben-Gurion, however, assured his partner that in his opinion the great figures of Judaism from the Patriarchs to Judah Halevi were neither "national" nor "Zionists," for "the concept 'Jew'," he said, "says everything to me. It connects me with all the former generations and all the generations to come."[41] He sought in this way to allay Kurzweil's fears that the secularization of Jewish nationalism would lead to a fetishization of the state, and to what Kurzweil called a "territorial Messianism." The thinking of this religious intellectual resembled that of other neo-Kantian Orthodox thinkers who were bewildered by the secularism of the Jewish State. The question which never ceased to preoccupy Kurzweil was: Are we still Jews or are we already Canaanites? Would the universal Messianism of historical Judaism become a "Canaanite Messianism" of modern Jewish nationalism?

Kurzweil had already examined these Canaanite tendencies of modern Jewish nationalism and their cultural roots at the turn of the twentieth century in his classic essay "The Nature and Origins of the 'Young Hebrews' (Canaanites)" (1958). In this essay he showed that, from the ideological point of view, the "Young Hebrews" of the Yonatan Ratosh variety were an Israeli

version of an exilic Jewish manifestation – a logical conclusion of intellectual and aesthetic tendencies that had existed in Hebrew literature for a hundred years.[42] In the writings of Berdichevsky, and of the poets Zalman Shneur and Saul Tchernikovsky, one can already see a rejection of the Jewish exilic past and an affirmation of archaic and mystical pre-Israelite and Canaanite elements, but in Kurzweil's opinion this theoretical aesthetic trend in the literature of the Hebrew revival had now become the daily reality of the Israeli children in their own country. The Canaanite movement was a radical and conclusive stage in the process of secularization and in practice brought the tendencies in modern Jewish nationalism to a paradoxical outcome.

Kurzweil held that Zionism, like the European nationalisms, was an essentially secular movement, and as such was alien to the concept of Judaism as a timeless entity. In seeing Judaism as something meta-historical and in his questioning of the direction of modern Jewish nationalism, the Israeli literary critic was following in the footsteps of the Jewish thinkers Franz Rosenzweig and Isaac Breuer. Both of them warned of the secular consequences of Zionism and they especially feared the deification of the State. The special nature of Judaism ceases to exist if it is the same as the history of the peoples of the world. Kurzweil supported "the historical religious assertion of the spiritual and moral nature of Judaism." Apart from the claims of religion, he thought that Judaism had no uniqueness: there was no meaning to the concepts "the eternity of Israel" and "the Rock of Israel" in a national Jewish context.

He based this idea on Max Wiener's book *The Jewish Religion in the Period of the Emancipation*, which argued that the emancipation represented a break with the uniqueness of Jewish culture. The aim of the Jewish national revival was the normalization of the Jewish people within history, but its price was the renunciation of immortality, of the special uniqueness of the Jews. On entering into the sphere of nationalism, historical Judaism was caught up in immanent paradoxes of theology and politics, eternity and history, the Messianic and the concrete. Is there any way out of the modern paradoxality in which Judaism found itself ensnared in the era of nationalism? According to Kurzweil, the way out of the thicket is not through a "State of Torah" as envisaged by Leibowitz in his early phase, or "Torah and humanism" as envisaged by Breuer, but through a perpetual struggle for the values of Judaism and by making a permanent distinction between the sacred and the secular.

The sources of Kurzweil's thinking lie in his analysis of the Jewish situation in the post-emancipatory period. In modern Judaism, subjectivization had penetrated into the world of religion. As soon as the subjectivity of the believer becomes determinant the last defenses of normative religion are destroyed. The result is the subjectivization of the Jewish world in general and a loss of distinctness in the general historical context. This criticism of secularism was influenced by a reading of the writings of Martin Buber and Gershom Scholem, the scholars and thinkers representing the two main trends in modern Judaism. Buber represented the subjectivization of the religion and

Scholem represented its historicization. Hassidism and Kabbalah, the two disciplines identified with Buber and Scholem, rebelled against normative rabbinic Judaism by giving legitimacy and vitality to a revival of myth.

At the beginning of his article "M. Buber, Winner of the Bialik Prize," Kurzweil gives a quotation from Buber: "Of all the forms of assimilation we have known in our history, the nationalist assimilation is the worst and the most dangerous."[43] The fear of the new myth – nationalism – was also based on Buber, although in Kurzweil's opinion he was no less responsible than Scholem for the new-found legitimacy of myth. Buber's popularization of hassidic mythology opened up irrational, anarchistic-religious tendencies in Judaism. Kurzweil's opinion was based on the testimony of Buber himself, who wrote: "Historically, the hassidic movement was born as a reaction to the crisis of Messianism."[44] Buber added that the antinomian direction taken by the Sabbataian movement prepared the way for Hassidism, the Messianic myth of Frankism led to the very verge of nihilistic destruction, and, as Buber said, "the Frankist enterprise … now with both feet made the final leap into nihilism refurbished with mythology."[45] Kurzweil explained that the link between Buberian dialogue and his revival of myth was hassidic interpretation, which was a focusing on "the subjective circle in which the dialogal experience was ensnared."[46] In the end, however, he took up Buber's defense because the latter acknowledged "the cult of myth … and therefore raised up against himself and against the danger represented by myth the walls of humanism." The person who failed to raise the "walls of humanism" against the cult of myth was in his opinion Gershom Scholem.

According to Kurzweil, at the heart of Scholem's political theology there was a tendency "to throw a bridge between Sabbataianism and secular Zionism."[47] In Scholem's pretension to scientific objectivity Kurzweil perceived a subjective will-to-power: the seemingly scientific enterprise was a mask for "a modern nationalist perspective." His main criticism of Scholem was that the celebrated scholar of Kabbalah blurred the distinction between theology and history, between the sacred and the profane, between Judaism and secular nationalism. In Scholem's political theology there was a mixture of scientific investigation and a bias towards secular Zionism.[48] Kurzweil asked, "Is [Judaism] finally no more than a collection of myths and anti-myths?"[49] An exaggerated regard for the state, he said, was an original sin liable to turn into a new myth. In this "deification of the state" Scholem felt that he was transferring Judaism to the sphere of myth. Kurzweil's critical question still retains its validity: "Are Jewish studies simply the study of the history of mythology?" Scholem, who analyzed the classical Jewish tradition, which was largely "anti-mythical," discerned in it a Gnostic, mythical, and archaic trend.

It is against this background that the differences of opinion between Kurzweil and Ben-Gurion should be seen. Kurzweil, who did not see any special quality in Jewish history outside the area of faith, feared that with the loss of religious belief the ancient Jewish historiography would be no more than a myth which had become outmoded: "And without a faith, it is very

dangerous to yield to a dubious yearning for a mythical dream."[50] The myth most likely to develop was that of the State as the all-in-all. Although he was glad that Ben-Gurion agreed with him that "we, the people of Israel, cannot elevate the State into a supreme and ultimate value," as a religious man he reiterated his opposition to a political theology which transformed the principles of the Jewish religion into a state ceremony: "I cannot see in the claims of the secular state the realization of the religious commandments. Simply stated: the State cannot be the supreme and decisive value, but only God." Kurzweil's conclusion resembles those of Simon and Leibowitz: there should be a differentiation between the claims of the secular state and those of religion, and, in his words, "[a] clear distinction should be made between the sacral and the secular, and sacred concepts should not be used to embellish the profane."[51]

The problem that troubled Kurzweil was the change that had taken place in modern times from "abstract Jews" to "Hebrew Jews," a development that went from Berdichevsky to romantic Zionism and Hebrew *Mamlachtiut*. In this "godless theology," myth had a place of decisive importance. Like the philosopher of symbolism Ernst Cassirer, Kurzweil asked:

> When are mythical elements necessary and fruitful in the development of religion and the arts, and in what situations do they become a dangerous drug, liable to lead to a catastrophe? One thing is clear: intellectual play with myth without religious faith, and, no less important, the mobilization of myth for political ends, are especially negative phenomena because they remove the restraints of rational criticism and throw the gates of the irrational wide open.[52]

Idolatry, in Kurzweil's definition, remarkably similar to that of Isaiah Leibowitz, is giving something limited and temporary the value of the absolute: "There is also a danger of modern idolatry in the cult of the party, the cult of the state, the cult of the secular nation and the cult of society." The values of the people and the state should not be regarded as supreme values: "The desacralization of modern life gave rise to the sacralization of the idols of nation and state." He said that examples of the incursion of the theological into the sphere of politics, a process which Simon and Leibowitz also warned about, existed in abundance: e.g. "The Israel Defense Forces will neither slumber nor sleep" or "Who will relate the heroic deeds of Israel?" or a placard which Kurzweil saw at a demonstration of the "Nesher" beer factory in Haifa: "And I will carry you on eagles' wings." The mixing of the theological and the secular reached its climax in the transformation of the Messianic idea into a political reality:

> Israel knows this … and yet it hitches Messianic-apocalyptic horses onto the wagon of State. The religious-Messianic dream is its credentials for its appearance on the stage of history! Like it or not, the religious-Messianic

eschatology is the metaphysical basis of the State, and this eschatology is given a secular interpretation. The State declares its very existence, its living immanence, to be the presence and realization of transcendentalism."[53]

The Six-Day War placed the overlapping of the sacred and the profane, the theological and the political, the Messianic and the territorial in a fascinating perspective. One could say that the ironic, scathing comments made by Kurzweil in 1970 are a good exposition of his critique of "Canaanite Messianism":

The year 1967 placed practical Zionism, which could only be a political-*Mamlachtiut* Zionism, at its most fateful crossroads. The conquest of the entire country in the Six-Day War was a most powerful and dangerous challenge, a kind of touchstone of the truth and authenticity of the historiosophical interpretation that Zionism gave to Judaism. The national-secular redemption was complete. The territorial Messianism had achieved its aims. The heavenly Messianism had come own to earth. It was almost a proof of the complete legitimacy of Zionism's claim to be the continuation and the living and life-giving actualization of Judaism. The ancient myths at the heart of Judaism – and in the form of their rational reworking as well – had become a historical actuality. The soldiers who captured the Wall were truly like dreamers. Breaking into the Old City and conquering it were extra-temporal manifestations. The "now" was also the past; the past was identical with the future. A synoptic vision united them all. Divine historicity, which is meta-historical, and normal, secular historicity, the product of time, seemed to melt into one another and become as one, and there were consequently many who spoke of a religious revival. There was clearly a blurring of distinctions … The distinction between sacred and profane was obliterated. From now on, everything was sacred or could be sacred.

Zionism and its daughter, the State of Israel, which had reached the Wall through military conquest as the realization of the earthly Messianism, could never forsake the Wall and abandon the conquered areas of the Land of Israel without estranging itself from its historiosophical understanding of Judaism. Practical Zionism was caught in the web of its achievements. Abandoning them would be to admit its failure as the representative and agent of the historical continuity of Judaism … It could not be that the gallop of the Messianic apocalypse could be held up in order to permit the passengers to get out and look at the spectacular scenery of the Day of the Lord … The blowing of the ram's horn by all the Chief Rabbis next to the Wall will not change anything and from now on it will simply be a magical rite. Similarly, there cannot be a beginning of redemption at a time when full redemption is achieved and abandoned.[54]

The common factor linking Simon, Kurzweil, and Leibowitz is "compartmentalization": the rejection of a sanctity that does not irradiate the whole of life.[55] As intellectuals engaged in their society (to use Michael Walzer's expression), as rational Orthodox, as religious humanists, and as the possessors of a true liberal outlook, these thinkers had a deep religious commitment which in many ways was Protestant, because the idea of the transcendence of God is a Protestant characteristic. The three of them sought to base their religiosity on a defense of the territory of the secular, and this is only possible if it is not transformed into the sacred. Their great fear was mixing one kind with another.

Through this separation of spheres, Simon, Leibowitz, and Kurzweil sought to make the secular world rational in that it would be open to investigation and criticism. As followers of the neo-Kantian tradition, they wanted a Judaism free from the restrictions of matter and materiality. This was the Protestant conception of a religion free from myths: if we cleanse the land from the fetishes of symbolism, we shall be left with practical questions alone. The land ceases to be the ancestral heritage, a relic of Canaanism combined with a kind of fetishistic Judaism.

The combination of what they called a "concrete Messianism" and the old-new Canaanism, of the Messianic "anticipation of the end" and the sanctification of the State and of the land, was in their opinion disastrous. They feared a fetishization of the state, a neutralization of Jewish life in the era of secular Jewish nationalism.

The three of them had a deep background of European Judaism. They had experienced the destruction of the Jews in the Holocaust, the threat from secular culture, the politicization of myth, and the deification of the State in Europe. Unlike them, Rabbi Kook did not experience the Holocaust and so was able to adopt a harmonizing approach and to take a romantic view of secularization and the atheistic pioneers. They came to save Judaism by a differentiation, by creating a dichotomy between tradition and modernity; Rabbi Kook sought to save it through dialectic. He was an autodidact from Poland; they were Prussian survivors from Central Europe. They were steeped in the Berlin tradition; they came from the university and therefore demanded and achieved conceptual clarity. In calling for a differentiation of the sacred and the profane they were warning against a "Canaanite Messianism."

But it was not only the religious intellectuals who warned about a political theology infiltrating the State of Israel and threatening to grow into a "territorial Messianism." The secular historians Joshua Arieli, J. L. Talmon, and Uriel Tal also saw the connection between the post Six-Day War political theology and a Canaanite Messianism.

The idea of universal equality deriving from the Enlightenment, like the right to self-determination, was a guiding principle for Joshua Arieli in his approach to the Israeli–Palestinian blood-feud. From the day after the Six-Day War he was among the first to warn of the dangers of the Messianic and Canaanite inspiration of the Greater Land of Israel movement, and thus

founded the first dovish movement after the war – the "Movement for Peace and Security." In his opinion, there were two main schools of thought in Zionism, resulting in two different approaches to the territories captured in the war: the national-universalist school and the national-integralist school.[56]

Arieli warned against the territorial Messianism of the Greater Land of Israel movement, which combined the Revisionist ideology with Messianic religiosity of the Rabbi Kook variety. To this school of thought, one principle – the affinity of the people to the land – became an absolute demand requiring full realization. The duty of redeeming the land had replaced the duty of redeeming the people. Arieli stressed the importance of avoiding deceptive Messianic delusions and ideologies based on nationalist myths. In these myths, the past and future of the nation fused in fulfilling the drama of redemption: the return to Zion, the revival of the kingdom of Israel, and the sanctification of the land and the world through the advent of the Messiah.

According to Arieli, an old-new aspect of Judaism was revealed once more as a result of the 1967 war. It seemed as though events had shown the hand of Providence. Judaism appropriated for itself the physical side of Zionism and the biblical promise of settlement, and became a "tribal" religion. Nationalism was sanctified by religion and religion was sanctified by nationalism. In this "tribal religion" a new people was created, different from the Jewry outside Israel, which lived according to the norms of *halacha* and modern life.

Arieli thought that, together with the fetishistic Messianic vision, there had developed among the adherents of the Greater Land of Israel movement a Canaanite attitude to the land. Everything connected with the land of Israel – nature, the physical space, the seasons of the year, customs and memories – had been raised to the level of sanctity. The original Zionist approach had been the superimposition of the Jewish people's desire for national independence and the people's distress as a minority scattered among the nations of the world. The new integralist approach sanctified the place as the sole source of legitimacy only when the historical attachment to the land of Israel contended with the ideal of a national home; only then was there a need to choose between national territorial independence in part of the land of Israel and an attachment to the whole of the land of Israel. The majority in the Zionist movement continued to prefer national independence to an attachment to the whole Land of Israel, and thus the order of priorities was fixed.

Many in the Greater Israel camp wanted to grant citizenship to all the Palestinians and to include them in the state. Arieli perceived in this a Canaanite principle:

> These are former 'Canaanites', who rightly see the Greater Land of Israel project as *the* historical Opportunity with a capital "O" to implement their ideas and vision. But their attitude reflects the fact that they have always rejected the aims of the Zionist movement and its definition of the State of Israel as a Jewish state. Their hope that, with the inclusion of the

large Arab minority, the Jewish and Zionist character of the State of Israel would disappear, is a hope that is not unfounded.[57]

The "Canaanite" supporters of the Greater Land of Israel believed that with the society's abandonment of its Jewish and Zionist character there could be a full assimilation of all the inhabitants of the land in a single state, but Arieli found it hard to understand the logic of the members of the Greater Land of Israel movement who were willing to destroy the Jewish character of the State of Israel in the name of the boundaries of the biblical promise.

In his analysis of Jewish Messianism, Uriel Tal discerned two different schools of thought: the political-Messianic school of thought, which saw present-day historical phenomena as a realization of mystical realities; and the school of thought which held that in social and political matters one should act with caution and self-restraint as God alone is an absolute authority and one should therefore avoid intervening in his name. Both schools of thought accepted *halacha* as normative and as a binding authority. The adherents of the political-Messianic school of thought claim that the only difference between the Messianic period and other periods is that in the former the Jews are once again free from subjection to foreign rule. In this period, redemption has begun, and it will eventually be realized on a world-wide scale. This claim brings symbols down to the level of reality: that is to say, a stone or a plot of land is not a symbol of something sacred but is sacred in itself. On the other hand, there are those who believe that one function of *halacha* in the history of the Jewish people has been to liberate it from emotionality and mystification which could hold it back from important achievements like making peace. The emphasis on ethics and consideration for others in this approach is contrasted with the militancy of the active Messianic school of thought. "Truth and peace in your gates," to quote the prophet Zechariah, must be the basis of ethics and democracy. In the sayings of the Sages, there is a specific injunction always to search for wisdom; this search, it is held, will eventually lead to the coming of the Messiah. This approach rejects a political romanticism based on personal religious experience and rejects the intrusion of the sacred into politics.[58]

In this perspective, Ben-Gurion's Promethean Messianism is fascinating. He believed on the one hand that man must be sovereign and set up his universal human kingdom in this world, and on the other that man should not seek to achieve the kingdom of heaven on earth. It is better that he should not achieve the Messianic kingdom here and now but that he should strive for it with all his might:

> If God is man's belief in the Absolute, in the sublime, in the Creator of all things, or the highest concept of mercy, justice and love, the raising of man is the aspiration to resemble God as far as possible. And if that is "the kingdom of the Almighty," the Messianic vision is a striving towards

the rule of the kingdom of the Almighty on earth. This striving has no end, for one can get close to the kingdom of the Almighty but I fear one cannot reach it, for it is, as it were, an idea of the infinite.[59]

This Promethean Messianism formulated by Ben-Gurion is incompatible with transcendental Messianism such as that of Gush Emunim. The Kabbalah scholar Rivka Schatz, one of the intellectuals who have supported Gush Emunim, thought that the Messianic phenomenon is "greater than can be understood with the tools of scholarship we possess … Rather than a principle that can be described, it is a language through which hidden desires are revealed, it is the ultimate depth, it is the sanctuary of awe and hope where the dreams are stored which are not revealed in history."[60] In other words, Messianism is a language that reveals the "ultimate depth" of humanity, and it is something greater than those who create it or those who use it. This concept is a retreat from the Promethean Messianism of Zionism, which depends on the free will of sovereign human beings, and a return to non-human structures, to transcendental Messianism. Baruch Kurzweil at an early stage analyzed this phenomenon of a return to transcendental systems greater than man or than man's capacity to explain them.

In his expression "the structure of the archetype," Kurzweil, a product of European culture, was referring to the transcendental school of thought, which interpreted history in terms of deterministic, non-human forms. One of its theorists was Ludwig Klages, who developed an anti-rational approach focused on the conscious creation of myths and the belief that reality itself, and not its representations, consists of "symbols" or "expressions." The world-view of Oswald Spengler was characterized by this interpretation of reality as a symbol: in his opinion, the significance of morphological forms is that forms rule over life by means of symbols and metaphors; it is they that create the social reality and not human beings with free will. This aesthetic and metaphysical approach to history includes George Sorel's "myth," Klages' "aura," Spengler's "morphology," Ernst Jünger's "Gestalt," and mythical non-human concepts of the postmodernist era such as Claude Lévi-Strauss' "structure" and Michel Foucault's "episteme."[61]

The Messianic myth as a non-human structure was in Kurzweil's opinion also likely to lead to a negation of human decisions and actions. He disliked the idea that human actions are directed by mythical constructs, that a "system," a "structure," an "arché," an "episteme" should have priority over man and condition his actions in history.

The Messianic myth that Kurzweil warned against represented a moral and cultural relativism in which values changed in accordance with historical circumstances. The Messianic end justifies the means. Kurzweil was critical of postmodernist relativism, whose paradoxical possible result could be an affirmation of fundamentalism. The transcendental Messianic language cast aside the Promethean Messianic heritage, which was based on the sovereignty of man; critical observation was abandoned for a passionate defense of the

irrational, the mythical, mystery. Kurzweil's intention, similar to that of the Israeli philosopher and biblical scholar Yehezkel Kaufman (1889–1963) with regard to the Bible, was to eradicate myth. The danger was not an intellectual but a concrete one: playing with concepts of sparks and husks in the realm of politics could lead to a nihilistic theology.

In the post-modern era, transcendental Messianism has come back into our lives through the front door. It is active in the world of the post-Enlightenment: that is to say, in the world after the attempt to raise man to the level of God. Fundamentalism has internalized the Promethean initiative in order to increase its strength. In the pre-modern era, men waited with longing for the appearance of God, but they waited patiently and passively; in the modern era, they took their fate into their own hands and obliterated the traces of God; in the postmodern era they have lost their humility and want God to be summoned up immediately. This era has armed fundamentalism with the Promethean self-consciousness and the power of technology and the media. This reversal can take place if the secular is sanctified: only the secular can bring God closer. Fundamentalism has reconnected transcendental Messianism with Promethean Messianism; the theological has once again been joined to the political. Will the Zionist Prometheus return the fire to the gods?

Notes

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Index