
for all unhappiness; government as an instrument for the compelled self-improvement of the individual; active hostility to the public expression of religious belief; excusing moral and ethical lapses; the elevation of a rampant individualism to the virtual exclusion of respect for traditional morals and mores; and a belief that it is societal forces—susceptible to infinite reshaping by government—rather than personal failings which explain the persistence of evil.

The values that suffused Jewish life in the past seem to me far more consonant with conservative views than with those of liberalism. Yet the voting pattern persists.

I suggest that the explanation for the anomalous pattern of Jewish voting is not to be found in our religion but rather in our experience as a people in this century. Let me suggest two distinctive features of the American Jewish experience which may help to explain. One is the paradoxical anxiety which many Jews seem to feel about their security despite three centuries of life in a nation that may be, as to matters of faith, the most tolerant in human history. The second is the special connection masses of American Jews have felt to the struggle for Black liberation.

Afraid To Let Go Of Fear

As to the question of anxiety, it is as though the extraordinary freedom enjoyed by Jews in America to practice their faith, or, indeed, not to, and to form organizations to give voice to shared interests, has not assuaged sensitivities reflective of life in the Pale of Settlement. Many Jews, including intellectual leaders, seem unable to accept that, whatever the tolerance of America for different faiths, this is in a very deep sense a Christian society and nation. The fears associated with that ineluctable fact have given rise to a devotion to the Constitution's Establishment clause worthy of the most militant atheists. The Establishment clause of the First Amendment, with all of its judicial accretions, has been embraced by the Jewish community as a bulwark against the danger that the *de facto* status of America as a Christian nation will become *de jure*.

In my view the danger of this, given our nation's history of religious pluralism, is largely imaginary. Moreover, it is strange for this clause to have become an icon for a people who, in the final analysis, are defined by a shared historical, religious experience. Whether or not these fears are realistic or the devotion to this constitutional provision is consonant with the history and values of Jews, I would suggest that a significant part of the Democratic party's attraction is its perceived commitment to upholding and strengthening this clause.

As to the relationship, albeit unrequited, with African Americans, again the Democrats are seen as more deeply committed to the cause. It was undoubtedly a noble chapter in American Jewish history that so many individuals and organizations played an important role in redressing some of the altogether legitimate grievances of Black Americans. Perhaps this cause resonated with our ancestral memories of the Exodus, reviewed each year at the *Seder*. Perhaps it was motivated in part by the continuing sense of insecurity in the *galut* which made identification with the plight of another marginalized group not only noble but self-protective.

Back To The Future

With regard to both of the social phenomena set out above, the Democrats have been seen as the paladins of the fears and hopes of American Jews. But in my view it smacks of arrested development for these concerns to define and constrain the voting behavior of an extraordinary majority of American Jews. These concerns, however worthy or understandable, are utterly inadequate definitions of the totality of our lives as individuals or as a group. There are other important values steeped in our traditions which must be refurbished and inculcated for the good of our nation, our society and our progeny. I would only ask that Jews consider the possibility that conservatives may be better allies in carrying our this vital task. †

A new liberalism for the 1990s?

Richard T. Foltin

Thirty years ago, Professor Theodore Lowi asked (in his book entitled, ironically for the theme of this publication, *The End Of Liberalism*) questions that still resonate: "What kind of government, what ends of government, what forms of government, what consequences of government?"

As Americans and as Jews, we are in the midst of a fundamental rethinking of the proper role of government. The three decades since Professor Lowi asked those trenchant questions have demonstrated that not every government program intended to deal with societal problems has been well advised and, more crucially, that

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not every problem is necessarily susceptible to government solution in the first place.

Blending Personal And Social Responsibility

To be sure, the emerging "new liberal" (or, perhaps, "not-a-liberal") mode continues to value the vital role of government and to assert that there are crucial national interests that cannot be delegated wholesale to the state and local levels. This is the case not only in the international arena, but also with respect to such domestic concerns as alleviating domestic poverty, civil rights enforcement, promotion of an effective public education system and protection of the environment.

Thus, a willingness to say *al het* (we have sinned) for some of the liberal approaches to social issues should not invalidate the ideological premises on which those approaches were founded, premises that include a societal responsibility for the neediest and a belief that there are useful things that can be done for that portion of society beyond a call for "personal responsibility." To be sure, responsibility for self is a crucial value. Jewish tradition teaches us that the highest form of charity leads to the self-sufficiency of its beneficiary. Among the great failings of the welfare system have been its breeding of dependency and the denial of dignity to its recipients. But personal responsibility cannot be de-linked from social responsibility, which, in our society, resides with a number of institutions—religious organizations, volunteers at the community level, and, yes, government.

Where Government Is Necessary

Since Jews have often been the victims of persecution and worse—often carried out by or with the connivance of government officials—it would not have been surprising if Jewish tradition exhibited bitterness and hostility toward government. But this is not the case. Jewish law teaches the principle of *dina de'malkhuta dina* (the law of the land is the law). As Jews, we are directed to obey the laws of a state ruled by principles of neutral justice and to pray for the welfare of its officials, knowing that the absence of government leads ultimately to anarchy. And, as Americans, we should bear in mind that the just society—whatever one believes that to entail—is not likely to be achieved without government. Nor are we likely to have a system of governance much better than the one we now enjoy.

The leap from Jewish tradition to an argument that government ought to fulfill a social policy function is, perhaps, a bit less direct. The biblical imperative to care for the poor was addressed primarily to person-to-person

giving and to communal mechanisms that were small and local. But while the instrumentalities by which we carry out our present-day society's activities—including its charitable functions—have changed, the underlying values have not. As Jews and as Americans, it is appropriate that we promote government policies that care for the poor in a way that is respectful of individual dignity and promotes self-sufficiency, and that aspects of those policies be codified at the national level.

This argument for a continued central role for government (and the making of this argument in the context of welfare policy is simply by way of example) does not imply the government ought to plan the economy through centralized bureaucracies, or needlessly override personal decisions, or even preempt state and local approaches to issues of poverty and education. History has taught that grand government programs are themselves subject to the most rigorous law of all, the law of unintended consequences. And the principles of our capitalist system—the law of supply and demand, the profit motive—are among the underlying reasons why this nation has been so prosperous.

Self, Government And Values

A free society must be vigilant, moreover, in the struggle to keep government from encroaching on fundamental rights of personhood. One example is the necessity to protect the principle of separation of church and state. Similarly, we must remain on guard against government encroachment on free speech and privacy, including private decisions of reproductive choice. All such matters touch upon fundamental aspects of individual autonomy; any utility arising out of government encroachment in these areas is unlikely to outweigh the harm done by infringement on individual liberties. As a minority community, Jews, as much as any other group, must beware of the overreaching state.

But unqualified *laissez-faire* is as unworkable as unqualified state control. Committed only to individual (or corporate) maximization of profit, it gives no regard to the larger good. It can lead to ecological and other public health problems, and invidious discrimination against minorities. *Laissez-faire* makes no provision for the poorest and least able among us, whom society ought to seek to make self-sufficient or, failing that, for whom at least the benefit of a minimum safety net ought to be provided. It makes no allowance for the measures that are sometimes necessary to steer the economy away from impending danger. And unbridled *laissez-faire* cares nothing for the ties that bind diverse and heterogeneous neighborhoods into communities.

On this last point, the progressive end of the political spectrum has encountered its greatest failing and faces its hardest task. The exponents of a more “conservative” approach have responded to the sense of diminishing common values and lack of community that troubles the American electorate, and the appeal of conservatism has been based in large part on an explicit promise to address those concerns. There is a legitimate need for community and legitimate demands that community has upon us (how could anyone who takes Jewish tradition seriously think otherwise?), even as we may disagree on the appropriate responses to those needs and demands.

We must find ways to grapple with society’s need for values and community in a way that respects our society’s diverse streams. It is time to say that there is right and that there is wrong, that the smaller communities and the larger community of which we are all part nurture us and deserve our support, that we have responsibilities as well as rights, and that there are healthy values and values that are dysfunctional (for example, acceptance of self-responsibility—even in the context of real, outwardly imposed problems—as compared to responses to problems based on overarching theories of victimization).

To paraphrase the questions asked at the beginning of this piece, “What kind of society, what ends of society, what forms of society, what consequences of society?” The questions as to the role of government are, at their core, really the same questions. The political future of the next years depends on our ability to articulate a vision that draws wisdom from all portions of the political spectrum while remaining true to the ideals encapsulated in the—by now familiar—Hebrew phrase, *tikkun olam*. †

🌿 Endthoughts 🌿

Peace and palestine in the classroom

Carmela Ingwer

As a Jewish educator witnessing the Intifada, I found myself confronted by a pedagogic void. The uprising in the territories compelled me to abandon my belief in the justice of Israel’s position regarding the Israeli–Palestinian

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conflict, and therefore to question the traditional way I had been presenting Israel in the classroom.

The formerly sacred underpinnings of classical Zionism were beginning to unravel with lightning speed, along with a spate of “reliable” educational paradigms that had granted teachers and students alike a false sense of confidence in Israel’s course. Each fateful event in the following years—from the Oslo accords and Baruch Goldstein’s massacre, to Rabin’s assassination and the rise in Hamas terror—served to intensify my angst about the teaching of Israel. Mirroring our community—at-large, the long-standing consensus among Jewish educators over Israel’s character and destiny was shattered, leaving many of us with the feeling that we, too, were fragmented, and uncertain of how to handle the new reality in our classrooms.

Educating For Peace

This dilemma will not be easily solved. Given the deep split in American Jewry’s attitudes toward the peace process, underscored by their polarized reaction to Netanyahu’s victory last May, one can hardly expect the speedy re-emergence of communal consensus regarding Israel. However, I believe that our community’s lack of unanimity must in no way deter liberal educators from instituting a staunchly pro-peace agenda in their schools. In fact, in light of this past year’s blows to the peace process, to do so now is crucial.

A transformed Israel curriculum is needed to drive home the message that nothing, whether the scourge of Hamas terror or the re-ascendance of Likud, could ever utterly abrogate the precious, dearly-bought peace that burgeoned against all odds. The conviction that the peace process must endure should become the core of students’ developing relationship with Israel.

Prophetic Precedent

What will be the first, and possibly hardest, task of educators seeking to bring the proverbial peace train into their classrooms? We will have to repudiate the still unchallenged communal dictum demanding the removal of political controversy from the arena of religious education. Evoking our most venerated teachers, the prophets of old, we can assert that they would have flatly rejected such a separation; their revolutionary exhorta-

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