

## Why We Remain Jews: Can Jewish Faith and History Still Speak to Us?<sup>1</sup>

A Lecture delivered at the Hillel Foundation, The University of Chicago  
February 4, 1962

**Joseph Cropsey:** It is a strange title, and has the joint or the simultaneous characteristics of being apparently somewhat narrow and at the same time terribly<sup>2</sup> bold. It seems to be narrow in being apparently addressed to Jews: “why *we* remain Jews.” And why it is a bold-sounding title I suppose hardly needs to be spelled out, since it suggests that a question remains as to why people should continue to be Jews, something which as Jews perhaps you’d expect they’d never raise as a question. Now as it happens, the boldness of this fundamental question is connected with [the] breadth of it, I think. It is not a narrow question, as it will turn out, because the problem seems to arise in virtue of some very deep and far-ranging developments coming from modern science and modern politics. Some developments in modern political life seem to cause a special difficulty for people when they consider their Jewish character, and indeed which is what makes the question somewhat more than narrow when they consider the question of their religious affiliation at all. And I think that since the question does so much have to do with developments coming from modern science and modern political life, the question is one that probably occurs not only to Jews but also to people of every religious persuasion. Now I am absolutely uncommissioned to speak for any of the subsequent lecturers, and I don’t in any way wish to appear to anticipate what they might say, but it would surprise me very much if it didn’t turn out to be true that in one way or another the lectures will speak to the question that arises in the mind of everybody, not only of a Jew, and can be easily transformed with some modifications into the question why anybody should remain anything that he happens to be to begin with. Now one other consideration might deserve to be mentioned. Not only is the title of this series a bit bold in its appearance, but you might also have been somewhat taken aback by the extensive affiliation of the political science department with the discussion of this question. As to whether that contributes another element of boldness, I will have to allow you to judge on hearing what is forthcoming.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> There are two published versions of “Why We Remain Jews: Can Jewish Faith and History Still Speak to Us?” One version appears in *Leo Strauss: Political Philosopher and Jewish Thinker*, edited by Kenneth L. Deutsch and Walter Nicgorski (Rowman & Littlefield, 1994), and the other in *Jewish Philosophy and the Crisis of Modernity: Essays and Lectures in Modern Jewish Thought*, edited by Kenneth Hart Green (SUNY Press, 1997). They are referred to in footnotes in this transcript as “D&N” and “Green.”

The Leo Strauss Center has made a new typescript based on the remastered audiofile and has noted here the discrepancies between it and the published versions, with the exception of minor details such as changed word order or verb tenses. Deutsch and Nicgorski make editorial insertions and enclose them in square brackets; as these are evident, they are generally not noted. Because substantive footnotes, especially in Green, are good and comprehensive, we have added only a few footnotes, mainly identifying people. Ellipses indicate that what was said on the audiotape was inaudible or drowned out by laughter. The Strauss Center thanks Ralph Lerner and Kenneth Green for help with Hebrew terms.

<sup>2</sup> In Green: “apparently”

<sup>3</sup> Cropsey’s introduction does not appear in D&N.

This is one of those occasions on which it literally is true that the speaker needs no introduction. Everybody, I think, knows the reputation of the gentleman who we will now have the pleasure to hear. I will only say that it is a source of very great personal pleasure, and it would be any honor to anybody who is in the position of introducing the Robert Maynard Hutchins Distinguished Service Professor of Political Science, Doctor Leo Strauss.

[Applause]

**Leo Strauss:** Mr. Chairman, ladies and gentlemen. I have to make two prefatory remarks. One was partly anticipated by Dr. Cropsey, regarding the title.<sup>4</sup> When Rabbi Pekarsky approached<sup>5</sup> me first and suggested this title, I was repelled by it, not to say shocked by it. But then on reflection I found one could say something about it. [Laughter] And at any rate, I must say that to the extent to which I prepared this paper, I prepared it on the assumption that I was going to speak on the subject “Why Do We Remain Jews?” I learned of the subtitle only a few days ago, when thanks to some mishap in the printing division of Hillel Foundation I saw for the first time the subtitle, on which I could not with propriety speak, because after all everyone is a specialist, and my specialty is, to use a very broad and nonspecialist name, social science rather than divinity. Now social science demands from us, that we all know—and the gentlemen from the Social Science Division I see here, some of very different persuasion<sup>6</sup> than I, would agree with me that the characteristic of the social sciences [is] to start from solid if low facts and to remain as much as possible on that ground. No flights of fancy, no science fiction, no metaphysics will enter. That is clear.

The second point which I have to make by way of my introduction is of a more private nature, and I am sad to have to say that:<sup>7</sup> I could not prepare this lecture, for entirely private reasons, as I would have wished to prepare it. But nevertheless I didn’t cancel the lecture because I thought: I am prepared, if not indeed for this lecture but for this subject. I believe I can say without any exaggeration that since a very, very early time the main theme of my reflections has been what is called the Jewish question. May I only mention only a single fact, going very far back in my childhood. I believe I was about five or six years old, in some very small German town, not to say a village.<sup>8</sup> I saw in my father’s house refugees from Russia after some pogroms which had happened there: women, children, old men on their way to Australia. At that time it could not happen in Germany. We Jews there lived in profound peace with our non-Jewish neighbors. There was a government, not in every respect perhaps admirable but keeping an admirable order everywhere, and such things as pogroms would have been absolutely impossible. Nevertheless, this story which I heard<sup>9</sup> made a very deep impression on me which I have not forgotten until the present day. It was an unforgettable moment. I sensed for a moment that it could happen here. That was overlaid soon by other pleasing experiences, but still, it went to my bones, if I may say so. Now this and many other experiences, which would be absolutely boring and improper to rehearse, are the basis of my lecture. You will not expect a lucid presentation. On the other hand,

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<sup>4</sup> This sentence does not appear in D&N.

<sup>5</sup> In D&N: “first approached”

<sup>6</sup> In D&N, Green: “some of whom take a very different view”

<sup>7</sup> In D&N, Green: “which I am sad to have to make”

<sup>8</sup> In D&N, Green: “in a village”

<sup>9</sup> Green adds “about pogroms in Russia”

I will promise to give, as I indicated by the reference to the fact that I am a social scientist, what one would call a hardboiled one. I prefer to call it a frank one. I will not beat around the bush in any respect. At the same time, I hope that I can reconcile what not necessarily all social scientists do, the avoiding of beating around the bush, with a treatment which we would call *bekavod*, or to translate it, “honorable.” I think that should be possible. Now I turn to my subject.

The main title, taken by itself, implies that we could not remain<sup>10</sup> Jews, that there might be good reasons for not remaining Jews. It suggests even this possibility. The clearest expression of this view, of this premise, was given by Heinrich Heine, the well-known poet: “Judaism is not a religion but a misfortune.” The conclusions from this premise are obvious: Let us get rid of it as fast as we can and as painlessly as we can. If I may now use a somewhat, almost technical word, complete assimilation is the only help. Now this solution to the problem was always possible, for it was—and it was always suggested somehow, because at all times it was very difficult to be a Jew. Think of the Middle Ages, think of the Reformation, to say nothing of other times. In a way, even that solution was easier<sup>11</sup> in the past than it is now. It was sufficient in the Christian countries for a Jew to convert to Christianity, and therewith<sup>12</sup> he ceased to be a Jew. And we cannot count—and no statistician will ever be able to find out how many Jews took this easy way out of what Heine called a misfortune. Yet it was not—there were difficulties here;<sup>13</sup> I will not speak of certain obvious things like the separation of the only people one knew well, one’s family.<sup>14</sup> But there was a big experiment made,<sup>15</sup> and that was in Spain after 1492, when the Jews were expelled from Spain. What I say about these things is of course entirely due to authorities; I have no own knowledge in these matters, but a very solid authority I will refer [to] later.<sup>16</sup> Spain was the first country in which Jews felt at home, although they knew they were in exile, and therefore the expulsion from Spain was an infinitely greater misfortune for the Spanish Jews than the expulsion from France in 1340, if I remember well, and the expulsion of the Jews from England in 1290 and so. Quite a few Jews simply could not tear themselves away from Spain, and this difficulty was enhanced if the individuals in question were wealthy, had large possessions, especially landed possessions, and some of them, some leaders of Jewish communities converted to Christianity and they lived in<sup>17</sup> Spain. But this time it was different<sup>18</sup> because there were so many converts at the same time, and not one here and another there. As a consequence, there was a reaction to these many new Christians, and the reaction showed itself in distrust to them. Some Christians thought, many Christians thought that these converts were not sincere believers in Christianity but simply had preferred their earthly fortunes to their faith. The Inquisition entered and did all kinds of things which are most horrible to read, but of course in some cases<sup>19</sup>, if the Inquisition did its worst, it could not give a legal proof of the fact that

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<sup>10</sup> In D&N, Green: “cease to be”

<sup>11</sup> In D&N, Green: “that solution was even easier”

<sup>12</sup> In D&N: “then”

<sup>13</sup> In D&N, Green: “Yet it was not quite easy even then.”

<sup>14</sup> In D&N, Green: “separation from one’s relatives and friends”

<sup>15</sup> In D&N: “made with this solution”

<sup>16</sup> In D&N, Green: “entirely based on authorities I have read” (D&N enclose “based on” in square brackets).

<sup>17</sup> In D&N, Green: “stayed in”

<sup>18</sup> Green inserts “especially after the Jews were expelled from Spain in 1492”

<sup>19</sup> In D&N, Green: “of”

some one former Jew had engaged in Jewish practices or whatever it may be, and so quite a few survived. But one thing was done which was extralegal but not illegal: the Spaniards made a distinction between the old Christians and the new Christians, and they began to speak of Spaniards of pure blood, the old Spaniards, and by implication of the Spaniards of impure blood, meaning the *conversos*, the Jews who had converted to Christianity and were seamlessly . . . <sup>20</sup>

Now this is of course ancient history. Assimilation now does not mean conversion to Christianity, as we know, because assimilation now is assimilation to a secular society, a society which is not legally a Christian society, a society beyond the difference between Judaism and Christianity, and in this sense, if every religion is a particular<sup>21</sup> religion—Judaism, Christianity, Islam, and so on<sup>22</sup>—an areligious society, a secular society, a liberal society. In such a society there are no longer any legal disabilities of<sup>23</sup> Jews as Jews, as we know. But a liberal society stands and falls by the distinction between the political or the state and society, or by the distinction between the public and the private. In the liberal society, there is necessarily a private sphere within which the state, legislation does not<sup>24</sup> interfere. And it is an essential element of this liberal society, with its essential distinction between the public and the private, that religion as a particular religion, not as general religiousness,<sup>25</sup> is private. Every citizen is free to adhere to any religion he sees fit. Now given this, the necessary existence of such a private sphere, the liberal society necessarily makes possible, permits, and even fosters what is called by many people discrimination. And here in this well-known fact the Jewish problem, if I may call it this way, reappears. There are restricted areas and in various ways—I do not have to belabor this point, any glance at the *Journal of Sociology* or at Jewish journals would convince you of the fact if you have any doubt about its existence. Therefore the practical problem for the individual Jew on the low and solid ground is this: How can I escape “discrimination”—a term which I beg you to understand always as used with a quotation mark, because I would not use it of my own free will. Now the answer is simple: By ceasing to be recognizable as a Jew. There are certain rules of that which everyone can guess, I would say, *a priori*, and I wouldn’t be surprised if there were not an Ann Landers or another writer of this kind who had written perhaps a long list of these techniques. The most well known<sup>26</sup> are change of names, mixed marriages, childless marriages. It would be a worthy subject for a sociological study to enlarge this theme and to exhaust it, if possible. I do not have to go into that because it is not truly important, because this solution is possible at the most only for individuals here or there, not for large groups. I once heard the story of Jews in Los Angeles, of some Jews who tried to solve this discrimination problem by becoming Christian Scientists. And there were first four, then there were ten, and then more. Then at a certain moment the chairman of that group (I don’t know whether they called him “chairman”) said: Well, that is all very nice, but why don’t you make another group, a group of your own of Christian Scientists, meaning of former Jews. So simply I think we can

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<sup>20</sup> In D&N, Green: “and were forced to remain Jews in a manner.”

<sup>21</sup> In D&N: “always a particular”

<sup>22</sup> “Islam and so on” does not appear in D&N, Green.

<sup>23</sup> In Green: “put on”

<sup>24</sup> In D&N: “must not”

<sup>25</sup> In D&N, Green: “general religion”

<sup>26</sup> Green inserts “of such techniques”

leave it at that.<sup>27</sup> I would say that this possibility<sup>28</sup> is refuted by a very simple statistical phenomenon not known to me statistically but only by observation: the Jewish birthrate. A broad solution would require the legal prohibition against discrimination in every manner, shape, or form. And I have seen people, Jews, who thought just: We wanted that. Fraternities must not be permitted to pick their own people and, strictly speaking, no man can pick his own company. The prohibition against every discrimination would mean the abolition of the private sphere, the denial of the difference between state and society: in a word, the destruction of liberal society, and therefore it is not a sensible objective of policy. But some people would say: Well, why not the destruction of liberal society, if this is the only way in which we can get the abolition of discrimination, or what they call the abolition of injustice?

Now we have empirical data about this fact, the abolition of a liberal society and how it affects the fate of Jews, and that was done<sup>29</sup> on a large scale in a famous country, in a very large country, unfortunately a very powerful country, called Russia. You all are familiar with the fact that the policy of communism is<sup>30</sup> of the communist government and not of a private fraternity like another organization, [and]<sup>31</sup> is anti-Jewish. To which one could reply—well, that is undoubtedly the fact, I made some checks on it—I mean, I get some information from certain associations,<sup>32</sup> but I asked a gentleman whom I know very well, a friend of mine who is very much in favor of an arrangement<sup>33</sup> with Soviet Russia—he is a Jew. And I asked him: What did you observe about Jews in Soviet Russia? . . . And he said: Of course [it is] true, Jews are naturally discriminated against as a matter of principle by the government. And he gave me some specimens, so there is no question this is a fact.<sup>34</sup> But someone would say: All right, that is the policy of the present Russian government, it is not essential to communism. In other words, it is thinkable<sup>35</sup> to abolish liberal society, to abolish the difference between state and society without having afterward a more anti-Jewish policy than exists anywhere in the present West.<sup>36</sup> I would like to discuss this, this objection [that] it is not essential to communism to be anti-Jewish. I would say it is very uncommunistic to seek for the essence of communism outside of what they call the historic reality of communism in a mere ideal or aspiration. Trotsky's communism, which was different, which was surely not anti-Jewish in this sense, has been refuted by his highest authority: history. The Trotskyite is, I mean, a living, not only contradiction but manifest contradiction.<sup>37</sup> There is no longer a Western revolutionary proletariat, to put it on a somewhat broader basis, and that settles this issue perfectly. Only thanks to Stalin could the communist revolution survive. Stalin was a wiser statesman from this point of view than Trotsky, and to some extent than Lenin, by demanding socialism within a single country. Only thanks to Stalin

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<sup>27</sup> This sentence does not appear in D&N or in Green.

<sup>28</sup> Green adds: "i.e., of escaping "discrimination" by ceasing to be recognizable as Jews"

<sup>29</sup> In D&N: "an experiment was made"; in Green: "The experiment has been made"

<sup>30</sup> Green adds "the policy"

<sup>31</sup> Green adds "and this policy"

<sup>32</sup> In D&N, Green: "I have checked it by some information I received from certain quarters."

<sup>33</sup> In D&N, Green: "a deal"

<sup>34</sup> In D&N, Green: "he gave me a striking example."

<sup>35</sup> In D&N, Green: "possible"

<sup>36</sup> In D&N, Green: "without having to become anti-Jewish"

<sup>37</sup> In D&N: "A Trotskyite is a living, a manifest, contradiction"; Green has the same but eliminates the comma after "manifest"

could the communist revolution survive Hitler. But in order to survive Hitler, Stalin had to learn from Hitler. That is always so: in order to defeat an enemy, you have to take a leaf from his book. Stalin learned two grave lessons from Hitler. The first, which has nothing directly to do with our issue but should be mentioned, is that bloody purges of fellow revolutionaries are not only possible but eminently helpful. The old communist theory, as you surely know, was: No repetition of the bad experience of the French Revolution, where the revolution eats<sup>38</sup> its own children . . . And then Hitler showed by his classic act against Roehm that this can be done, and makes governing much easier. So number one, the big Stalin purges were all afterward.<sup>39</sup>

Secondly, and here I come back to our immediate subject, in pre-First World War socialism, where the distinction between Bolshevism and Menshevism was not so visible, at least not in the Western countries, it was an axiom, I quote: “Antisemitism is the socialism of the fools,” unquote, and therefore incompatible with intelligent socialism. But again, Hitler showed something,<sup>40</sup> and I think one can state the lesson which Hitler gave to Stalin very simply as follows. The fact that antisemitism is the socialism of the fools is an argument not against but *for* antisemitism. Given the fact that there is such an abundance of fools, why should one not steal that very profitable thunder? Of course one must not become like that great fool Hitler, a prisoner of these things—I mean, so that you see nothing but anti-Jewish things.<sup>41</sup> That is absurd. But judiciously used, you know, judiciously used, politically used, anti-Jewish policies make governing Russians and Ukrainians and so on and so on much easier than if one would be really strictly fair to Jews. I do not have to point out the obvious fact that we must think not only of the Russians and Ukrainians but also of the Arabs, and everyone can easily see that there are many more Arabs in the world than there are Jews. I mean, a sober statesman for whom the end sanctifies every means has no choice. Khrushchev, I think one can say, abandoned lesson number one regarding the desirability and usefulness of bloody purges of fellow<sup>42</sup> party members—for the time being, let me add<sup>43</sup>—but he surely kept lesson (b),<sup>44</sup> and it has come to stay.

I draw a conclusion for the time being:<sup>45</sup> It is impossible not to remain a Jew. It is impossible to run away from one’s origins. It is impossible to get rid of one’s past by wishing it away. There is nothing better than the uneasy solution offered by liberal society, which means legal equality plus private discrimination. We must simply recognize a fact which we all know, that the Jewish minority is not universally popular and the consequences which follow from that. We all know that there is in this country an entirely extralegal but not illegal, what we can call racial hierarchy, coming down from the Anglo-Saxons, down to the Negroes, and we are just above the Negroes. We must face that, and we must see that there is a similarity between the Jewish and

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<sup>38</sup> In D&N: “ate”

<sup>39</sup> In D&N, Green: “Hence, the big Stalin purges.”

<sup>40</sup> D&N, Green delete “Hitler showed something”

<sup>41</sup> In D&N, Green: “become a prisoner of this like that great fool Hitler who believed in his racial theories”

<sup>42</sup> “fellow” does not appear in D&N, Green.

<sup>43</sup> In D&N, Green: “let me add, for the time being.” Khrushchev was the leader of the Soviet Union until 1964.

<sup>44</sup> In D&N, Green: “lesson number two”

<sup>45</sup> “For the time being” does not appear in D&N, Green.

Negro question. And there are quite a few Jewish organizations which are very well aware of it, but also, in order to keep the record straight, we must not forget the difference. When we Jews fight for something which we may generally<sup>46</sup> call justice, we appeal to principles ultimately which, if I may say so, were our own: Bible.<sup>47</sup> When the Negroes fight for justice, they have to appeal to principles which were not their own, their ancestors' in Africa, but which they learned from their oppressors. This is a not-altogether negligible difference, which should however be stated by someone who doesn't want to beat around the bush.

I begin again, with another round.<sup>48</sup> There is no solution to the Jewish problem. The expectation of such a solution is due to the premise: every problem can be solved. There was a famous writer, a great mathematician in the sixteenth century—that I also read somewhere, I haven't read that man<sup>49</sup>—Vieta, who has literally said there is no problem which cannot be solved. And this is, of course, in application to social matters a premise of many well-meaning men in the West in the nineteenth-twentieth century. I disagree with them entirely. It is not self-evident that every problem can be solved, and therefore we should not be altogether<sup>i</sup> surprised if the Jewish problem cannot be solved. Let us briefly survey the solutions which have been suggested. The first is the assimilation of individuals, of which I disposed before. The second would be assimilation in a different form: Judaism understood as a sect like any other sect—I say advisedly “sect” and not religion—a society that is based on an entirely voluntary membership, so that today you belong to sect A, you change your mind, you leave sect A and turn to sect B, and the same applies of course to all members of your family. The fact that one<sup>50</sup> stems from Jewish parents would be entirely irrelevant from this point of view. I do not believe that this opinion can be reconciled with anything ever understood by Jewish, regardless of whether it is orthodox, conservative, or reform.

There is a third solution, the only one<sup>ii</sup> hitherto mentioned<sup>51</sup> which deserves our serious attention, and that is assimilation as a nation. Here the fact that the Jews are an ethnic group is honestly faced. But it is also implied that Judaism is a misfortune—*implied* that Judaism is a misfortune, and hence that we must do something to solve that problem. But the problem cannot be solved except on a national scale: We Jews are a nation like any other nation, and just as any other nation we have the right to demand self-determination. It leads necessarily to the demand for a Jewish state. This was the view taken by the strictly political Zionists. I emphasize the word “strictly” because in empirical fact<sup>52</sup> there are all kinds of combinations by no means due to accident but to one of the deepest principles of human nature, which is that man is the animal who wishes to have the cake and to eat it. To make clear what I mean, I remind you of the motto of the most impressive early statement of political Zionism: that is Pinsker's *Auto-emancipation*, written in the '80s of the last century. Pinsker's motto is this: If I am not for myself, who will I

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<sup>46</sup> In D&N, Green: “fairly”

<sup>47</sup> In D&N, Green: “Bible” does not appear.

<sup>48</sup> “with another round” does not appear in D&N, Green.

<sup>49</sup> In D&N, Green: “as I read somewhere” (Green encloses the phrase in parentheses)

<sup>50</sup> In D&N, Green: “the man”

<sup>51</sup> In D&N: “The only one[of those] mentioned”; in Green: “the only one, as opposed to the hitherto mentioned solutions”

<sup>52</sup> In D&N, Green: “in fact”

be?<sup>53</sup> And if not now, when? In other words, don't expect help from others, and don't postpone your worked-for solution indefinitely.<sup>54</sup> This is a quotation from a well-known Jewish book, *The Sayings of the Fathers*. But in the original something else is said, which Pinsker omitted: "But if I am only for myself, what am I?" The omission of that,<sup>55</sup> I think one can say, constitutes the definition of pureblooded political Zionism. There was, long before Pinsker, a man who sketched the principle of political Zionism, a great man but not a good Jew, and that was Spinoza. Towards the end of the third chapter of *Theologico-Political Treatise*, he says—I am recalling<sup>56</sup> now from memory: "If the principles of their religion did not effeminate the Jews, I would regard it as perfectly possible that one day, if the political constellation is favorable, they might succeed in restoring their estate." I don't believe he said "Palestine," because from his point of view Uganda would have been as good as Palestine. Now I did not interpret this very interesting utterance of Spinoza, what he means by the effeminating character of the Jewish religion, which is very austere, as you doubtless know, but he meant simply—by "effeminating" he meant trust in God instead of trust in one's Bren guns and other hardware.<sup>57</sup> But in spite of the undeniable fact that political Zionism pure and simple is based on a radical break with the principles of the Jewish tradition, I cannot leave that subject without paying it homage.<sup>58</sup> Political Zionism was more passionately and more soberly concerned with the human dignity of the Jews.<sup>59</sup> What it had in mind ultimately was that the Jews should return to their land, with their heads up, *qommemiut*,<sup>60</sup> but not by virtue of divine act but by virtue of political and military action: fighting.

It is, political Zionism, whatever one might say against it on this ground as well as on the other ground—that for simple demographic reasons it is impossible to settle all Jews in that very small land, and other things of this kind<sup>61</sup>—political Zionism was a very honorable suggestion, but one must add, it is also merely formal or poor. I would like to illustrate this. I was myself, as you might have guessed, a political Zionist in my youth, and was a member of a student organization and so on.<sup>62</sup> And in this capacity I occasionally met Jabotinsky—you know who Jabotinsky was, the leader of the Revisionists? I visited him, and he asked me: What are you doing? I said: Well, we read [the] Bible, we study Jewish history, we have Zionist theory, and of course keep abreast of developments. He said: And rifle practice? And I had to say no, which was of course a very great inconsistency on our part.<sup>63</sup> Now in this group, when I talked to my friends—some are now

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<sup>53</sup> In D&N, Green: "who will I be for?"

<sup>54</sup> In D&N: "postpone your decision"

<sup>55</sup> In D&N: "omission of these words"

<sup>56</sup> In D&N: "speaking"

<sup>57</sup> In D&N, and in Green with minor variation: "I did not explain what he meant by the effeminating character of the Jewish religion. He meant by that trust in God instead of trust in one's own power and 'hardware.'"

<sup>58</sup> In D&N: "homage to it"

<sup>59</sup> In D&N, Green: "Jews than any other movement."

<sup>60</sup> This biblical Hebrew word appears in Lev. 26:13. Transliterated, "qommemiut." Its sense is that this is the character of a free man and a free people, standing tall, erect, and upright, not bent under the yoke of servitude. The Strauss Center thanks Ralph Lerner for this note. "Qommemiut" does not appear in D&N, Green.

<sup>61</sup> In D&N, Green the sentence reads: "Yet it is impossible to settle all Jews in that very small land."

<sup>62</sup> In D&N: "Zionist student organization"

<sup>63</sup> In D&N: Strauss's response is simply "No."



very high officials in Israel—I made this observation. They were really<sup>64</sup> passionate Zionists, political Zionists, worked very much and were filled with enthusiasm. But after all, you cannot always make speeches and have political discussions or do other administrative work, although administrative work—you also have to have, so to say, a life of your own. And I was struck by the fact that some of these very estimable young men—the substance of their intellectual life, to the extent to which it was not merely academic and therefore of no particular interest outside of the academic halls, they were concerned with people like Balzac. I remember that distinctly. But it could also have been Stendhal or Dostoevsky, I don't care.<sup>65</sup> But the main point is that Zionism was strictly limited to political action. The mind was in no way employed, or the *heart*<sup>66</sup> was no way employed in matters Jewish.

Now this led to a reaction very early, an opposition to political Zionism by cultural Zionism. Cultural Zionism means simply that it is not enough to have a Jewish state: the state must also have a Jewish culture. A *Jewish* culture. In other words, it cannot live on the novels of France or other countries,<sup>67</sup> it must have a life of its own. Jewish culture means the product of the Jewish mind in contradistinction to other national minds. Now if we look, however, at what this means in specific terms, we see that of course the rock bottom of any Jewish culture are the Bible, Talmud, and Midrash. And if you take these things with a minimum of respect or seriousness, you must say they were not meant to be products of the Jewish mind. They were meant to be, ultimately, *Torah min hashamayim*, the Torah from heaven.<sup>68</sup> And this is the crux, the fatal difficulty for cultural Zionism.<sup>69</sup> Judaism cannot be understood as it is as a culture.<sup>70</sup> I mean, of course there are folk dances and pottery and all that, but you can't live on that. The substance is not culture, but divine revelation. And therefore the only consistent solution, clear solution is that which abandons, which goes beyond cultural Zionism and becomes clearly religious Zionism: return to the Jewish faith, to<sup>71</sup> the faith of our ancestors.

But here we are up against the difficulty which is underlying the very title of the lecture and everything I said before: What shall those Jews do who cannot believe as our ancestors believed? So while religious Zionism is the only clear solution, it is not feasible, humanly speaking, for all Jews. I repeat: It is impossible to get rid of one's past. It is necessary to accept one's past. That means [that] out of this undeniable necessity one must make a virtue. The virtue in question is fidelity, loyalty, piety in the old Latin sense of the word *pietas*. The necessity of taking this step appears from the disgraceful character of the only alternative: of denying one's origin, past, or heritage. A solution of a man's problem which can be achieved only through a disgraceful act is a disgraceful solution. But let us be detached, let us be objective, scientific. Is this universally true? Let us take—and we should really bust the case wide open in order to understand the difficulty. I am not interested in preaching up any solution; I try to help myself and, if I can, some of you in understanding our difficulty. Let us take a man by nature very gifted for all

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<sup>64</sup> In D&N: “truly”

<sup>65</sup> This and the prior sentence do not appear in D&N or Green.

<sup>66</sup> In D&N: “The mind [—or even the heart—]”; in Green: “or even the heart”

<sup>67</sup> The phrase beginning with “it cannot live on” does not appear in D&N or in Green.

<sup>68</sup> “the Torah” does not appear in D&N.

<sup>69</sup> In D&N: “the crux of the matter.”

<sup>70</sup> In D&N: “Judaism cannot be understood as a culture.”

<sup>71</sup> In Green: “return to”

excellences of man, of the mind and of the soul, who stems from the gutter. Is he not entitled to run away from the gutter? Surely one could even say that by being silent about his gutter origins he acts more decently than by displaying them and thus annoying others with a bad smell. Yet, however this may be, this interesting case—which deserves all our compassion, I think—is surely not *our* case. Our worst enemies admit this in one way or another. Our worst enemies are now called,<sup>72</sup> since I don't know how many years, anti-Semites, a word which I shall never use, which I regard as almost obscene. And I think if we are sensible, we abolish it from our usage. This was coined, as I learned a few weeks ago<sup>73</sup>—I said in a former speech here, it was coined by some German or French pedant. I smelled that.<sup>74</sup> But then I learned it was coined by a German pedant, a fellow called Marr. M-a-r-r. Now the reason why I say this is simple: antisemitism means hatred of Jews. We Jews have a similar word:<sup>75</sup> we call it *rish 'us*, viciousness, which is not a bad word at all, but which is of course not easily intelligible by non-Jews, and therefore we have to have a translation for that.<sup>76</sup> But hatred of Jews is perfectly intelligible; it was coined in a situation in which people could no longer justify their hatred of Jews by saying the Jews are not Christians. Ya? Not Christians. That was the traditional form of anti-Jewish conduct.<sup>77</sup> They had to find another reason, and since the nineteenth century<sup>78</sup> was almost as proud of science as the twentieth century, it had to be a scientific reason.<sup>79</sup> And science proves that the whole Western world consists of two races, fundamental races, Aryan and Semitic race; and therefore by calling it antisemitism, you could say, having great authorities, Renan and some others—and say: Well, we act on a spiritual principle, not on just mere hatred.<sup>80</sup> The difficulty of course is that the Arabs are also Semites, among others, and one of my Arab friends was occasionally asked in the Chicago suburbs: You are of course an anti-Semite. And he had to say: “I can't do that.”<sup>81</sup> [Laughter] It is an absurd thing.

So I speak of our enemies, and I want to show that they recognize that we are not from the gutter. Let us take the latest and crudest and simplest example: the Nazis. The Nazis' system was based on the notion of the Aryan. I mean, it was no longer a Christian Germany, it was to be an Aryan Germany. Now what does Aryan mean? Aryan does not mean what Renan and some linguists and so forth understand by “Aryan,” but Aryan has to be defined for lack of terms.<sup>82</sup> And the Nazis were simply compelled to give the Japanese, for example, the status of Aryans, and quite a few others. In a word, “Aryan” had no meaning<sup>iii</sup> but “non-Jewish.” Now the Nazi regime was the only regime of which I know which was based on no principle other than the negation of Jews; therewith it could not define its highest objective except by putting the Jews into the center. That is a great compliment to us, not intended as such. I take more serious cases:

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<sup>72</sup> In D&N: “not called”

<sup>73</sup> This beginning of the sentence is deleted in D&N, Green.

<sup>74</sup> It is not entirely clear that Strauss says “smelled.”

<sup>75</sup> In D&N, Green: “Why not call it as we Jews call it?”

<sup>76</sup> The part of the sentence following “viciousness” does not appear in D&N.

<sup>77</sup> This sentence is omitted in D&N, Green.

<sup>78</sup> In D&N: “thirteenth century”

<sup>79</sup> In D&N: “the reason had to be scientific”

<sup>80</sup> In D&N, Green: “by speaking of anti-Semitism, our enemies could claim that they acted on a spiritual principle, not mere hatred.”

<sup>81</sup> In Green: “I can't be that.”

<sup>82</sup> This sentence does not appear in D&N, Green.

in late classical antiquity,<sup>83</sup> we—and incidentally also the Christians but I speak only of us—were accused<sup>iv</sup> [by] the pagan Romans of being convicted<sup>84</sup> of hatred of the human race. Convicted of hatred—I forget minor and trivial things: convicted of hatred of the human race.<sup>85</sup> I contend that it was a very high compliment, and I will try to prove it.

This accusation reflects an undeniable fact, for the human race consists of many nations or tribes, or in Hebrew, *goyim*. A nation is a nation by virtue of what it looks up to. In antiquity, a nation was a nation by virtue of its looking up to its gods. They did not have ideologies at that time; they did not have even ideas at that time: at the top there were the gods. And now our ancestors asserted *a priori*, that is to say, without looking at any of these gods, that these gods were nothings and abominations, that the highest of any nation<sup>86</sup> was nothings and abominations.<sup>87</sup> In the light—I cannot develop now, then we would have to go into broader, into that metaphysical science fiction thing which I have tried to avoid, but I must at least make one remark. In the light of the purity which Isaiah understood when he said of himself, “a man of unclean lips in the midst of a nation of unclean lips,” the very parthenon is impure. This is still alive in Judaism today, not among all Jews but among some. I heard the story [that] when Ben-Gurion went to Thailand for negotiations or so, he went to a Buddhist temple, and there was quite an uproar in Israel about that on the old, old grounds. And I suggested to the man who told me: He should have wired to Ben-Gurion that he should say what he was meditating upon in that Buddhist temple was the foreign policy of Israel, which might be pleaded as an attenuating<sup>88</sup> circumstance.

Now the fight of our ancestors against Rome was unique. We have the two greatest cases: the Jewish fight against Rome and the German fight against Rome. The Germans were more successful from the military point of view: They defeated the Romans; we were defeated. Yet still, victory and defeat<sup>89</sup> is not the highest criterion, and if we compare these two actions we see that the fight of our ancestors was not merely a fight against foreign oppression but it was a fight in the name of what one should very provisionally call an idea, the only fight in the name of an idea made against the Roman Empire.

The next great anti-Jewish body was the Christian republic. The hatred of Jews persisted, but changed. In some respects it was intensified, for the Jewish people’s posture toward the God-man was the same as that against the manlike god of the Greeks and Romans. And since there are many Christians today who are no longer Trinitarians, one difference surely remains between Judaism and Christianity which was never, never taken back. The Christian assertion [that] the redeemer has come was always countered<sup>90</sup> by our ancestors to the assertion that the redeemer has *not* come. One can perhaps say, and I say this without any animus, that the justification of Judaism in its fight with Christianity was supplied by the Crusades. One only has to read that history as a Jew to be satisfied with the fact that one is a Jew. The Crusades consisted partly of a

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<sup>83</sup> In D&N, Green: “the anti-Judaism of late classical antiquity”

<sup>84</sup> In D&N, Green: “standing convicted”

<sup>85</sup> This sentence does not appear in D&N, Green.

<sup>86</sup> In Green: “the highest things”

<sup>87</sup> In D&N: “nothing and an abomination.”

<sup>88</sup> In Green: “extenuating”

<sup>89</sup> In D&N: “victory or defeat”; in Green: “victory as opposed to defeat”

<sup>90</sup> In D&N: “counted”

simple orgy of murder of Jews. Wherever the Crusaders went, above all in Jerusalem itself, how did our ancestors act? Permit me to read a few lines from a writing of the greatest living Jewish historian, Yitzhak F. Baer, *Galut*.

The best descriptions<sup>91</sup> left us of the persecutions that took place at the time of the First Crusade are to be found in Hebrew records. These were constructed from shorter reports describing the happenings in individual places and provinces, and encountered similar pamphlets with opposite tendencies that were circulated by the Christians. In this age, religious-national martyrdom reaches its highest expression. These martyrs are no seekers after death like the early Christians, no heroes challenging destiny. Violence and death come unsought. And the whole community suffers—old and young, women and children, willing or not. At first they fight for the preservation of the community, and they hold off their enemies before the walls of the episcopal palace or the fortress just as long as defense is possible.

One must add here a remark, which Baer of course does not deny, that the higher clergy behaved on the whole much better than the lower clergy. You know, the peasants' sons who had become<sup>92</sup> priests were much more fanatical and savage than the famous case of Bernard de Clairvaux,<sup>93</sup> who tried to prevent that, but they did not prevail.

But then, when all hope for safety is gone, they are ready for martyrdom. No scene is more stirring than the sabbath meal of the pious Jews in Xanten [Romania—LS] (1096): Hardly had the grace before the meal been recited when the news came of the enemy's approach; immediately they fulfilled the ceremony of the closing grace, recited the formula expressing faith in the oneness of God, and carried out the terrible act of sacrifice that was renewed again and again, generation after generation, from the time of Masada<sup>94</sup> [in the Roman world—LS]. The martyrologies have described<sup>95</sup> in frightful clarity the<sup>96</sup> ritual of voluntary mutual slaughter (not the sacrifice of enemies, falsely ascribed to the Jews), and have glorified it in poetry modeled after the sacrifice of Isaac (Akedat Yitzhak).<sup>97</sup>

The Reformation abolished bloody persecution. But the unbloody persecution which remained was in some respects worse than the bloody persecution of the Middle Ages because it did not call forth the fighting qualities which were still so powerfully visible in that glorious time for us of the Crusades.

I summarize. Our past, our heritage, our origin is then not misfortune, as Heine said, still less

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<sup>91</sup> In D&N: "description"

<sup>92</sup> In D&N: "became"

<sup>93</sup> D&N insert ellipses and "de Clairvaux" in brackets, suggesting that the audio tape was not clear to the transcriber.

<sup>94</sup> In D&N: "Macedon [Massada]"

<sup>95</sup> In D&N: "here described"

<sup>96</sup> In D&N: "and"

<sup>97</sup> "Akedat Yitzhak" does not appear in D&N. Yitzhak F. Baer, *Galut*, trans. Robert Warshow (New York: Schocken Books, 1947), 24-25.

baseness. But suffering indeed: heroic suffering, suffering stemming from the heroic act of self-dedication of a whole nation to something which it regarded as infinitely higher than itself; in fact, as<sup>98</sup> the infinitely highest. No Jew can do anything better for himself today than to live in remembering this past. But someone might say: Is this sufficient, if the old faith has gone? Must the Jew who cannot believe what his ancestors believed<sup>99</sup> not admit to himself that his ancestors dedicated themselves to a delusion, if to the noblest of all delusions? Must he not dedicate himself to life<sup>100</sup> in a world which is no longer Jewish, and by the same token no longer Christian but, as one could say, post-Judeo-Christian? However repulsive the thought of assimilation must be to any proud man, must he not accept assimilation as a moral necessity and not as a convenience? Is not the noblest in man his capacity to assimilate himself to the truth?

Very well, let us then reconsider assimilation. We will be helped in that reconsideration in a<sup>101</sup> statement by a non-Jew, by a German. By a German, in addition, who has a very bad reputation in many quarters, and that is Friedrich Nietzsche. I would like to read to you an aphorism which will not please every one of you, from Nietzsche's *Dawn of Day*, aphorism 205.<sup>v</sup> The translation is very—is not good. I mean, this man had no sense of language. I have tried to make some corrections while I went, but not enough.<sup>102</sup>

*The people of Israel.* One of the spectacles which the next century will invite us to witness is the decision regarding the fate of the European Jews. It is quite obvious now that they have cast their die and crossed their Rubicon: the only thing that remains for them is either to become masters of Europe or to lose Europe, as they once centuries ago lost Egypt, where they were confronted with a similar either/or. In Europe, however, they have gone through a schooling of eighteen centuries such as no other nation has ever undergone here, and the experiences of this dreadful time of training have benefited not only the community but, even to a greater extent, the individual. As a consequence, the resourcefulness of the modern Jews both in mind and soul is extraordinary. Amongst all the inhabitants of Europe, it is the Jews least of all who try to escape from any distress by recourse to drink or to suicide, as the less gifted are so prone to do. [Every sociologist knows that the suicide situation has terribly changed. That was still the old sturdy Jews . . . —LS] Every Jew can find in the history of his own family and of his ancestors [a long record of instances of the greatest coolness and their heroic *spernere se sperni* that surpasses the virtues of all the saints.

People wished to make them contemptible by treating them contemptibly for nearly twenty centuries,]<sup>103</sup> and refusing them access to all honors and everything honorable,

<sup>98</sup> In Green: "which it regarded as"

<sup>99</sup> In D&N: "believe"

<sup>100</sup> In D&N, Green: "a life"

<sup>101</sup> In D&N: "this"; in Green, "by this"

<sup>102</sup> Strauss's remarks about the translation are deleted by D&N, Green. The translation is John MacFarland Kennedy's, *The Dawn of Day* (Macmillan, 1911). The passage as read is close to Kennedy's translation, with some changes.

<sup>103</sup> There is a break in the tape at this point. The missing portion of the aphorism supplied in brackets is from *The Dawn of Day*, translated by John MacFarland Kennedy (Macmillan, 1911). Strauss says "of his ancestors a treasure"; "a treasure" has been deleted.

and by pushing them further down into the more sordid trades, and under this process indeed they have not become any cleaner. But contemptible? They have never ceased for a moment from believing themselves qualified for the very highest things, nor have the virtues of the sufferers ever ceased to adorn them. The manner in which they honor their parents and children, old times, forgotten times, the reasonableness of their marriages and marriage customs, *tempora mutantur*,<sup>104</sup> this distinguishes them amongst all Europeans. Besides this, they have been able to create for themselves a sense of power and eternal vengeance from the very trades that were left to them or to which they were left. Even in palliation of their usury we cannot help saying that without this occasional pleasant and useful torture inflicted on their enemies, they would have experienced difficulty in preserving their self-respect for so long, for our self-respect depends upon our ability to make reprisals in both good and evil. Nevertheless, their revenge never urges them on too far, for they all have that liberality of mind and of soul produced in men by frequent changes of place, climate, and customs of neighbors and oppressors. They possess by far the greatest experience in all human intercourse, and even in their passion they exercise a caution which this experience has developed in them. They are so certain of their intellectual versatility and shrewdness that they never, even when reduced to the direst straits, have to earn their bread by manual labor as common workmen, porters, or farmhands. [Well, he knew only German Jews—LS]<sup>105</sup> In their manners we can still see that they have never been inspired by chivalric feelings, or that their bodies have never been ever girt with fine weapons: a certain obtrusiveness alternates with a submissiveness which is often tender and almost always painful.

Now, however, that they unavoidably intermarry more and more, year after year, with the noblest blood of Europe, they will soon have a considerable heritage of good manners of the mind and the body, so that in another hundred years they will have a sufficiently noble aspect not to render themselves, as masters, disgraceful to those who will be their subjects. And this is important; and therefore a settlement of the question is still premature. They themselves know very well that the conquest of Europe or any act of violence is not to be thought of, but they also know that someday or other Europe may like a ripe fruit fall into the hands which extend themselves towards it only a bit. In the meantime, it is necessary for them to distinguish themselves in all departments of European distinction, and to stand in the front rank until they shall have advanced so far as to determine themselves what distinction shall mean. Then they will be called the inventors and guides of the Europeans whose shame they will no longer offend.

And then where shall an outlet be found for this abundance of great impressions accumulated during such an extended period and representing Jewish history for every Jewish family, this wealth of passions, virtues, resolutions, resignations, struggles and victories of all kinds—where it can find an outlet but in great intellectual men and works? On the day when the Jews will be able to exhibit to us as their own work such jewels and golden vessels as no European nation, with its shorter and less profound experience, can or could produce, when Israel shall have changed its eternal vengeance into an eternal

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<sup>104</sup> An equivalent of “old times, forgotten times” does not appear in Kennedy’s translation, nor does “*tempora mutantur*.”

<sup>105</sup> In D&N: “Strauss remarks, “Well, we knew only Germany.”

benediction for Europe, then that seventh day will once more appear, and the old Jewish God may rejoice in Himself in his creation, in His chosen people, and all, all of us will rejoice with Him!

This is the most profound and most radical statement on assimilation which I have read. It doesn't lose in significance by the fact that Nietzsche's statement was not written without irony. In other words, he had no hopes in this respect, he only thought something through. Assimilation cannot mean abandoning the inheritance, but only giving it another direction, transforming it. And assimilation cannot be an end, it could only be a way toward that. Assimilation is an intermediate stage in which it means distinguishing oneself in pursuits which are not as such Jewish but, as Nietzsche would say, European—as we would say, Western. After having received a notion of what assimilation at the highest could mean, and only in this way can we understand any assimilation, we must look at the actual assimilation. After one has heard such a passage, one trembles to look at the actual assimilation. There exists a kind of Jewish glorification of every clever or brilliant Jewish mediocrity, which is as pitiable as it is laughable. It reminds one of villagers who have produced their first physicist and hail him for this reason as the greatest physicist that ever was. I <sup>106</sup>refuse to quote chapter and verse, but when I read statements in Jewish periodicals about Jewish celebrities, I am always reminded of that. I became so distrustful of it at a time that I didn't believe that Einstein was of any significance. I am not a theoretical physicist, and therefore I was as entitled to my opinion as any other ignoramus. [Laughter] Then I asked a trustworthy friend of mine, a physicist, a Jew. I told him my opinion: I had the feeling that this is really a propaganda machine organized by Einstein's wife. I believe that was, by the way, true; I had heard that . . . <sup>107</sup> [Laughter] But then he told me: "You are mistaken. He was present at a seminar in Berlin, and that was tops in physics—Planck and other such men were present." And it was simply so. Einstein had the defect that he didn't know elementary mathematics. I mean, that was his genuine defect. But his conceits, I mean his inventions, were surpassing that of all the others there. And he said, "You must believe it. He really is a first-rate physicist, and surely the greatest physicist of this epoch. It is an empirical fact." So I accepted that, but I must say I am still proud of my resistance, because this inclination to self-glorification in things in which there is no reason for self-glorification is a disgrace. That we have today so many outstanding Jews is due—let us not deceive ourselves about that—to the general decline, to a general victory of mediocrity. It is today very easy to be a great man. [Laughter] "Among the blind, the one-eyed is king," is a proverb.

I would like to emphasize this. Nietzsche's statement, which seems to be nearly, almost dithyrambic, is based on a very deep analysis, perhaps on the deepest analysis ever made of what assimilation could possibly mean. Now the most patent defect of Nietzsche's analysis seems to me to be this. The regeneration or cleansing which he had in mind as part of the process proved to be insufficient as the work of individuals, however numerous, or dedicated, or gifted. It required and requires an act of national cleansing or purification, and this in my mind was the establishment of the state of Israel. Everyone who has seen Israel, nay, everyone who has witnessed the response to that act in New York will understand what I mean. But this fact refutes Nietzsche's dream. For the establishment of the state of Israel means, while it may be in a way a

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<sup>106</sup> In Green: "And so my physicist friend said to me"

<sup>107</sup> In D&N: "I have heard that there was [such an effort]"; in Green: "I have heard that we have had one"

progress<sup>108</sup> in Jewish assimilation, as it surely is, [it] is also a reassertion of the difference between Jews and non-Jews. If I say an act of assimilation, may I tell another story from my youth? I had a Jewish friend who was not a Zionist; his father was an old-fashioned liberal Jew. They called themselves in Germany “German citizens of Jewish faith.” That was the name—you remember that, ya?<sup>109</sup> And he said when he goes to fetch his father from the synagogue and sees him together with his other assimilationist friends, and then he sees this young generation of Zionist boys, then he must admit [that] this older generation which is so un-Jewish by refusing any national character of Judaism is much more Jewish than this young generation which was . . .<sup>110</sup> It’s undeniable.

Judaism is not a misfortune, to come back to my beginning, but let us say a heroic delusion. In what does this delusion consist? The one thing needful is righteousness or charity. That in Judaism is the same. This notion of the one thing needful is not defensible if the world is not the creation of the just and loving God, the holy God. The root of injustice and uncharitableness which abounds is not in God but in the free acts of his creatures: in sin. The Jewish people and their fate are the living witness for the absence of redemption. This, one could say, is the meaning of the chosen people: the Jews are chosen to prove the absence of redemption. The greatest expression surpassing everything that any present-day man could write is that great Jewish prayer which will be known to some of you and which is a stumbling<sup>111</sup> block to many: *Olenu leshabeach*. It would be absolutely improper for me to read it now.

But let us reflect for one more moment, for a few more moments—have this patience—about delusion. What is a delusion? We also say a dream. No nobler dream was ever dreamt. It is surely nobler to be victim of the most noble dream than to profit from a sordid reality and to wallow in it. Dream is akin to aspiration, and aspiration is a kind of divination of an enigmatic vision; and an enigmatic vision in the emphatic sense is a perception of the ultimate mystery, of the truth of the ultimate mystery. The truth of the ultimate mystery—the truth that there *is* an ultimate mystery, that being *is* radically mysterious—cannot be denied even by the unbelieving Jew of our age. That unbelieving Jew of our age, if he has any education, is ordinarily a positivist, a believer in science, and I believe he will be a believer in science if not a positivist even without an education. As scientist he must be concerned with the Jewish problem among innumerable other problems. He reduces the Jewish problem to something unrecognizable: religious minorities, ethnic minorities: in other words, you can put together the characteristics of the Jewish problem by finding one element of it there, another element there. I am speaking from experience. I had once a discussion with some social scientists in the presence of Rabbi Pekarsky, where I saw how this was done. (It was like the passage which you find there. I forgot all the names.) The unity of course was completely missed. The social scientist cannot see the phenomenon which he tries to diagnose or analyze as it is. His analysis is based on a superficial and thoughtless psychology or sociology. This sociology or psychology is superficial and thoughtless because it does not reflect on itself, on science itself. At the most, it raises the

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<sup>108</sup> In Green: “an act or a progress”

<sup>109</sup> Strauss presumably addresses a member of the audience. This question is deleted in D&N.

<sup>110</sup> In Green: “which was accepting of the national character of the Jews.” [At 1:12:30]

<sup>111</sup> Strauss stumbles on this word.



question: What is science? It is constitutionally unable to raise the question: Why science?<sup>112</sup> Nevertheless, whatever might follow from that, I must now by God come to a conclusion.

Science as the positivist understands it is susceptible of infinite progress. That you learn in every elementary school today, I believe: that every result of science is provisional and subject to future revision, and that will never change. In other words, fifty thousand years from now there will still be results entirely different from those now, but still subject to revision. Science is susceptible of infinite progress. But how can science be susceptible of infinite progress if its object does not have an inner infinity? In other words, the object of science is everything that is: being. The belief admitted by all believers in science today, that science is by its nature essentially progress and eternally progressive, implies, without saying it, that being is mysterious. And here is a point where the two lines which I have tried to trace do not meet exactly, but where they come<sup>vi</sup> within hailing distance. And I believe [that] to expect more in a general way, of people in general, would be unreasonable. I believe I have talked too much.

[Applause]

### Question and Answer Session

**Joseph Cropsey:** <sup>113</sup>—desirable to designate some human being to be a discussant. For various reasons, I won't go beyond one short remark. Dr. Strauss is known to have spoken other times on the theme of Jerusalem and Athens. My only observation tonight is: I believe he has done it again. It seems to me that what Dr. Strauss has said with respect to the solution of the Jewish problem, or the character of the Jewish problem in the way in which a respectable man can hope to understand the solution of it, is a sort of affirmation of the human unity of the excellences known to the old tradition of the Jews, and also those timeless things that the Greeks maybe in their own way first articulated with respect to the moral and the intellectual virtues. I don't think that it's necessary for me to say more. The understanding was that the floor would be thrown open to questions, and that's altogether a matter of convenience and the wishes of Dr. Strauss. If he wishes to entertain questions now, he will say so; or if it seems better to Dr. Strauss and Rabbi Winograd<sup>114</sup> that there be some break at this point, that's a matter for the principal party.

**LS:** . . .

**JC:** Dr. Strauss opts for the present, no postponement of the responsibilities. I have only one request. If you will be only so good as to defer to the mechanical arrangement here, and in voicing your question, speak out loud and clear, so that not only the answer but also the question will be part of the record. Then you will be helping Rabbi Pekarsky very much in his regrettable absence.

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<sup>112</sup> This question does not appear in D&N, Green.

<sup>113</sup> Cropsey's introductory remarks and the exchanges between Cropsey and Strauss are deleted in D&N, whose transcript of the question session begins with the first questioner.

<sup>114</sup> Rabbi Richard Winograd.

**LS:** Mr. Chairman, can you make a decision, a ruling now, which is of some importance. How much time do you give for the discussion?

**JC:** How much time would you like?

**LS:** Well, I have no [laughter] — you know me.<sup>115</sup>

**JC:** Maximum twenty . . .

**LS:** Let's make it thirty, otherwise . . .

**JC:** The stipulation is for no more than a half an hour of interrogation.

**LS:** This is an interpretation of . . . I said *at least* half an hour. [Laughter] Mr. Cropsey is much more humane than I am. [Laughter]

**JC:** I have only one of object of my humaneness at the moment, and that's the speaker for the evening.

**Questioner:** Dr. Strauss, the title of the lecture, "Why do we remain Jews": Am I correct that your answer is that we have no choice?

**LS:** As honorable men, surely not.

**Same Questioner:** Even one step back from that, even if we wish to be dishonorable, do we have a choice?

**LS:** Even—I tried to show that even then it wouldn't work, because you have to have a very, very special—like a murderer, you know, who thinks that the easiest thing [is] to get the money he wants by murder, and then he lives his whole life with that murder. I mean, that is not a practical thing. And this fellow who tries to do that will live for the rest of his life with his solution; in other words, his solution will prove to be a problem. Sure. I made this reservation only for this [reason]: one cannot look into human beings, and the human beings, one knows only a limited number. There may be somewhere, perhaps in Alaska, or—a man of Jewish origin who no one knows as a Jew and lives happily ever after. That I cannot exclude. But you get my point. Yes?

**Questioner:** I tend to be perhaps less pessimistic temperamentally than you, and perhaps both younger and more foolish, but it seems to me that one of the things in the current scene that could contribute to a better outlook for the problem of discrimination is just the best of sciences. If we as Jews can better come to understand the Christian, the non-Jew, sociologically, culturally, as well as just in terms of theological doctrine, and they can come to understand *us* better sociologically, and culturally, and historically—and so also with the Negro—we can yet remain Jews, non-Jews, and Negroes and yet win some mutual respect.

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<sup>115</sup> Here there is whispering between Strauss and Cropsey.

**LS:** Well, sure. I would say—I deplore the word pessimism, because that means the belief that this world is the worst of all possible worlds, and which I think very few people believe. It is impossible to maintain. But I would say—you think I am more apprehensive than you are?

**Same Questioner:** Well, I say, can we not hope, at least? Let us not hope for winning an end to discrimination, perhaps—I mean, everyone has his friends, everyone has his likes and his dislikes, and we don't wish to take that away from anyone, but we can certainly hope for increasing the mutual respect of peoples of different religions and different races.

**LS:** Sure, sure! I mean, everyone should try to educate himself and, if he can, educate others to behave as decent human beings. But whether the so-called prejudices, meaning the erroneous opinions, are so important—[in] some cases, they may be important, but whether they are universally so important can be doubted. You see, knowledge of another group, a nation or whatever it may be, is not necessarily conducive to good relations. The cultural exchange between Germany and France shortly before the First World War and the whole few decades there<sup>116</sup> surpassed everything which the most sanguine man could expect now to take from cultural exchange with Soviet Russia, and there was not someone, a security officer at the elbow of every German in Paris or of every Frenchman in Berlin. And yet, when the thing came to the test, all these cultural relations, which were much more intimate than the cultural relation between United States scientists and Soviet scientists, it meant absolutely nothing for their fate.<sup>117</sup> In other words, in political matters the stronger and lower is more powerful than the higher and weaker. That's a general point. But by all means, go on. There is no question, if there are absolute misconceptions—that people think, for example, to take a somewhat neutral example, that every Negro is given to violence and to violent crimes and so, of course it is good to tell him: You are absolutely mistaken, that is a false generalization. Surely! I am all in favor of that. But I don't believe that this—by the way, I would not regard my view as apprehensive in particular, but it is only if you expect the possibility of perfect harmony among human beings in general, then it would be indeed disappointing. But what right do we have to expect that, short of divine intervention? In other words, if that day would come where there would not be a trace of discrimination against Jews, and perfect amity between all non-Jews and all Jews in this country, I bet there will be another line of discrimination drawn. Men need that, I believe. Ya, so. Yes?

**Questioner:** In the discussion as to why we remain Jews, I do not know as I heard a definition of what a Jew is. I bring this up because, going back to the historical treatment, whatever similarities there may be between Jews today and our Jewish ancestors, I think there has undeniably been a change from our ancestors,<sup>118</sup> and I wonder, reflecting on this, if with this change we can't think of something that we are progressing towards, perhaps something which we can't define today, but still a progression; and also, looking at people in the world in general, if all people aren't progressing towards some goal.

**LS:** Ya, I believe I understand your position; it has a long and very respectable ancestry also. But I would say this, that there is a change from our ancestors to us is the massive fact which is

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<sup>116</sup> “And the whole decade there” does not appear in D&N.

<sup>117</sup> In Green: “the fate of their political relations.”

<sup>118</sup> “I think there has been . . .” does not appear in D&N.

underlying my whole paper. Otherwise, we would sit here and perhaps listen to a homiletic interpretation of some biblical verse and not discuss that, or discuss some very subtlety of the religious law and not do what we do. Surely, however. And you say: Things have changed. Could there not be further progress? This means the change from our ancestors to us was unqualifiedly a progress. A very grave assertion. That if you take as the standard the absence of pogroms or other bloody things of this kind, and a standard of living and many conveniences—legal security, and other greater things, even—it is undeniable. Also science. I mean, there is no question that today science is much more advanced as science than it was centuries ago. But is this sufficient? Can we simply speak of progress?

**Same Questioner:** I think there has also been a progress theologically speaking.

**LS:** What is that?

**Same Questioner:** A change. It might be individualistic, but it is a progress.

**LS:** Yes, but you see, when you say, “Let the individual decide,” you say it is absolutely arbitrary preferences, and then we can no longer speak of progress. So why don’t you stick to your guns? That would then mean that theology written in our century, Jewish theology, may be superior—is in fact superior, I would say, if you assert progress—to, say, the theology of Yehuda Halevi, Maimonides, or someone else. I mean, prior to investigation, it is surely possible. Let me only draw your attention to one point.<sup>119</sup> The enormous progresses which have been achieved in every respect, in the standard of living and even politically, have very much to do with modern technology, which itself is based on modern science. This same science and technology has also made possible for the first time, or is about to make possible, the destruction of the human race. The most wicked and vicious human beings who ever were, Nero himself, could not, even if he wished, think of such devices like an atomic bomb. I mean, in other words, his killing capacity did not reach the state of what is called by some people<sup>120</sup> “overkill.” That is exactly the other side—I mean, when we speak of positive progress, we must also say that this progress is essentially, not accidentally, accompanied by a progress in destructiveness. And if we look at Jewish history . . .<sup>121</sup> we must say we have gone through terrible things, but such a thing as the Nazis has never happened before, before the twentieth century. If you look at the terrible persecution of the Middle Ages, you have to admit that this was not the *government* which demanded it. The government, represented by the higher clergy, was opposed to it. I mean, one can prove this by a simple picture. In some medieval churches, especially in the Münster in Strasbourg, there is a presentation of the church and the synagogue. The church: eyes open; the synagogue: blindfolded. “Blindness,” as the Christians call it. But there is nothing whatever mean and degrading in that, nothing whatever. It is a dogmatic assertion to which the Christians from their point of view are entitled, but<sup>122</sup> it has nothing whatever to do with a debasement, degradation and so on as a *government* policy as it was pursued. Even the czarist regime,

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<sup>119</sup> In D&N, Green: “one thing, one point”

<sup>120</sup> In D&N, Green: “what some people call”

<sup>121</sup> In D&N: “we look at that history as Jews—we must say that such a thing”; in Green: “if we look at that history as Jews”

<sup>122</sup> D&N, Green insert “but it has nothing in itself” here.

although it was surely abominable, did not reach that degree of abomination which the Nazis reached. And that is in the twentieth century.

So I believe that many people have become<sup>123</sup> doubtful whether it is wise to speak of progress. Progress in certain respects, regress in other, perhaps more important respects. And therefore,<sup>124</sup> that there was a change from our ancestors to us is undeniable, and it is also prudent to assume that there will be further changes from us to Jews a hundred years from now. But that this should be a progress is an unwarranted assumption. There could be possibly, if everything goes well, a reduction in what is now called discrimination. That, I think, is for the time being very possible. And in this respect I think this lady has, if I may use this arrogant term, my blessings, but not more, not more.<sup>125</sup>

**Same Questioner:** I am afraid I didn't make my question very clear. I think you pointed out some things which aren't exactly to our taste, only the Nazis and the Russians, the possibility but not the definite direction of nuclear destruction. But the point of my question was not the discussion of progress or not progress, but rather there has been an undeniable change from Judaism as it was defined many centuries ago and what it is today, and it seems to me that this change is continuing and therefore will continue in the future, and I think it's reasonable.

**LS:** Aha! That is the key point. I mean, change is undeniable. But for the better or worse, that is the question.

**Same Questioner:** Well, I bring the question back to the basic discussion: Why do we remain Jews? And in view of this continuing change going on, we have to define what is a Jew, and what are we remaining, what have we changed from, what are we changing to? And isn't there a possibility that the various beliefs might eventually come a little closer to something that is not what we call today Jewish?

**LS:** Ya, sure. Well, that was exactly the dream of the eighteenth century. Lessing put it in this way in a letter to Moses Mendelssohn, if I remember well, saying—Lessing was absolutely sick and tired of religious controversy, you know, he was not an orthodox Lutheran and got into all kinds of troubles, and he said: I wish I could go to a country where there were neither Jews nor Christians. That was his simple epistolary formulation of what a very broad political movement intended. There are people who say that this notion is underlying<sup>126</sup> the American Constitution. You know that's controversial, because what does the First Amendment mean? But it is surely at first glance a possible view: a secular society. Ya, but this is no longer an aspiration: now we have some experience with a secular society, and if we are sensible we must consider that experience. We have also the experience in an alternative secular society, namely, the communist society. And a religious man who is sure on the basis of divine revelation that this will be the future, so that, for example, that the messianic age will come, he is consistent if he believes in the face of all evidence to the contrary. But someone who bases his hopes *not* on divine

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<sup>123</sup> In Green: "that is why there are many people who have become"

<sup>124</sup> D&N, Green insert "that we are different" here.

<sup>125</sup> The final sentence of these remarks does not appear in D&N. Strauss refers to the second, "less pessimistic" questioner.

<sup>126</sup> In Green: "underlies"

revelation must show some human grounds for it, and I think you cannot show any. Because, you see, even granting what some people suspect, that a hundred years from now there will no longer be religious people in practical terms, the members of religious communities, churches, synagogues and so on, they will become a tiny minority. Ya? Even that would of course not mean that the distinction between Jews and non-Jews would disappear, because the Jewish community is of this peculiar character, that it is indeed what we now call a religious community—religion not being a Jewish word, therefore I say what we now call, we would say *yir'ath ha'shem*<sup>127</sup> or something of this kind<sup>128</sup>—but let us call it a religious community. But at the same time, it is the people, the seed of Abraham. That goes together. How this goes together in the thought of the Jewish tradition, that is a very deep and long question, but the fact is undeniable. You see, all practical questions—all *practical* questions—must be settled here and now. The way in which your great-grandchildren might settle it cannot determine the way in which you settle it now, because you cannot possibly know under what circumstances your great-grandchildren live. If social science claims to predict, it does not mean that it can predict the circumstances in which Jews will live a hundred years from now. The predictions of social science are much more circumscribed and, if I may say so, irrelevant—I mean, from a practical point of view. They are theoretically very—yes. Professor Bacon, ya.

**Questioner:** I have both uneasiness<sup>129</sup> and a question to ask you. The uneasiness that I want to express firstly has to do with the fact that in the contemporary world—and I'm directing my comment to the rather easy way in which you talked about Christians on the one hand, and then non-Jews on the other—in the contemporary world the outstanding anti-Jews or Jew haters have not been Christians but have been Nazis on the one hand, which were not Christians, and communists on the other, who are not Christians.

**LS:** That is correct.

**Same Questioner:** Yes. And the question that I ask is: What implications do you see, if any, in the growth of the kind of friendliness, at least theologically and in other areas too, which prevails, say, between, say, people like Tillich on the one hand and Martin Buber on the other, where, if you will, the leading theologians, both Jewish and Christian, have referred to each other, read each other with a considerable amount of friendliness, and quote each other. Do you see any Judaizing in the contemporary world of Christianity, and Christianizing of Judaism?

**LS:** No, no, no. Surely not. I mean, I don't know whether the examples you chose were the ones which I would have chosen—I mean the individuals you mentioned—but that is truly irrelevant. You are right. I mean, there are such figures—like Parkes in England is a good example. There are quite a few Christians now who deplore the decision originally made by Augustine in favor of forcible persecution. I know that. And I would assume that there were at all times deep Christians who in their heart of hearts saw the same thing, that this is incompatible with Christianity. I'm sure of that. Glad as I am about these developments, I must not give up a certain, how should I say, sobriety to which I am obliged by virtue of the fact that I belong to a political science department. I mean, in other words, I must also speak of the seamy side of the

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<sup>127</sup> God-fearing.

<sup>128</sup> “therefore I say . . . to this kind” does not appear in D&N, Green.

<sup>129</sup> In D&N, Green: “uneasiness to express”

matter. By this I do not wish for one moment to impugn the motives of any individual concerned with these matters. For example, I know Rabbi Finkelstein, Professor Finkelstein of the Jewish Theological Seminary, and he is on excellent terms with [Reinhold] Niebuhr of the Union Theological Seminary, and I know others of these cases. No question. But you cannot be blind to the fact that since a hundred years, gradually building up and now coming to the fore in our century, [there is] a very powerful movement which is both anti-Christian and anti-Jewish. Now this of course leads—and here it is not entirely illegitimate to use examples from straight politics: you know, when a new party arises, very powerful, the older parties who were in a dogfight up to this point might be compelled to make peace among themselves. That this could be, in the case of Judaism and Christianity, in the spirit of the noblest aspirations of the noblest Jews and Christians—after all, you know, we Jews find all kinds of statements to this effect in Judah Halevi, in Maimonides, and so on—surely I do not wish to question the theological legitimacy of that,<sup>130</sup> but I would like to say that we must also look at the other side. And here I come to my point. This was exactly what I tried to show, and I could show it sensibly only in the case of communism, that this new power or powers which are both anti-Jewish and anti-Christian still make the distinction between Jews and Christians. The Greek Church—and Islam—is treated by the Soviet government *very* differently from the way in which, to use a Christian expression, the synagogue is treated. You see the point? I mean, only someone completely ignorant would say that anti-Jewish things are a matter of Christianity. Of course not. The Romans and the Greeks in Alexandria and other places were as much anti-Jewish as the most vicious<sup>131</sup> monks in Germany or in northern Italy, or wherever else it could have been. In other words, this fact, that quite a few Christians<sup>132</sup>—and I mention Nietzsche advisedly from this point of view, although Nietzsche surely was not a Christian, as you know, but Nietzsche surely was very German, and he is partly held responsible for the Nazis. And there is a certain animosity against Germany among Jews, which I shared I believe as much as anyone else could have shared it, but which is also in need of rethinking, I believe. You know? And we find other cases, for example, Max Weber, a man very well known in the social sciences, the philosopher Schelling, much less known; and there were some other famous cases *precisely* in Germany who were not only friendly to Jews but showed a very profound understanding of what one would call the substance of Judaism, which a man who is friendly to Jews does not as such possess, as you will admit. Surely that exists, but you must not forget the background of this reconciliation: a new power, which according to its promise broke with all the past. You know? And Marx says, of course—in a way stated Khrushchev's politics, you know, by a certain language he uses in his famous writing, but he didn't mean that, naturally.<sup>133</sup> I would say [that] in proportion as Jewish-Christian antagonism disappears, other antagonisms come to sight, and these antagonisms cannot be presumed to be indifferent to the difference between Jews and non-Jews, and to exploit it for

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<sup>130</sup> In Green: "legitimacy of this reconciliation"

<sup>131</sup> In D&N, Green: "wicked"

<sup>132</sup> Green adds "were friendly toward Jews, is significant"

<sup>133</sup> In D&N, Green (with minor changes of punctuation): "A new power has arisen: Marxist communism, which promised—by a break, a radical break, with the whole past—to destroy the very possibility of anti-Jewish feelings and thoughts. Marx's well-known anti-Jewish utterances were, of course, not inspired by anti-Jewish feelings in the common sense of the word. Yet, Marx's present-day successors like Khrushchev have restored anti-Jewish policies on a communist basis. However this may be, communism in principle threatens Judaism and Christianity equally. As a consequence, the Jewish-Christian antagonism—just as the intra-Christian antagonisms—tend to disappear."

their purposes. So that doesn't lead us further. I know the facts you mention. Yes?<sup>134</sup> Excuse me, my reference to the terrible times in the Middle Ages was only in order to dispel Heine's crude and simplistic view: misfortune. That was not mere misfortune, that was something much greater than mere misfortune. That was the reason why I said it. I'm sorry.<sup>135</sup>

**Questioner:** Do you agree that there is a basic difference between discrimination against Jews and discrimination against Negroes, in that those who discriminate against Negroes are glad to have some people that they can look down on around, whereas those who are against Jews would rather have no Jews at all, and therefore have their property belong to Christians or belong to some other sect which they happen to belong to?

**LS:** I do not know. I mean, in the first place I would say that the desire to have someone to look down on is not limited to anti-Jewish people, of course. Ya? I have known Jews who have had the same desire. You know? I mean, every man who has ambition in the vulgar sense of the word has this desire. So let us not be self-righteous at this point. But you know every chaser after *kovod*<sup>136</sup>—as we say here, after badges—has this; he doesn't have to be vicious, but the element of viciousness is in that. Sure. I grant you of that. But as for this point which you made, I am not so familiar with the details of anti-Jewish and anti-Negro propaganda. The facts as you stated them, if they are facts, would simply prove there is more Jewish property to distribute easily than Negro property.<sup>137</sup> [Laughter] Yes?

**Questioner:** As a non-Jew, I find that one of my greatest problems is, as you mentioned at the very end of your lecture, the fact of being, and the infinity which underlies and holds up the idea of progress. And I find myself before this idea of being, looking at a Jew as if the difference between him and me was irrelevant.

**LS:** Between?

**Same Questioner:** Between himself and me.

**LS:** Who is "himself"? I didn't hear the noun.

**Same Questioner:** The Jew. I as a non-Jew. The one thing that seems to distinguish us in our attitudes is that—I suppose you would just call me a "humanist," in that before the fact of being I acknowledge that all our symbols are relevant and that we all stand under the same dispensation, but the Jew will not admit that. He will never merely say: You are as a man as I. And I find this a real difficulty—

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<sup>134</sup> It is possible that there is a break in the tape here.

<sup>135</sup> In D&N, Green the remainder of this paragraph reads: "But it is more important to realize, as I tried to show by the comparison of the Greek Orthodox Church and the synagogue, that the actual policies of that common enemy are much more anti-Jewish than anti-Christian. I know the facts you mention. My reference to the terrible times in the Middle Ages was intended only to dispel Heine's crude and simplistic view: misfortune. That was not mere misfortune; that was something much greater than misfortune."

<sup>136</sup> Honor, respect, or prestige.

<sup>137</sup> In D&N, Green: "than the Negroes have"



**LS:** Oh, that is not true. I mean, that is simply not true.

**Same Questioner:** No, I find he insists, you see, in saying that he is a Jew. And this question of self-definition creates real difficulties in communication.

**LS:** Oh God! I mean, that is I think really unfair. That is as if you would blame a Christian for saying he is Christian. Would you say that a Christian as Christian denies to non-Christians the qualities of men? Or a Muslim, or a Buddhist? Or if a man says, "I am an American," does he deny that the people who are not Americans are human beings?

**Same Questioner:** No, but the Christian makes certain assertions about dogma. I find that there are certain people, for instance who dealt to some extent with the problem of the Jew who cannot believe as his father believed. Now I am inclined to think also that the question of race as an ethnic problem is merely a residual one. That is, there may continue out of choice to be people who choose to stay in the tradition and race, may continue for as long as there is a human race a seed which is what we would call a distinctive race.

**LS:** Well, race of course not in any particular biological sense; that is, I suppose, sheer nonsense. But people who, to put it very cynically, people who believe to be descended from Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Ya? Sure, that could be. But I would say I don't see that there is anything wrong with that.

**Same Questioner:** Yes, but the whole point is that given this fact that race as such—I mean, one has only to go to New York and watch, for instance, the Maccabee soccer team, who have come back from Israel, play soccer together on the fields of Yonkers to realize that the whole business of race is irrelevant. All these people call themselves Jews, and the idea of physical race—

**LS:** Race as it is used in any human context is not a subject about which biologists can say anything. That's clear.

**Same Questioner:** Right. Granted. So this point is there: We have the Jew who cannot identify himself with any dogmatic fixation of his fathers, and yet withal he insists on calling himself a Jew. Now he may be a Jew, but his Jewishness consists in a myth, which can be a reality, I grant you, in the human consciousness, but I can't lay my hands on it. [Laughter]

**LS:** Well, that is very, very nice of you to say that it might exist although you cannot lay your hands on it. But I would say I have tried to explain that. I took the extreme case of a Jew who feels—I did not take your particular "humanist," but I could also have taken him—who thinks that this was all, well, perhaps a noble belief, but it is not a true belief, he cannot share it. And he sees no reason whatever for perpetuating this old community. All right, but what is he going to do? How does it look in practice? You see, in all practical matters it is not sufficient to state merely the end; you must also show the way to the end. And the most simple thing is, you can show the first step. Now if you tell this man: All right, you don't wear a beard, in the traditional—you know, you would be recognized as—and today beards have changed their meanings, I have been told [laughter] there was a time when the beard was as such a sign by

which you could recognize a Jew. So in other words, all other things which he can possibly change in his external appearance he will change; he may even change his name, he may even marry a non-Jewish woman, and the children will not be brought up as either Jews or Christians, they will not be circumcised nor baptized. Ya? I mean, let us go into this. If we want to commit an act of treason, we must go into that. Now how do we go from here? I would say you will discover, except in *extremely* rare cases, somewhere on the way flies in the ointment. For example, this very liberal Jew and this very liberal non-Jewess are not descended from rocks or oaks, to quote an old poet, but from human beings. By which I mean they belong to families, and the families do not necessarily see eye to eye with their most liberal members. [Laughter] The Jew may be willing to say: All right, I will never see my father and mother, brother and sister again. But the wife, the non-Jewish wife, owing to an amiable weakness of the female sex, may perhaps say: Well, it is too hard, I will see them . . . time. And then they will always say: Why did you do it? Why did you marry that Jew? Then the children must also see the grandmother, and the same difficulty arises again. So in other words, I mean, you cannot wish away these things. If you could form—then you would have to form colonies in which only people who have broken with their Jewish heritage, past origins, and with their Christian past origins would live together. And well, people have made such small colonies for other purposes, for example, for trying out socialism and communism, but they are mentioned in the histories of social movements as amiable but wholly ineffective. It doesn't work. If you take it on the lowest ground, just Machiavellian recipes for getting rid of that misfortune, it doesn't work. It can work in individual cases. I do not know whether one could say, if one may speak of a living man in this connection, [that] perhaps Bernard Baruch is an example where it worked. I have heard this some time, but I do not know the gentleman, and I don't know how it works in practice. But this is a very old man now, in addition living in the South. You know? That I have heard, I do not know that. There may be other cases of this kind. But you see a nice man, I would say, would think not only<sup>138</sup>—if it is a problem of a social kind, i.e., not a problem peculiar to him but to other people of his kind—[he] would think of the other people of his kind and would say: A solution which is even perfect for me<sup>139</sup> is *imperfect* because of these bonds, you see, these bonds. And I would say I think the fundamental point seems to me this, again speaking very detachedly, hard-boiledly, and disregarding all the deeper issues: Why do you want perfect solutions?

**Same Questioner:** Now that is the whole point. I am not looking for a solution. You see, I don't want Jews to cease to exist.

**LS:** Oh! [Laughter]

**Same Questioner:** That is why a man who is a religious Jew is in a position before the mystery of being, for which I have respect and rather more, let me say in passing, than many others with which I am acquainted. But I meet people who do not have this orientation . . . I recognize that the race question is irrelevant, and yet withal this individual creates a special orientation for himself which seems to me to have just the quality of myth.

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<sup>138</sup> In D&N: "in addition, living in the South. That I have heard; I do not know that. There may be other cases of this kind. But"

<sup>139</sup> In Green: "him"

**LS:** No, that is, I believe, empirically wrong. I mean, if you mean by myth something fabricated, merely figured out . . . <sup>140</sup> and that was the word *galut*, exile. In other words, the recollection, the notion that there is <sup>vii</sup> a deep defect in our situation as Jews, and this deep defect in our situation as Jews is connected with the deep defect in the situation of man. That was an implication of the traditional Jewish faith. This implication, I mean disregarding the theological premises and consequences, is, I think, an empirically tenable assertion. And that the Jews know, most of them. I mean, it is perfectly clear that the difficult position in which modern Jews are I have not brought out fully, because I thought everyone knows it: every Jew surely knows something about it from his own experience, and every thoughtful non-Jew who knows any Jews better also doesn't have to be told. These are things which are partly very painful to speak about, and one should not display the pain if no useful purpose <sup>141</sup> is served, in other words, merely for the sake of the record. At least I would not do that. But on the other hand, one cannot deny it—you know, one cannot deny it and deny, as you called it, its “reality.” It is not a myth. The theories of this or that Zionist ideologies, these can be said to be myths. I mean, when I was still studying these things with intensity many decades ago, I always made a distinction between Pinsker as the clearest case on the one hand and Nordau on the other, Pinsker really starting from the Jewish question as it was hitting him directly, and Nordau having a general theory of nationalism, of which the Jewish case was a special case. And I always went more for these more direct people, you know, who started from what everyone could know. There are all kinds of things, and I don't wish to go into intra-Jewish polemics; you are aware of the fact that there are Jews, a minority in this country, who regard the state of Israel as—well, to use a mild expression, as a pain in the neck. I know these people, but one can simply say that they are the delusionists. <sup>142</sup> One can also say it as follows, also on the lowest denominator: the Jewish problem, as it is called, is the most simple and available exemplification of the human problem. That is one way of stating that the Jews are the chosen people. [Laughter] Honestly, that is not—if it [is] properly developed, the whole other things would come out, but that is so. The clean solutions of which people dream and [have] dreamt have led either to nothing, or to a much greater bestiality than the uneasy solutions with which sensible people will always be satisfied.

**Questioner:** Well, if I were to try to draw a general principle from what you have said, I don't know if this is right, but I would say something like this: A man is being dishonorable if he chooses to disagree with, break away from his origins, what his family believes.

**LS:** I qualified that. I mean, I qualified that: I said I could visualize a man, stemming from absolute degradation and simply having a nobler thing in himself tending away, as it were this way. And I could only say this is of course—he acts wisely. You know? I mean, provided he has some—if he had the singular qualities ascribed to him, he would not go around and peddle [them and] say, “Look what I achieved,” this kind of thing. <sup>viii</sup> Really, honestly, I can't see that. But what I said is [that] this is not the case of the Jews. However degraded we had to live for centuries in all the various countries, we were not degraded. We were not degraded. <sup>143</sup> Surely we were maltreated: we were—all kinds of things were inflicted upon us. But for the *average* Jew,

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<sup>140</sup> There is a break in the tape at this point.

<sup>141</sup> In D&N: “things which are partly very painful if no useful purpose”; in Green: “things which are partly very painful to bring out, if no useful purpose”

<sup>142</sup> Strauss might have said “they are delusionary”; there is noise near the microphone at this point.

<sup>143</sup> This sentence is deleted in D&N.

the average Jew, it was perfectly clear that we did not deserve it at the hands of these people. Perhaps we deserved it at the hands of God—that is another matter—but not at the hands of the people as such . . . I could give you some childhood stories, and older people or people of my age here could also give examples of what the traditional posture was. I remind you only of one essay which is still worthy of being read by everyone who is interested in this. That is an essay by Ahad Ha'am—you know who he was? Asher Ginsberg?—an essay by Ahad Ha'am which he called “In External Freedom and Internal Slavery.” And he there compared the situation of the Jews in the Russian ghetto to the chief rabbi of France at the head of the Sanhedrin—you know, an institution founded by Napoleon the First himself, and highly respectable, and badges—you know, like this. And then he<sup>144</sup> showed on the basis of what this man said, this chief rabbi, that he was a slave, not a free man. Externally he was free: he could vote and many other things, acquire property, whatever kind he liked. But in his heart he was a slave. Whereas the poorest Polish Jew, if he did not happen to be an individual with a particularly lousy character, which can happen in any community, was externally a man without rights and in this sense a slave, but not in his heart. And that is of crucial importance in that matter.

**Same Questioner:** My point of view is that if a person who is an average Jew, let's say, comes to me and says: On the basis of my latest thinking I had a real struggle; I have decided that I can no longer in conscience remain a Jew. I have either decided I will become a positivist, I will suspend judgment. *I* would say, and even though I realize this is going to cause trouble, let's say in his family and it is going to be dysfunctional for him, my point of view would be—

**LS:** Do you mean inconvenient? [Much laughter] . . .

**Same Questioner:** Yes, inconvenient for him, I would say that if this man remained a Jew, he would be dishonorable.

**LS:** Oh! That is another question. You mean to say, is it not morally necessary for certain Jews not to go to synagogue, not to pray, and not to participate in other communal activities?

**Same Questioner:** Even more than that: take over, say, the trappings of another religion completely if he so decides that this is the correct thing to do.

**LS:** Ya, prior to any deeper argumentation, one would have to say yes. I was still brought up in the belief, in a very old-fashioned country, that no Jew who ever converted to Christianity was sincere. [Laughter] I have to—that was what I learned and what I believed until I met, as a student, a professor who told me of his conversion to Christianity, a son of a rabbi. And I must say I was not impressed by this story, and if I could speak of living people here among more or less strangers, I could tell the story which was more pitiable than any object of indignation, but I would have to admit that he was subjectively sincere, and no calculation entered into it. I cannot say anything more about that. I know there is a real disproportion between my primitive feelings—what I learned from my wet nurse, as a greater man<sup>145</sup> put it—and my rational judgment, but I have to, as a man speaking publicly<sup>ix</sup> . . . naturally. But we are not speaking now—I said that at the beginning: conversion was always possible. But the question was not

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<sup>144</sup> Ahad Ha'am.

<sup>145</sup> In D&N, Green: “much greater man”

simply whether to be a member of a Jewish congregation, with all its implications: quite a few Jews do not do that, you know what the statistics say about that. But nevertheless, the interesting point is this: the question, the Jewish question *remains*. I gave you the example of those people who became Christian Scientists. I assume, because everyone must be regarded as innocent until proven guilty, that they did it out of conviction. Ya? In other words, they didn't want to get rid of a misfortune, but they were convinced of the truth of Christian Science. All right, but what happens to them without any doings on their side—after other Jews who have also gotten this conviction—from all pure convictions. The chairman of this group came to them and said: Why don't you form a group of Christian Scientists of your own? You can say: Well, for people who are only concerned with the religious truth (in this case, Christian Science) it doesn't make any difference whether their fellow worshipers are former Jews or not. Surely. But that is however very unfair and I would say almost cruel, because these people *suffer* from that. While they did not become Christian Scientists in order to get rid of the Jewish disability, they felt discrimination was committed. They are right from their point of view, only it is no use to get indignant about individual occurrences or symptoms, and one must see the whole situation. Ya, now, you yield to Professor . . . [Laughter]

**Questioner:** It's in a sense, and I guess with some pain, I really think that I, as a Jew, as one who is very concerned with finding some meaningful answer as to why I remain a Jew and how to do so, must really repeat the question that was asked by the non-Jew. I think that you give us really little reason to want positively to remain Jewish. At best you tell us that an empirical, hard-boiled analysis of the situation, which is your position tonight—

**LS:** Absolutely. Always. [Laughter]

**Same Questioner:** would constrain one in this direction. At second best, you tell us that there are various flies in the ointment which we might idealize.

**LS:** I did not say that! No, no.

**Same Questioner:** Well, I'm guess really I'm reacting, and I think I'm allowed to—

**LS:** Yes, sure, get it out of your system. [Laughter]

**Same Questioner:** Okay. But basically I think that you are really suggesting, if you talk to the young people here, among whom I number myself [laughter]—

**LS:** Rightly.

**Same Questioner:** is that you are really challenging us, you are really forcing us to say that this is just another one of the things that “quotes, we shall overcome,” because even if we fail, it is worthwhile from the way you paint the picture. And I think that there is a—I would hope, but this is not my evening to lecture, that I have different reasons for positively wanting to remain a Jew, and for having an answer to [the question] in what ways one might be meaningfully different from a Christian. But partly my difference with you stems from my inability to accept your basic premise. I think at least now maybe we are deluded, but Americans in my situation, I

think, pretty well feel that it is a voluntary thing—that your anecdotes are out of date, so to speak, that the Christian Science story has no compelling meaning to people of our generation. And I think much of your interpretation of the American scene is based on such anecdotal material, which I feel is not compelling although it may be true that it has happened somewhere else and quite recently.

**LS:** No, no, that—all right.

**Same Questioner:** But basically accepting your premise, I would say that all you offer me positively is to be a religious Zionist. But failing that, you give me the quite comfortable solution, but which I find inadequate because not challenging enough and not different enough, to be a scientist who somehow can reconcile his scientific positivism with the eternal mystique which after all derives from Judaism.

**LS:** Well, thank you very much for your statement. And you misunderstood certain points, but<sup>146</sup> I can only say that must be due to certain defects of my presentation. When you say that my knowledge of American Jewry, and the question there, is defective, I simply have to grant that. I came to this country only about twenty-three years ago (I have not even figured that out precisely at the moment, but roughly), but I have also some training in seeing, by which I do not necessarily mean the social science training. That's so, but it is possible . . . Now what I tried to show is this. I think clarity or honesty about the most important matters is the most important thing. Ya? That was my premise. Therefore I rejected, partly explicitly and partly implicitly because I couldn't develop the whole thing, all attempts to interpret the Jewish past, the Jewish heritage, in terms of a culture; therefore the emptiness of which you complain. In other words, for me the question is truly either the Torah as understood by our tradition or, say, unbelief. And I think that is infinitely more important than every cultural interpretation which is based on a tacit unbelief and cannot be a substitute for the belief it has given up. That is, I believe, the basis of our disagreement as far as I can see.

Let me add one point. When I say “the Jewish faith as our ancestors held it,” I do not mean that every particular belief, even if entertained by the majority of Jews or by the large majority of Jews for centuries, must necessarily be binding. I<sup>x</sup> know a bit of the Jewish medieval thinkers, and I know that quite a few very powerful and important changes were made even by them. I believe, and I say this without any disrespect to any orthodox Jew, that it is hard<sup>xi</sup> for most Jews today to believe in verbal inspiration, for example. Ya? In verbal inspiration of the Torah, and in the miracles or at least in most of the miracles, and in other things. I know that. My friend Rabbi Harris<sup>147</sup> is not here; I am in deep sympathy with what he means [by] postcritical Judaism. I think that it is a perfectly legitimate and sensible goal, to restate the essence of Jewish faith in a way which is by no means literally identical, say, with Rambam's “yood gimel ikareem” [thirteen principles]<sup>148</sup> or with something of this kind—I mean of any traditional statement of

<sup>146</sup> D&N, Green insert “but since I know you”

<sup>147</sup> Rabbi Monford Harris (1920-2003), who taught Jewish Studies at Spertus College in Chicago and at Rosary College in River Forest, Illinois. He is the author of *Exodus and Exile: The Structure of Jewish Holidays* (Fortress Press, 1992) as well as several scholarly articles on Jewish mysticism.

<sup>148</sup> In Green: “Rambam's Creator of the world.” According to Kenneth Green, “these thirteen principles or roots are the formal articles of faith which Maimonides (Rambam) articulated and legislated in a section

principle. That is not the point. But a Judaism which is not belief in the *boray olam*, but has problems . . . <sup>149</sup>

Now I will tell you another story, and this story has a somewhat greater dignity because it has . . . One of the most outstanding Jews in Germany was Hermann Cohen, the founder of the neo-Kantian school, and he was concerned very much with how he could be both a philosopher and a Jew in the sense of a believing Jew. That was a lifelong struggle, but he tried, and what he said is by no means irrelevant and I think worthy of the study of everyone who is concerned with that. In a certain stage of his life, he read to an orthodox and educated Jew a brief statement of what he thought to be the essence of Judaism, and then this old-fashioned, simple man (of birth and education) said: And where remains the *boray olam*, the Creator of the world? In other words, I have heard that in this very building, some time someone said: I believe in God as a symbol. Then I would say: A man who says, “I do not believe in God” is, other things being equal, a better man. Now I do not deny that a man can believe in God without believing in creation, and particularly without believing in creation out of nothing. After all, the Bible itself does not explicitly teach creation out of nothing, as one might say. But still, Judaism [contains]<sup>150</sup> the whole notion of man’s responsibility and of a final redemption. I mean, you can say: All right, abolish the personal Messiah and have only a messianic age—which is done by most liberal Jews, as you know—and add many more of these things. But the very notion of the certainty of final redemption is untenable without belief in a God concerned with justice. And this is such a *most* important issue, and I would say it seems to me that the proper posture of a man who does not believe in that is to enter into this mystery, into this mysterious belief, and whether he will not come out of it, even if he will not come out of it with belief in this, with some understanding he did not have before.

One of the deepest Jewish thinkers now, in my private opinion—which does not count in these matters, surely—the deepest Jewish thinker is Gershom Scholem of the Hebrew University. Now in his most recent book, which is in German only (I suppose it came out in Hebrew, but I do not even remember the German title—he sent it to me), he shows to what amazing lengths some of our mystics went by thinking through these beliefs, and then coming out with views [to] which many of the objections which many of us would have to such traditional beliefs would no longer be tenable. That would be the kind of thing which I would regard as satisfactory. But I believe by simply replacing God by the creative genius of the Jewish people, one gives away, one deprives oneself—even if one does not believe—of a source of *human* understanding. Let us also not forget: What does it mean, “one does not believe”? How much of the unbelief now existing is as much a matter of hearsay or what some of your profession[s] would call “social pressure”? You know, not necessarily that you don’t get a job, but in the form that “everyone doesn’t believe and I don’t want to be a—” You know? This kind of thing. I mean, belief and unbelief are not such simple states: here is a camp of believers, here is a camp of nonbelievers. Politically it may very well appear in this way on many occasions, but for most of the thoughtful people in both camps, things will be different. I do not wish to minimize folk dances and Hebrew speaking, and many

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of his *Commentary on the Mishnah*, and which are still acknowledged only by orthodox Jews today.” The Strauss Center thanks Green for deciphering this phrase from the audio file, for transliterating it, and for providing this explanation.

<sup>149</sup> In D&N, Green: “problems running through it.”

<sup>150</sup> In D&N, Green: “contains”; in the audio: “has . . .”

other things; I don't want to minimize them, but I believe they cannot possibly take the place of what is most profound in our tradition. But however this may be, I have had my day in court. I have said what I have thought about it, and I must say I am surprised that you are still here.

[Laughter]

Now we must turn as soon as possible to more rewarding things. I hear that we get some coffee?

[Laughter]

[Applause]<sup>151</sup>

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<sup>i</sup> Deleted "be"

<sup>ii</sup> Deleted "which"

<sup>iii</sup> Deleted "other"

<sup>iv</sup> Deleted "of"

<sup>v</sup> Deleted "People of Israel."

<sup>vi</sup> Deleted "to some"

<sup>vii</sup> Deleted "something"

<sup>viii</sup> Deleted "you know"

<sup>ix</sup> Deleted "I have to"

<sup>x</sup> Deleted "have"

<sup>xi</sup> Deleted "for people"

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<sup>151</sup> The session concludes with Cropsey's announcement of the next week's lecture by Rabbi Levi A. Olan of Dallas, Texas.