

YORAM HAZONY, *The Jewish State*. New York, N.Y.: Basic Books 2000, 432pp.

Toward the end of term, an unsolicited paperback book arrived in my in-tray and those of many other academics who study nationalism. Given my marking load, I was tempted to shelve the book immediately as space filler. Thankfully I did not, for Yoram Hazony has written an extremely erudite, controversial volume that serves at once as both a neo-Zionist tract and a powerful academic study of the social impact of Jewish cosmopolitanism on the state of Israel. Hazony, a thirty-something intellectual close to Benjamin Netanyahu and one of the leading lights of conservative Jewish thought, never hides his ethno-nationalist cards. He is outspoken about the need for Israel to function as a Jewish state, with all that this entails in terms of security, immigration policy, historiography, and the university curriculum. The primary narrative of the state of Israel, Hazony maintains, must be a this-worldly eschatology of messianic biblical Zionism, wedded to a modern myth of Israel as the 2000-year old salvation of the Jewish *ethnie*. It is the deviation from this path - so evident in the cultural sphere of Israeli life - that forms the central concern of Hazony's work.

The work itself is not a manifesto, however. Instead, we are treated to a tightly argued, well-documented and analytically subtle treatment of Jewish anti-nationalism: a discourse that springs from sources deep in both traditional Judaism and the 19th century ecumenism of American and German Reform Jewry. From there, Hazony follows the cosmopolitan path to the spiritual Zionism of Hermann Cohen, Martin Buber, Hannah Arendt, Hans Kohn, and others within the German-speaking pre-WWII Jewish world. These individuals treasured a secular myth of the Jew as homeless exile, rendered uniquely sensitive (through suffering) to the Other, and

therefore singularly suited to found a universal civilization and a higher spirituality for all of mankind. Hazony contends that this constellation of ideas was extremely influential among the German-speaking Jews who formed the community's elite in both central Europe and America in the first half of the twentieth century. Though Zionism, aided by the assiduous diplomacy and effort of leaders like Herzl and Ben-Gurion and abetted by disasters like the Russian pogroms and the Holocaust, did carry the day, it was always a fragile reed, claims Hazony. More to the point, he claims, the cosmopolitan strain in the Jewish psyche has enjoyed a renaissance in Israel since the 1960's because the arid materialism of the Founders' Labor ideals failed to motivate a younger generation. Instead, the children of Zionism were weaned on the anti-nationalism of Martin Buber and his *protégés*, who dominated the social sciences and humanities faculties of Hebrew University from its inception in 1925.

It all amounts to a fascinating read, full of gripping prose and powerful anecdote, but does it stand up as an academic contribution? Yes and no. On the one hand, we are treated to a well-documented and fascinating account of the history of Jewish cosmopolitanism, the institutional retreat of Jewish nationalism post-1963 and the creeping 'post-Zionist' neutrality of the Jewish state. This is insightful. On the other hand, the book fails to trace the sociological shift in 'new class' attitudes which Hazony claims has transpired. There are no surveys and no detailed content analyses to trace such a large-scale change. And though I agree with Hazony's emphasis on culture, even a confirmed culturalist must give weight to the role of rising affluence and, in particular, the upheaval of demographic change. This might have rendered a more nuanced picture of Zionism's health, an account more in accord with the facts on the ground that have given rise to phenomenon like Shas, the election of Sharon, and the tenacity of the Settlement-building programme. Finally, there is almost no

awareness of simultaneous anti-nationalist trends outside of Israel which re-defined citizenship, opened doors to immigrants, smashed ethnic myths and championed a 'multiculturalist' mode of cosmopolitanism throughout the West.

Like myself, many readers in the Anglo-Saxon world will find Hazony's ultra-Zionist stance disturbing - especially in the wake of the recent tragic events of the Middle East, which have been compounded by Israeli policy. But Hazony's nationalism has focused scholarly attention on the woefully neglected hegemonic social force of our times: cosmopolitanism. Nationalism scholars tend to resound with talk of national revival, but it is imperative that we understand the equally significant *anti-nationalism* of our day. For this reason, Hazony's book deserves to be read by all who purport to understand the vicissitudes of nations and nationalism.