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THE POLITICS OF CENTRISM: JEWS AND THE 1980 ELECTIONS

Irving Louis Horowitz

EDITOR'S NOTE: Irving Louis Horowitz, Hannah Arendt Distinguished Professor of Sociology and Political Science at Rutgers University, is a long time observer of the Jewish scene in the United States and abroad. Here he turns his considerable talents to an analysis of why Jews respond politically as they do, focusing on the current American presidential campaign. His thesis of Jewish political centrism as part of Jewish universalism adds another dimension to the continuing discussion of Jewish political orientations. Two of the Fellows of the Center for Jewish Community Studies, Charles Liebman and Peter Medding, have been especially active in this discussion. This article could well be read in conjunction with Liebman's The Ambivalent American Jew and Medding's "Towards a General Theory of Jewish Political Interests and Behavior."

Because 1980 is a presidential election year in the United States, interest in Jewish voting patterns, ideological preferences and interest orientations is once again high. A simple profile of the 5,778,753 American Jews itself indicates why curiosity quickly turns to analysis.[1] Jews as a group graduate 58 percent of their number from college, are highly concentrated in metropolitan centers, are clustered, at 65 percent, in professional or business activities; and consider themselves either Democrats

[1] Bernard Lazerwitz, "An Estimate of a Rare Population Group: The U.S. Jewish Population," Demography, Vol. 15, No. 3 (August 1978), pp. 389-394.

(56 percent) or independents (36 percent).[2] Melvin Urofsky's recent appraisal of America as the land of the goldenah medinah seems indisputable.[3]

> Here a culture and society developed through intermingling and mutual accommodation of numerous religious and ethnic groups, without the blight of a crippling medieval heritage of Jew-hatred. In no other country had Jews ever achieved the social, economic and political acceptance they found in the United States, a land which, in the words of the Puritans, was a new Zion. Certainly, when the halutzim of the First and Second Aliyot left Russia to settle in Palestine, thousands of other Jews voted with their feet for a different Zion, and migrated to the United States.

In Israeli Ecstacies/Jewish Agonies, I took note of continuing Jewish commitment to Democratic Party voting patterns as a matter of intellectual disposition and social commitment.

> The Jewish community of the United States has traditionally voted for the Democratic Party not as an act of contrition or faith but rather in the belief that that Party expressed the best interests of the American political commonweal in its search for universal justice and complete equity. The Jews have proven to be a unique force in American politics in that, despite their class backgrounds or interests, they have exhibited the capacity to vote and act beyond their class and interest group constraints. The critical decision then in the current decade, and perhaps beyond, is whether this historic sense of equity, built up by strong and powerful identification from the New Deal to the New Frontier, will yield to a sense of fear and a sentiment of loathing for the newer minority groups, particularly the blacks and Spanish-speaking groups who have gone beyond philanthropy in their dealings with Jews, and for the large deviant marginals who

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[2]Barry Tarshis (editor), The "Average American" Book. New York: Atheneum Publishers, 1979, p. 360 (from Gallup Poll data). For more extensive data, see both the current and previous volumes of The American Jewish Year Book, edited by Morris Fine and Milton Himmelfarb. New York: The American Jewish Committee, and Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America. Volume 80 was published in 1979.

[3]Melvin I, Urofsky, "Bright Moonlight and Darkness," Jewish Frontier, Vol. XLVII, No. 10 (December 1979), p. 13.

> clearly represent a threat to traditional Jewish ethical and cultural credos.[4]

A recent summary of data compiled by Seymour Martin Lipset confirms my earlier judgment.

> Studies of Jewish attitudes and political behavior continue to find that Jews remain the most liberal white ethnic or religious group in the nation. A late November Gallup release reports that Edward Kennedy, accurately perceived by the populace as the most Left or liberal of the candidates, has a larger lead over Carter among Jews (64-16) than among any other group of Democrats, including blacks and Kennedy's fellow Catholics. Analyses of voting behavior find that American Jews remain more committed to the Democratic Party than any other ethnic or religious group, except for blacks. Within the party, as their current presidential nomination preferences indicate, Jews are the segment most disposed to back the more liberal, New Politics wing. In 1972, when McGovern's dovish views were supposedly alienating pro-Israel Jews, he secured about two-thirds of the Jewish vote, more than he received from any other white group. In June 1978, a small majority of California's Jewish voters opposed Proposition 13, while 65 percent of the electorate favored it, according to a Los Angeles Times survey. In November 1978, 60 percent of the Jews voted for Jerry Brown for governor, a far higher percentage than Brown received from Catholics and Protestants. In the 1978 congressional elections, 72 percent of the Jews queried as they were leaving polling places told New York Times/CBS interviewers that they had voted for Democrats, in contrast to 60 percent of the Catholics and 45 percent of the Protestants. Only 16 percent of the Jewish voters described their political views as conservative, compared with 27 percent of Catholics and 37 percent of Protestants.[5]

A review of international events in the last decade confirms long standing tendencies, primary of which is that the Jews cannot find a permanent home in either left-totalitarian or right-totalitarian contexts. In contrast to demographic trends elsewhere, the number of self-declared Jews in the Soviet Union

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[4]Irving Louis Horowitz, Israeli Ecstacies/Jewish Agonies. New York and London: Oxford University Press, 1974, p. 109.

[5]Seymour Martin Lipset, Contribution to Symposium on Liberalism and the Jews in Commentary, Vol. 69, No. 1 (January 1980), pp. 53-54.

have diminished from roughly three million to two million during the past ten years. Outward migration, cultural absorption, and just plain fear to express manifest identification have accounted for as massive a decline in Jewish population as one can find since World War Two and the Hitler Holocaust.

An interesting parallel is that the Jewish community in Cuba has declined from an active, vibrant group of more than 10,000 prior to Castro (roughly 1960), to a remnant population of under 1,500 in 1980 whose expression of Judaism is strictly confined to temple worship. No country outside the satellite Soviet orbit has been as consistently anti-Semitic as has Fidel's Cuba. Granma is even more exaggerated than Pravda as it repeats the slogans of its Soviet masters. At the other end of the political spectrum, Argentina had a Jewish population of roughly 500,000 in 1960. By recent accounts, its Jewish population in 1980 is roughly 300,000 people. This 40 percent reduction has been highlighted by the house arrest, harrassment and expulsion of important Jewish figures for aiding and abetting Communist subversion.[6] The classic model -- fascists blaming Jews for being vanguard communists, and communists blaming Jews for their racist-Zionist forms of racism -- persists with a grim vigor, the continuation of a hoax that has plagued the century.

One can readily appreciate the centrist tendencies in Jewish life as an international phenomenon: its support for the open society, for democratic processes, human rights and a free economy; rather than with any single political slogan or trend. In the United States, extreme left factions have taken anti-Semitic postures and allied with anti-Israeli causes. At the same time, as the Skokie crisis indicates, rightist extremists or nativistic Nazis, have continued unabated their assaults on the Jews as the central evil -- along with the blacks -- of American society. No wonder that Jews have shown a pronounced inclination to avoid organized Left politics. In the McCarthy hysteria of the 1950s only 13 percent of white Gentiles favored equal rights for Communists, while 38 percent of the Jews did. Equal rights remains a cardinal touchstone of Jewish attitudes, but there has been a noticeable hardening of Jewish resistance to Soviet anti-Semitism. Equally important has been growing resistance to and resentment of absolutist civil libertarian support for Nazi and fascist harrassment of Jewish communal life. In short, Jewish centrism has intensified

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[6] See Morris Fine and Milton Himmelfarb (editors), "World Jewish Population," in American Jewish Year Book 1978. New York: The American Jewish Committee and Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 1977, pp. 517-525.

as both political extremes have coalesced around the theory and practice of anti-Semitism.

Recent identification of a right-ward swing on the part of Jews is inaccurate. In fact Jews have held a constant course in a shifting sea. Jews have always been committed to a fair race, where all contestants can participate on an equal footing. They notoriously avoid any notion of special favors, they do not curry special favors, they remain convinced (as were their adversaries) that given equal opportunity the race would go to the swift, and the Jewish community would end up with its reasonable share of victories. Jews do not desire a favored position in the economic marketplace, only an equal status in that marketplace. In this sense, the Jew remains the steady devotee of classical liberalism.

What in fact has occurred is a shift of liberalism to affirmation of the active participation of the State as a handicapper in the race, and the concommitant shift of conservative elements to a pure theory of the political marketplace in which all participate. The Jewish community, especially its intelligentsia, has been pictured as shifting to the Right.[7] In point of fact, Jews have retained their uniquely centrist role, attached to the idea that everyone starts the race for social goods at roughly the same place and ends at far different points on the tracks when the race is completed (in this case, when the plan is declared subscribed or overfulfilled).

The velocity of change in Jewish life in America is so great that when we turn to a 1974 essay by Lucy S. Dawidowicz and Leon S. Goldstein[8] we can see how, only six years later,

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[7]The crisis of identity of Jews with respect to liberalism might be gleaned from the fact that Commentary, the leading "establishment" periodical of Jewish affairs, and sponsored by the American Jewish Committee, has published two of its infrequent and much vaunted special symposiums on the subject. "What Is A Liberal - Who Is A Conservative," Commentary, Vol. 63, No. 3 (September 1976); and "Liberalism and the Jews," Commentary, Vol. 69, No. 1 (January 1980). It is clearly impossible to summarize such a vast array of informed opinion. But the fact that the symposium in effect had to be repeated is indicative of the degree of which Jewish identification with mainline parties and ideologies has become a central agenda item in Jewish organizational and intellectual life.

[8]Lucy S. Dawidowicz and Leon S. Goldstein, "The American Jewish Liberal Tradition," The Jewish Community in America, edited by Marshal Sklare. New York: Behram House, Inc., 1974, p. 300.

the situation is remarkably more complex. They write

> Political traditions brought from Europe (particularly Eastern Europe), economic experiences among the urban proletariat, and insecurities about anti-Semitism have combined to shape a middle class American Jewish liberalism that has usually expressed itself at the polls in Democratic voting. This liberalism has become so pervasive that many descendants of German-Jewish immigrants, whose fathers and grandfathers were Republicans, have come to vote Democratic in the last two or three decades. By now liberal voting may have become part of a family group tradition -- a habit and custom difficult to shed, particularly at that final moment in the voting booth when what Paul Lazarsfeld once called "terminal horror" assails the voter, preventing him from pulling the unaccustomed lever.

Liberalism was, until recently, "a family voting tradition"; it has now become a habit and a custom quite readily shed, albeit selectively. This is indicative of the rapidity of political shifts, generational transformations, and erosion of the Democratic Party organization itself more than of shifts in the Jewish voting bloc. The disintegration of party identification in general cannot be overlooked in any evaluation of Jewish party preferences. Beyond that, family and group traditions may be seen as themselves at home in conservative as well as liberal garb. In short, the movement of the Democratic Party away from classical liberalism and toward state liberalism does more to explain new patterns of Jewish political identification than any particularly noticeable shift over the past decade in Jewish ideology.

Perhaps the best way to make sense out of the subject of the Jews and the Right, is to examine the general panorama of American political shifts. If I may be permitted the horse racing metaphor, what we find is the following: the classical liberal model holds that all horses shall commence the race from the same precise starting position, and the test of talent shall be where one finishes in the race, with rewards commensurate with the finishing position. The classical conservative model holds that the race shall have a common starting gate, but not every horse shall be allowed to run. A pug has no place in a race against a thoroughbred. Over time, certainly over the twentieth century, the grid of expectations has shifted dramatically: The state liberal has become a devotee of the handicap race, viewing the real object of a good race to have all the contestants end at the finish line in a dead heat. Horses are handicapped with weights -- the better horses carry more weight -- so that they will compete with no "advantage" over slower horses. The modern conservative, for his part,

has taken up the classical liberal persuasion, believing that the starting gate should be open to all but that the results should be different, since talent is unequally distributed. The conservative has thus effectively filled the gap in the mainline culture, leaving to the undiluted reactionaries its earlier posture that nags and pugs have no place in the same track as the thoroughbreds. Admittedly, such metaphorical analogs are imperfect and intellectually porous, yet it does help show us, in broad brush strokes the evolution of the American ideology over the course of the century. We must now address how Jewish identification fits into this shifting grid, this changing mosaic of beliefs.

The relationship between Judaism and liberalism or Judaism and conservatism has been argued by many -- long and forcefully but somehow inconclusively. Howe has emphasized the highly disproportionate number of Jews in radical and protest politics.[9] Isaacs has argued that Jewish liberalism is largely a myth, a function of distrust and insecurity rather than a specific ideology.[10] Elazar properly asserts that Jewish liberalism is tangential to Christian denominationalism, so that the organizational starting points are dissimilar but the ideological end results are similar.[11] But several serious weaknesses exist in these classical viewpoints: they fail to distinguish radicalism from liberalism; they tend to underemphasize religious and/or ethical dimensions of Judaism in favor of its organizational aspects, discounting the public inactivity and apathy of most Jews, their tendency toward privatization and their socialization away from political participation of any kind. Indeed, the views recently expressed by William Berlin probably come closest to the truth: The "conscious concern with the past and its meaning indicate in contemporary Jewry an orientation which their forebears felt with similar intensity: the desire for a unique and continuous identity in a world where Jews can live

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[9]Irving Howe, World of our Fathers. New York and London: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1976.

[10]Stephen D. Isaacs, Jews and American Politics. Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday and Company, 1974.

[11]Daniel J. Elazar, "American Political Theory and the Political Notions of American Jews," in Peter I. Roas (editor), The Ghetto and Beyond. New York: Random House, 1969, pp. 217-220; and also by Daniel Elazar, Community and Polity: The Organizational Dynamics of American Jewry. Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1976.

like everybody else."[12] Acceptance of the prototypes of pluralism, local government, and community control, all built around questions of belief, may well be viewed as within the parameters of contemporary conservatism. But whether conservative or liberal labels are attached, the profound attachment of Jews to American ideals as a whole remains inescapable. Judaism is threatened less by any overidentification further or separation from any political ideology than by the total identification of Judaism with Americanism.

In this sense, Jewish criticism of affirmative action programs, hardening of attitudes toward racial, ethnic and language minorities, and general movement away from the politicization of government and education, may be seen less as a shift to the Right, than as a transformation of Jewish acceptance of establishment liberalism for a more activist -- and critical -- posture in the policy arena. As the price of new programs has proven burdensome for many American taxpayers, and as the costs have come to be perceived as outweighing the benefits, Jewish suspicion of state liberalism has come closer to mainline American concerns. For example, the near uncritical support of John Fitzgerald Kennedy in 1960 and of Robert Kennedy in 1968 gave way to strong criticism of Edward Kennedy.[13] Even before his announcement for office, the strongest criticism of Kennedy's candidacy came in Commentary. Thus, once again, Jewish mass support for traditional liberalism is counterbalanced by elite opposition to state liberalism.

The foreign policy imperatives in particular have become a concern for Jews. The erosion of American political and military strength, the extension of OPEC energy power, the expansion of Soviet geopolitical and military activity, all of these have stirred Jewish concern in part because they directly affect Israel's survival. Edward Kennedy's failure to articulate a response to such threats, not any presumed vigor on the part

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[12] William S. Berlin, On the Edge of Politics: The Roots of Jewish Political Thought in America. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1979, pp. 151-159.

[13] Joshua Muravick, "Kennedy's Foreign Policy: What the Record Shows," Commentary, Vol. 68, No. 6 (December 1979), pp. 31-43. This very well researched article argues, in effect, that this Kennedy at least is as much interested in articulating an ideology as in the exercise of power. And that the ideology being espoused is isolationist, predicated on a benign view of the Soviet military threat, and a selective perception of human rights which cracks down on allies and turns a blind eye to enemies of American democracy.

of President Carter, helps to explain why support has been withheld from Kennedy by the Center and the Right wing of the Democratic Party. (In part, rumblings of Jewish support for Anderson may reflect his willingness to grapple with some of these issues.) When foreign policy concerns are coupled with fears that vigorous promotion of black, Chicano, and other minority causes, can so politicize domestic policy that Jews will be forced to behave as a self-seeking interest group, then the present erosion of strict party loyalty can be better understood. The dissolution of solid bloc voting for the Democratic Party at the national level less reflects Right tendencies than fear that the party has become too responsive to its own power blocs and interest groups and hence less universalistic in its commitments to fundamental American political pluralism.

Even more than the size of the Jewish vote, its geographic concentration has been of concern to national political managers for many years. Some candidates may simply disregard ethnic and religious preference as a factor. For most, there is renewed interest in Jewish voting patterns in part as a result of several elements: Jewish disaffection and alienation from the Democratic Party; declining significance in party identification on the part of voters as a whole; and the general relationship of party preference to preferences for state liberalism.

Jews are less concerned with liberalism as a general ideology than with the specific issues: Israeli security and survival internationally, and equity concerns and quota demands nationally. In the past, even if Democratic candidates took positions critical of Israel or declared in favor of affirmative action, Jewish support for the Democratic Party remained consistently high. Jewish support for George McGovern was 65 percent, while he could claim only 31 percent of the rest of the white vote in his campaign against Richard Nixon.

In the 1980 presidential campaign, the Republican frontrunner, Ronald Reagan, has been most consistently "pro-Israel" of all candidates; he is also perceived as the most conservative on domestic issues. Alternate choices, such as George Bush or John Anderson, are considerably more liberal on domestic issues than Reagan, but far less candid or committed on the issue of Israeli survival as a Middle East power, or even as a United States ally. On the Democratic Party side, a similar situation obtains: Jimmy Carter is relatively more conservative on domestic issues than Jewish attitudinal preferences, but acceptable; however, his developing adversarial relationship to Israel is manifested in a series of United Nations negative votes and abstentions has made him a barely tolerable candidate for Jews. The cancellation effect, in which foreign and domestic issues work at cross purposes, serves to freeze the present Jewish voting preferences at a two-thirds Democratic and

one-third Republican ratio.

The Camp David Agreement between Egypt and Israel restored much Jewish support for Carter, but it is thin support, easily moved away from him. The primary alternatives, Edward Kennedy and Jerry Brown, offer a choice between a basically isolationist (Kennedy) posture toward foreign policy and a capitulationist (Brown) policy. Neither is perceived as remotely consonant with the needs of Israeli survival in a hostile Middle East geo-political-military environment.

Hence, the wide fluctuations in Jewish voting patterns in the 1980 primaries should be seen as a disaffection from Carter, more than any strong identification with Kennedy. For example, in Florida, the Jewish voters who are primarily of New York origin, voted for Kennedy over Carter by 53 to 37 percent. In New York, this same margin held, despite Mayor Edward Koch's manifest support for the President. On the other hand, in the Illinois primaries of March, specifically the vote in Chicago, Jewish support went to Carter over Kennedy by an almost two-to-one margin.[14]

In the past, Democratic party candidates combined strong support for United States-Israeli cooperation in foreign policy with undeviating liberal positions in domestic policy. Candidates like Hubert Humphrey, Henry Jackson and Morris Udall gained overwhelming Jewish voter support. Only in a non-election year, when the choice was between Carter as Democratic candidate and Ford as the Republican entrant does Carter's support among Jewish voters soar to roughly 90 percent.[15] Jews tend to make liberal choices over and against the conservative options that usually exist in the Republican Party. But no such distinctive option seems to offer itself for the 1980 elections, hence voting percentages should change modestly, if at all, during this presidential election.

Jewish disaffection from the Democratic Party is significant precisely to the extent that their voting preferences are representative of existing party loyalties, and the intensity of such loyalties. Since it is unlikely that the Democratic Party in 1980 will nominate a president who is perceived as anti-Israeli candidates or opposed to civil equality, equal opportunity, aid to poor, and education, the erosion of Jewish electoral

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[14]Martin Schram, "A Major Unknown for Carter," The Washington Post. March 23, 1980, p. 6 (first section).

[15]Alan M. Fisher, "Realignment of the Jewish Vote," Political Science Quarterly, Vol. 14, No. 1 (Spring 1979), pp. 97-116.

support is also unlikely. The more meaningful problem is the disintegration of the Party system: through the substitution of personality for ideology, financial moguls in place of grass roots activity, and continuing exposure of legislative and executive corruption on the part of those sworn to moral probity. Under such conditions, exceedingly unlikely to develop all at once in a single electoral campaign, one cannot expect continuing broad based Jewish support for the Democratic Party.

How support for the Democratic Party translates into support for liberalism has been a constant problem in data analysis. There is an all-too-ready presupposition that the Democratic Party is the more liberal party. But this assumption may well be challenged in 1980 by the victory of the most conservative Democratic figure (Jimmy Carter) over his "liberal" (Ted Kennedy) and "radical" (Jerry Brown) opponents. Contrariwise, the emergence of someone like Representative John Anderson as a significant if minority element in the Republican Party, may have a long term impact on loosening Jewish support for one party. While the vigorous pro-Israeli position of a Ronald Reagan might net him increased Jewish support among "internationalists," his domestic conservatism will cost him an equal number of Jewish votes among "liberals." In short, when one looks closely at national electoral prospects, the Jewish vote remains ubiquitous only as a result of the vagaries of the political processes and party choices. In itself, Jewish voting patterns are centrist in policy and universalist in principle.

Whether state liberalism tendencies in the Democratic Party will lead Jewish voters to embrace the Republican Party is something else again. The Grand Old Party is itself in a period of intense transformation: generationally no less than ideologically. Being out of office is sobering. Also, awareness that starting with less than ten percent of the black and Jewish votes is a serious handicap not easily overcome may create new ideological patterns within Republicanism. Republican candidates may diverge widely on issues of Jewish concerns. John Connally may have sealed his fate in the primaries by arguing a need for a greater gap between the United States and Israel. It was perceived that behind this urging for realism in the Middle East, was a call for dimunition of Israeli power. At the same time, Ronald Reagan made a strong policy statement urging greater support for Israel and recognizing the unique stability of the friendship between the American Goliath and the Israeli David.

William Ray Heitzmann conceptualized the movement toward the Republican camp as a maturity in Jewish voting. It might be accelerated by their nomination of a Jewish candidate in a national campaign, as he asserted. But any changes are not

quite so simplistic or so rapid as he indicates.[16] The decisive factor is not Jewish identification with Jewish candidates, but with American values of an enduring sort. Irish politicians like Father Robert Drinan or Daniel Patrick Moynihan easily defeated Jewish opposition -- with massive Jewish voting support. Unquestionably the age of automatic Jewish support for Democratic Party candidates has come to a crashing halt. Just as undeniably, to the extent that the Democratic Party better and more faithfully represents fundamental pluralistic liberal values, it will nonetheless continue to generate Jewish support. Political apathy or intellectual rigormortis does not explain continuing Jewish support for Democratic candidates, but rather the inability of Republicans thus far to present viable options within the framework of the American Dream.

Perhaps the best exponent of a new Jewish pragmatism is Milton Himmelfarb. While painfully accepting the facts of Democratic Party preference, he sees the problem in ritual political voting rather than in ideology. Hence, he argues that the need of the moment is to get beyond party identification into an appropriate self-interested Jewish posture.[17]

> If our rote liberalism has been against our interest, it does not follow that rote conservatism would be in our interest. It is in our interest to feel free to vote for one party or the other, and especially to be seen to be free. It is further in our interest that we should be enrolled in each party in such numbers as to discourage stands damaging to us. . . .
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> Jewish conservatism means: giving a two-thirds vote to the most unpopular Democratic candidate in memory. Compulsive smokers know that smoking is not good for them but they keep smoking. Most Jews are compulsive Democratic voters. As a friend of mine puts it, "I'm an independent, I always vote Democratic." A sensible Republican is unlikely to put great effort into hunting such elusive prey. A sensible Democratic candidate is unlikely to put great effort into winning over people who have shown that they will vote for him regardless.

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[16] William Ray Heitzmann, American Jewish Voting Behavior: A History and Analysis. San Francisco, 1975, pp. 79-84. (Monograph privately printed and released.)

[17] Milton Himmelfarb, Contributing to Symposium on Liberalism and the Jews, in Commentary, Vol. 69, No. 1 (January 1980), pp. 45-46.

The idea of planting flags in many political camps is reasonable enough. But whether such a strategy is much different or more compelling than Jesse Jackson's call to black voters to adopt a similar strategy is hard to detect. Whether such a dilution of strength in the Democratic Party would cause both major Parties to vie for Jewish support and Jewish votes is equally open to question. The possibility of a cancellation effect is sufficiently great that one might wonder if there is any single electoral strategy that will maximize Jewish strength. And of course, Himmelfarb's position rests on the assumption that Jewish goals have a unitary character. The pragmatic point of view can be seen to have precisely the same sorts of dangers as idealistic overidentification which the Democratic Party contains. In short, Jewish centrism is not simply a function of electoral strategy, but of shortcomings in presidential politics as such.

Those who present the Jewish question in the context of interest group politics have a dilemma. The model is not appropriate. Where factors such as race, class, and common ancestry cluster, then the interest group model has relevance. But the tripartite nature of Jewish life makes this an unlikely tactic.[18] Some Jews define themselves primarily in religious terms. Others define themselves in secular nation or Zionist terms. Finally, others have a cultural view of Jewish life, relating to matters of psychology and norms of behavior. The Judaic tradition has its own special form of trinitarianism: Israel, Torah and God. Corresponding to that in the secular realm is: 1) Israel as a state in the Hobbesian sense of retaining a monopoly of power; 2) peoplehood, in which the ethics embodied in the sacred documents are invested in the Jewish people as a whole, an entity without a physical boundary but a national people nonetheless; 3) the Hebrew God, in which a collection of values, precepts, and concepts are fused in a religious tradition which takes on institutional expression. Such fragmentation means that American Jews are divided, indeed fragmented on nearly every question other than the survival of Israel and opposition to anti-Semitism.[19] To expect Jews to behave as a narrowly focused interest group is politically improbable and perhaps worse, an intellectual disservice to the special historical role of Jews as a moral force.

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[18]See Irving Louis Horowitz, "Israeli-Diaspora Relations as a Problem in Center-Periphery Linkages," Contemporary Jewry, Vol. 3, No. 2 (Spring/Summer 1977), pp. 28-38.

[19]See Melvin I. Urofsky, "Do American Jews Want Democracy in Jewish Life?" Inter-Change, Vol. 1, No. 7 (March 1976), pp. 1-7.

One can interpret this position in several ways. Jewish political responses to American events may be seen as frozen, stagnant, even insensitive to new currents of political action. Or one might see this as a matter of Jewish consistency and resolve. At the practical level Jews have a strong emotive feeling that any sort extreme, any totalitarian system, is dangerous to Jewish survival. Beyond that, the Jewish tradition argues for a centrist framework, in which justice takes precedence over premises of historical inevitability or personal infallibility. The religion of the law translates into an ethic of personal responsibility, and as a result, while differences in outcomes are not only countenanced but encouraged, such differences have to be arrived at honestly, not through capricious or wrongful advantage.

Seen in this broad perspective, Jewish positions have changed little, whereas objective circumstances in American life have changed a great deal. The universalist premises of Jewish life function well in the national political arena only within the framework of the legal system. They function less well at the executive level, and scarcely at all in Congressional terms, where particularistic values operate both to place legislators in office, and keep them there. The emergence of interest groups, pressure groups, and special advantages for special people may be well within the tradition of modern state liberalism. State liberalism is an approach to life and morals that is difficult for the Jewish tradition to absorb. In previous ages special advantages translated into Jewish disadvantages. In religio-social terms, emphasis on interest group approaches to political and social concerns falsifies Jewish law by depriving it of the universalist spirit for which it is known and upon which it is based.

What has taken place in Jewish life is a transvaluation of values. What constitutes Left, Center, and Right, takes on a new meaning. "Radicalism" in such a universe has more to do with the activities of the Jewish Defense League in the United States and Israel than with any special aspect of Marxology. What has been called "establishing internality," means creating or defining political tendencies within the Jewish company of players that are quite distinct from the larger mass of society.[20] Conservative trends increasingly refer to religious zealotry and attacks on secular culture. Such religiosity becomes an internalized expression of Jewish rightism, a carrying of and a caring for the "tradition" not unlike certain Christian fundamentalist counterparts in the larger culture who are also

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[20] Janet L. Dolgin, Jewish Identity and the JDL. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977, pp. 175-178.

identified as Right wing oriented in their context.

If there is a Right drift or a Left tendency in Jewish life, its meaning must be situated and grounded within the specifics of Jewish dynamics. The fear of absorption into the dominant society propels such Left and Right tendencies. Jewish solidarity moves in various countervailing tendencies to offset Jewish centrism precisely because such centrism is isomorphic between the Jewish and Gentile worlds. Thus, while it would be a mistake to exaggerate Jewish tendencies toward a Right or Left drift, it would be no less erroneous to claim that a comfortable Jewish life within the larger American society is an uncritical or undiluted blessing. In this sense, Jewish marginality to the larger society remains characteristic of the peoplehood as a whole, even if such marginality is increasingly expressed as in terms of centrist commitments rather than separatist political goals.

One final caveat should be registered concerning Jewish centrism: while for some it is a political posture for perhaps the great majority centrism results from a difficult effort to find a proper political mansion. In this sense, centrism is a consequence of the differing strains and tensions within Jewish life, rather than a fully articulated ideological belief system. Centrism in this sense is not a middle of the road position on issues, but rather the outcome of a melange of beliefs, persuasions and attitudes. Hence, strong Jewish identification with civil liberties will occasion high Jewish support and participation in the movement for an Equal Rights Amendment and support for abortion reform legislation. The minority position of Jews in public schools will occasion their firm adherence to Jeffersonian premises of separation of Church and State and hence rejection of religious worship in school assemblies. Even on foreign policy matters Jews were found to be in strong opposition to the Vietnam War, while at the same time equally supportive of increased United States aid to Israel.

What this suggests is that Jewish "self-interest" does exist, but more often than not issues of substance are determined on their merit. If Jews have political power, it is not simply or even primarily based on voting patterns, but on the selective impact through elites and establishments to register their points of view. Jewish concentration is perhaps larger in the policy process, which binds the academy to the polity, than in the political process directly. Hence, this sort of centrism is based on selective decision-making on issues. It fits well with an American model which increasingly relies upon the policy process for its knowledge and decreasingly upon raw party membership or affiliation to determine domestic or foreign policy decisions of major consequence for the nation.

Candidates come and go, but the issues which vitally affect broad sectors of Americans, or sub-sets like Jewish Americans, have a durability which attests to the endurance of a democratic culture and no less to Jewish problems in dealing with that culture.[21] As I said about the 1972 election:

> The 1972 political watershed was crossed only to find a fork in the road: one path leading to assimilation into the national culture, the other leading to separation from the national culture. And what decisions are taken depend of course on the evaluation of the worth of that American national culture, and, beyond that, what realistic alternatives exist in that culture. In short, this watershed was a demonstration rather than a resolution of the Jewish agony, since it sharpened, in dramatic fashion, a choice between conservatism and radicalism, republicanism and egalitarianism. The automatic support of liberalism has finally come to a stark halt, replaced by a condition of polarization that, while not exactly new to the Jewish people, has seriously affected traditional Jewish assumptions about the universal rights to justice and equity. But this only demonstrates that the Jewish problem is, after all, tied directly to the American dilemma and can only be resolved along with it.

The events of these past eight years would indicate that the watershed of an earlier period has been crossed. Jewish identity has been reaffirmed, and the politics of centrism has come to be viewed as the necessary corollary of such selfhood.

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[21] Irving Louis Horowitz, Israeli Ecstacies/Jewish Agonies. New York and London: Oxford University Press, 1974, pp. 114-115.