put back into it would not have that much effect. We now know this is not true. Humans have been changing their physical environment for thousands of years. Before the last two hundred years, these changes had only local or, at most, regional effects. In the modern era, with large-scale industrialization and a growing global economy, environmental change has also increased proportionally. While we can say that previous generations did not understand how we were affecting the biosphere, we can no longer escape our responsibility for the decline of the basic life systems of the world. Climate change, shortage of fresh water, loss of biodiversity, toxicity of the soil, and other environmental problems are some of the issues that will confront humanity in the coming decades. How we respond now will affect how severe these problems will become.

In the end, the environmental crisis is not an issue of technology, economics, or politics; but one of values.

Therefore, Mr. President, I hope that your Administration will address the most critical environmental issues now facing our country and the rest of the world. In the next few years we must become part of an international treaty to reduce greenhouse gases and thus alleviate the effects of global warming. The reduction of greenhouse gases is the greatest issue facing humanity since the end of the Cold War. We will need to fashion a new American energy policy that will move us away from fossil fuels and create new clean sources of power as well as high mileage vehicles. We must do more to protect animal habitats to maintain biodiversity and stop the extinction of species. And we must continue our efforts to keep our water, air, and soil clean from toxic chemicals.

You, Mr. President, have a special role in providing leadership on the environmental issue. I hope you will take up the challenge.

Sincerely yours,
Rabbi Lawrence Troster
Bergenfield, New Jersey

Book Review

The Jewish Political Tradition, Volume I, Authority

Michael Walzer, Menachem Lorberbaum, Noam J. Zohar and Yair Lorberbaum (eds.), (New Haven, Yale University Press, 578 pp. $35.)

It has been a standard assumption of both Zionist and anti-Zionist ideologies that, lacking a state, the Jews never developed a tradition of political theory. Questions of authority, legitimacy, and the limits on sovereignty that preoccupied ancient and medieval thinkers from the Greco-Roman and Christian traditions faded from view once the Jews no longer wielded state power. Over the last two decades, a number of scholars, including this author, have challenged this dominant view, arguing instead that Jewish sources are rich with political discourse, even if largely different in form from Western political thought. This is, in part due to the fact that Jews continued to exercise power in community structures that were quasi-sovereign. From this premise, it becomes obvious that the State of Israel, although clearly constituting a radical change in Jewish political life, does not represent a complete rupture from rabbinic and medieval Jewish history.

Perhaps the most important and impressive fruit of this new approach is represented in this collaborative work of Michael Walzer, one of the foremost political theorists in North America, who combined forces with a group of Israeli scholars. The Israelis, who are all closely associated with the Shalom Hartman Institute, spent varying amounts of time at the Institute for Advanced Study in Princeton where Walzer is Professor of Social Science. The project itself grew out of several conferences of philosophers and Jewish Studies scholars that the Hartman Institute has organized since the 1980s. The result is an extensive collection of sources around the theme of authority (three more volumes, on membership, community, and politics in history, are forthcoming) covering a range of subjects from covenant and revela-

tion, to kings, priests, prophets, rabbis, and "the good men of the town." Additional chapters treat controversy and dissent, the gentile state, and the State of Israel. The sources are surrounded by commentaries by the editors and other scholars, representing Jewish Studies as well as the world of political philosophy. In this way, the book has the quality of a Jewish source: text is never devoid of interpretive gloss.

Several underlying agendas inform this project. For one, many themes or texts that are ordinarily found in discussions of rabbinic theology or hermeneutics appear here as elements of Jewish political theory. Thus, for example, the preservation of minority opinions and the interpretive freedom that the rabbis arrogated to themselves now become the discursive conditions under which the rabbis exerted their political authority. In a sense, much of what is central to rabbinical thought turns out to be eminently political.

Second, the commentators repeatedly stress the radical interpretive pluralism suggested by the sources and thus the lack of a fundamentalist theocracy. As Menachem Fisch puts it: "There is no absolute authority: the *halakhah*, granted permanence by traditionalists, is considered revisable; the court system, whose rulings, according to traditionalists are immune to future revision, is perpetually open to objection by critics; the critics, in turn, are in constant danger of being declared rebellious. All involved are obliged to live dangerously." "Living dangerously," in the interstices between traditionalism and innovation, Jewish political authority cannot be reduced to orthodoxy. Thus, to return to Fisch: "The Mishnah's antitraditionalism is an authentic alternative meta-halakhic position. Its revival, I believe, is essential for all those who ... wish to partake in the great political opportunity offered by modern Zionism."

This last comment points to the book's third agenda: its teleology in the State of Israel; indeed, the book is dedicated "to the *halutzim* — the pioneers — who paved the roads connecting dream and reality," a clear reference to the founders of Zionism. The Israeli commentators, all of whom are "Orthodox" (the word itself must be used advisedly), want to turn the Jewish tradition into a weapon with which both to fight the Israeli Orthodox establishment and to bridge the chasm between Judaism and democracy. They hold that the sources themselves represent a liberal and pluralistic alternative to the traditionalists who claim a monopoly on those sources. They also hold that a Jewish democratic state is not a contradiction in terms because the sources do not necessarily contradict democracy. The final chapter of the volume, on the State of Israel, is therefore of particular interest as the editors take up a variety of contemporary formulations of political theory for the State. Whether such a state can be truly "multicultural" forms the subject of a fascinating debate between the three last commentators: Joseph Raz, Sanford Levinson and Yael Tamir. The question revolves primarily around the status of Israel's non-Jewish minority, whose grievances recently exploded violently together with the new uprising of the Palestinians in the Occupied Territories. But just what the traditional sources say about the status of non-Jews in a Jewish polity will require waiting for the final chapter of the next volume.

This is, then, a project of recovery — the recovery of a Jewish political tradition that the editors not only recover but also construct. Insofar as that construction is driven by the challenges thrown up by the State of Israel, it remains a partial recovery, since more than half of the Jewish world continues to live as minorities in primarily secular states. The sources in this volume provide some foundations for how contemporary Diaspora Jews might construct a relevant political theory for themselves, and one hopes that in the future volumes, this pressing question will receive more of its due. But this qualification should not detract from the considerable achievement of the present work: it is not only a book, but also a *sefer*, that is, a Jewish source to be studied and debated in its own right.

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