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“The great sin of today is the ‘politicization’ of our Judaism, the great need, the ‘Judaization’ of our politics¹”: Leon Roth and the possibilities of a Jewish critique of Zionist politics

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ABSTRACT

This article explores the possibilities and limitations of a Jewish critique of Zionist politics and the State of Israel, via an engagement with the writings of Leon Roth (1896–1963). Specifically, the article focuses on three main themes: (a) the relation between Judaism and Jews, questioning the “ethnicist” foundation of Zionist ideology; (b) the relation between religion and politics as the two are constructed in modern European discourse, questioning the nationalist premise of the supremacy of nation-statist politics over religion; and (c) the meaning of Jewish secularism, questioning the Zionist claim to a “non-religious” Jewish identity. I argue that Roth’s critique of the moral failures of Zionism offers an illuminating explication of a Jewish critique of “the Jewish state”, while ultimately failing to form a coherent political voice because of its commitment to the concept of modern, nation-statist sovereignty.

KEYWORDS

Leon Roth; Israel; Zionism;
Judaism

Introduction

What are the possibilities – and potential limitations – of a Jewish critique of Israeli politics? (By “Jewish” I mean a critique that is committed to a loyal dialoguing with Judaism as a system of thought and practice.) This question becomes urgent in face of an incessant trend to conflate Zionism with Judaism or Jewishness – a conflation vigorously promoted by Zionist ideology itself and often accepted as a truism by critics of Zionism. In this essay I seek to offer an assessment of a *Jewish* critical consideration of the politics of Zionism and its embodiment in the State of Israel, and of the meaning of Jewish politics

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more broadly, through an engagement with the writings of Leon Roth (1896–1963).

Importantly, the engagement with Roth, who was a British born, Oxford educated Zionist, immediately locates this exploration within an admittedly limited discursive and ideational space. It situates Roth's interventions – in which his commitment to British liberal democracy is joined by his religiously ethical Jewish convictions and his active agency in the Zionist enterprise in Palestine – in a rather complex relation to other, mostly Central European thinkers who also offer ethical (often critical) engagements, religious and otherwise, with Zionism, such as Hermann Cohen, Hans Kohn, Franz Rosenzweig, Hannah Arendt, Martin Buber, Yeshayahu Leibowitz, and Judah Magnes.² Not so dissimilar from the case of what David Myers called, “the lost voice of Simon Rawidowicz”,³ Roth's thought further illuminates juxtapositions with non- and anti-Zionist Jewishly informed oppositions to Zionism, nourished by various traditions of thought, from Joel Teitelbaum to Daniel Boyarin and Judith Butler.⁴

Furthermore, Roth's own personal path, which ultimately led him outside of the newly established State of Israel and to the sidelines of the mainstream Jewish discourse on the state and on Zionism, instils his point of view with a unique quality. It is this obviously limited scope of discussion that both enables us to appreciate his brand of a Jewishly informed critique of Israeli politics and the alternative understandings of Jewish politics it offers. At the same time, it also underlines the limits of such a standpoint, limits which I will highlight as the entrapment of political thought in the sovereign nation-statist frame of the political mind.

Roth's ethical Jewish commitments direct his engaged reader rather immediately to a unique point of view informed by a profound commitment to what is at one and the same time a universal and a particularly Jewish commitment to justice. Roth looks at Zionism and its (or the State of Israel's) rendition of Jewish politics from the outside, as it were, and finds it wanting exactly because this politics is ultimately unethical from a Jewish perspective. Most important of all, perhaps, is the fact that the critical appreciation of a Jewishly committed Zionism/Israel leads the critic to address the price that is exerted from Judaism itself by actions carried by a state who self-identifies as “Jewish.”

Maybe the most telling fact related to Roth's intellectual and academic biography is the obvious gap between his relative obscurity and the foundational role he had held in the establishment of Zionist/Israeli higher education generally, and of the study of philosophy more specifically.⁵ It is this gap, exacerbated by the fact that not a single full monograph on Roth has yet to be commercially published, which calls for a short biographical sketch before going any further.⁶

Roth

Leon Roth personifies a unique strand of Jewish and Zionist commitments, encapsulated in his biography. Born in London in 1896 to a Jewish-Polish

merchant father and a Sheffield-born mother, Roth was one of four sons, the most famous of whom was the youngest, Cecil Roth. He gained Jewish and classical education in his youth, and later studied philosophy at Oxford. In 1923, he started teaching at the University of Manchester, but soon after he received an invitation to join the newly forming department of philosophy in the nascent Hebrew University in Jerusalem. Judah Magnes, Chancellor of the university, offered him the role of the very first professor of philosophy in the university. Roth accepted the invitation, immigrated to Palestine in 1928, and together with Hugo Bergman established the department and played a major role in shaping the University at large.⁷ Using his Hebrew name, Hayim Yehuda, Roth assumed the newly formed Ahad Ha'am Chair in Philosophy⁸ and as I discuss below, engaged with the legacy of Ahad Ha'am in illuminating ways.

Roth headed the department and together with Bergman shaped the modern Hebrew study of philosophy in Mandatory Palestine and the newly established State of Israel. The two have “determined the two trends of the study of philosophy in the department”, which later came to be known as the analytical and continental traditions.⁹ At its earlier stages, Roth's own work focused mostly on seventeenth century rationalism, specifically that of Descartes and Spinoza, and on Maimonides.¹⁰ Throughout his career, he also dealt with themes of Jewish philosophy, religion and ethics, and it is on these themes that I will focus my engagement with his thought. Roth has also presided over the translation of the Western philosophical canon into Hebrew, a project which, as Neve Gordon notes, was in itself a quintessentially idealistic, Zionistically-ideological undertaking.¹¹

While in Mandatory Palestine, Roth would devote much of his attention and time also to writing and teaching on themes of political philosophy, advocating a British interpretation of liberal democracy. As Jan Katzew¹² highlights, while “Roth was not primarily a political philosopher”, between 1945 and 1950 “he devoted his work exclusively to political philosophy. Within the five years that surrounded the birth of the State of Israel” Roth published an English book engaging with John Stuart Mill and Walter Bagehot, and six Hebrew monographs dealing with democracy, political philosophy, and education to democratic citizenship. This turn was not coincidental:

Roth wrote about political philosophy precisely when the State of Israel was transforming itself into a state, when the political and cultural DNA of Israel were being translated from theory to practice. Ever the educator, Leon Roth was seeking to influence the political climate in Palestine just as the political landscape of the emerging state of Israel was in formation. Roth endeavored to convince the nascent political leadership to adapt, if not adopt the democratic principles and structures in which he himself had been educated and immersed, those of Great Britain.¹³

It was only after Roth has left Israel that he wrote “the overwhelming bulk of his Jewish material”, writes Katzew, noting Roth's “deference to other scholars in Israel while he lived there, and his commitment to translating Judaism for

those ignorant of it.”¹⁴ I will comment on this shift to Jewish themes later on, as it emerges from Roth’s critical engagement with Zionism. Importantly, the two main aspects of Roth’s scholarship, Judaism and liberal-democracy, were far from detached. As Katzew puts it, taken together, Roth’s body of work broadcasts the clear message that “a Jewish state ought to be a democratic state.”¹⁵ While obviously motivated by Zionist ideology and unmistakably committed to a politics that we may safely designate as “Jewish”, Roth was far from being a “conventional” Zionist. Ultimately, he stood “aloof from Zionism in the sense in which that term has for some time now been conventionally understood.”¹⁶

In one telling incident, while on a visit to Los Angeles as a representative of the Hebrew University in June 1947, Roth “stir[red] [the] wrath of Zionists.” Answering questions at a press conference, Roth spoke against the partition plan for Palestine, warning that, “it will eventually lead to violence.” He accepted that Jewish immigration to Palestine should be determined by the “absorptive capacity” of the land and suggested that “the [Jewish-European] refugee problem and the Palestine problem are ‘two different’ problems.” Roth further complimented Britain for its treatment of the refugees and suggested that Canada and Australia should relax their immigration rules so as to absorb more of these refugees. He also rebuked “too many American yellow journalists in Palestine who are scare-mongers.” In response, local Zionist leaders called Roth “an ‘emissary of British Imperialism’.”¹⁷

Thus, while Roth clearly shared Zionist sympathies and was especially attuned to the importance of politics, “he was ultimately repelled by political Zionism.”¹⁸ What is often read as the strongest sign of his independent, critical stance came three years after the establishment of the State of Israel, when Roth left the newly established state. He returned to England but did not take another permanent job, spending the rest of his life writing, mostly on Jewish themes, and lecturing on an occasional basis. He died in 1963 while on a visit to New Zealand.

Roth did not give a concrete, compelling account of his motivations for leaving, raising a plethora of speculations, from personal-familial matters, through institutional tensions at the Hebrew University, to ideological misgivings about the Zionist enterprise.¹⁹ Clearly, given the heightened ideological atmosphere at the time, his action must have been contentious, and it has been given to ideological-political readings even if those were not its main motivations. Colleagues and friends have argued that Roth was unable or unwilling to accept the ethical compromises of the Zionist struggle.²⁰ He specifically found it difficult to accept that atrocities are carried out – and justified – in the name of Jewish nationhood. As formulated by one of his acquaintances, confronted with such atrocities that accompanied the struggle for statehood, Roth had experienced the “tragic experience” akin to viewing one’s students “earnestly study[ing] Plato or Aristotle by day and slaughter [ing] innocent women and children at night.”²¹ Swimming against the rising

tide of the nationalist outlook that justified these atrocities as a matter of *realpolitik* or necessity, Roth held a “demonstrative disavowal of what was going on with the condonation or approval of most of the Jewish public in Palestine.”²²

Roth’s “disappointment” with political Zionism was fed by his practical attitude to ethics. He believed that “ideas had to be relevant to modern everyday problems if their value was to be reckoned an abiding value, and, if their import was practical, they must be applied in fact.” This was especially true in the case of ethics:

This was the principal reason for his disappointment with Jewish statehood when it was ultimately realized. He has gone out to Palestine in the hope that it was to constitute a truly Jewish contribution to the polity of man. It being his experience that Jewish ethics and notions of justice were not given any marked enunciation in the national life of Israel [...] he saw no reason to remain in the country any longer. As he saw it, lip service was being offered to the ethical teaching of the bible which were at the same time being ignored in political concerns when they were inconvenient.²³

Or, as Neve Gordon summarizes this reading, “Roth came to Israel for moral reasons and left it for moral reasons.”²⁴

Roth’s style of writing on such topics as philosophy, Judaism, ethics, and religion – but also on political thought – does not lend itself easily to an “immediate” and direct reading as a political intervention. His clearly unscripted comments at the Los Angeles press conference, as well as a handful of public letters he co-signed (see below), which are the closest we have to a direct political intervention by Roth, leave much to be debated. Furthermore, as Raphael Loewe puts it, Roth’s style is “classical in its restraint [...] which succeeds by a few masterstrokes in suggesting what it leaves unsaid.”²⁵

In what follows I aim to explicate Roth’s critique of Zionism by focusing on three themes: (a) the relation between Judaism and Jews, (b) the relation between religion and politics, and (c) the meaning of Jewish secularism. While informed by an engagement with Roth’s wider body of work, I will be directly referencing only those works which are immediately relevant to my discussion.

A note of clarification is in place here: Although Zionist ideology is obviously varied,²⁶ I use a generalizing language below, identifying the ultimately triumphant, state-centered political Zionism as setting the tone for this ideology as a whole and for Israeli political culture. While contesting readings of Zionism are very much alive, I ignore these nuances for the sake of drawing the background against which Roth’s interventions may be better appreciated.

Judaism vs. Jews

The notion of divine election, of being a “chosen” people, is a pillar of nationalist thought,²⁷ and it has surely played a central role in the Zionist construction

of Jewish nationalism.²⁸ This construction is focused on the “uniqueness” of the Jewish People and its “right” over the land, which is derived from this special character. Importantly, this nationalist construction of “chosen-ness” is comfortable with adopting the notion of divine election from the Jewish tradition, while denying the “agency” of God as the one who elects.²⁹ In other words, mainstream Zionism’s is a “secular” notion of “divine” election, where the covenantal relationship entailed in this election is discarded and replaced by such abstract notions as the “genius” of the people and its “urge to life.”³⁰

But what does this “chosen-ness” mean? And what are its political implications? Roth’s engagement with these questions – most fully developed in his last published book, *Judaism: A Portrait*, which also stands, I would argue, as his ultimate rebuke to the dominant Zionist interpretation of Jewish politics – is indeed illuminating. Insisting that the “doctrine” of the “chosen people,” has been misunderstood by Jews and non-Jews alike and “has done much harm”, Roth opens his discussion of Judaism with clarifying the meaning of chosen-ness, warning his readers that “it is easy to claim to be of the chosen people, and to forget that the choice means duty, not privilege.”³¹

Importantly, the notion of being “chosen” is phrased in the Bible as the Israelites’ being a *holy* people, “that is, a people set apart with a special vocation.” (Like Zionist thought in general, Roth too tends to unquestionably identify the subject of modern Jewish nationalism – the contemporary “Jewish people” – with the biblical Israelite nation.) The rest of the Torah makes it clear that the essence of this vocation is an ethical conduct of private and public life. Hence, the question that looms large, at least in the context of the current, *political* reading, is how (and not whether; a betrayal of the vocation would render any discussion of *Jewish* politics simply meaningless) should the politics practised by the Jewish people express this “vocation”.³²

This very basic notion of holiness, namely that “election” entails duty, a commitment to a doctrine or a teaching of a just being in the world, leads Roth to delineate an important distinction that can and should be seen as a determined judgment, I would argue, in a foundational tension at the very core of Zionist and Israeli politics. To understand this point, it may be helpful to consider for a moment the very notion of identifying Zionism as the *Jewish* national movement, and the State of Israel as the *Jewish* state. The debate over the meaning of this “Jewishness” or “Jewish identity” is a foundational feature of Israeli politics, determined by the tension between two conflicting readings of the matter at hand.³³

One reading, which would prefer to see Israel as Jewish only in the sense that it is “the state of the Jews,” tends to be focused almost exclusively on the “demographics” of majority and minority groups within the state: So long as the majority of Israeli citizenry are identified as “Jews” the state can, by this reading, claim a Jewish identity for itself, regardless of questions relating to

“Judaism” as a system of thought, ethics, and forms of life (what this reading would usually identify as “religion”). As advocates of this view often claim, whatever Jews do, politically and otherwise, in their state, is by definition Jewish.

A competing reading prefers to identify Israel as a “Jewish state” in the sense that its politics corresponds with values, ideas and ethical guidelines that emanate from within the world of Judaism. According to this reading, of which Roth’s work, I would argue, could be read as an illuminative example, the state itself is subjected or indeed mandated to respond in principle and practice to an external *Jewish* judgment. Thus, the “Jewish State” or the Jews in the state could be found to act un-Jewishly.

It is through a discussion of the notion of chosen-ness that Roth offers his intervention in this debate, charting a clear relationship between Jews and Judaism: “Judaism is not to be considered in term of the Jews, but the Jews in terms of Judaism. Judaism is not what some or all individual Jews happen as a fact to do. It is what Jews should be doing (but often are not doing) as members of a holy people. Judaism comes first. It is not a product, but a programme and the Jews are the instruments of its fulfilment.”³⁴

While the notion that Jews precede (and define) Judaism entails a clear sense of “ethnicity” as determining Jewish politics, the insistence that Judaism precedes the Jews pulls the rug from under such a genealogical focus: “When it is said that the Jewish people is the bearer or carrier or transmitter of Judaism, the phrase ‘Jewish people’ has to be understood in the widest sense. In principle, the tie constituting this people is not one of ‘race’ or ‘blood.’” The ethical message of Judaism is universal, and anyone – regardless of “origin” – can become a carrier of this message and to abide by it; the question is one of the ideational, moral constitution of the person and of her community, and not of her accident of birth.³⁵

It is not the Jews who define Judaism, then, but the reverse: Judaism precedes and defines the Jew. This necessarily entails a notion of “Jewish peoplehood” that is dramatically different than the ethno-national idea that emerged mostly in Eastern Europe and came to determine Zionist and later Israeli politics. In essence, the precedence of Judaism over Jews renders the boundaries of the community that is the subject, or the collective agent of “Jewish politics” porous, allowing anyone who joins the aforesaid constitution to be a genuine part of this community: “The ‘household of God’ is the community of Judaism. Its root loyalty is not to a person or to an aggregate of persons but [...] to a Teaching. This Teaching is the ‘Law (in Hebrew, Torah) of Moses’ as it has been lived and interpreted, with ever-changing emphasis and modification, during the many long centuries of its history.”³⁶

Roth employs Maimonides’s teaching to draw the rather radical (in its denial of the “ethnic” bent of the Zionist construction of Jewish ethno-nationalism) lesson. Identifying the question of the voluntary or involuntary nature of the

association as that which defines it, he notes that on the Maimonidean view the community of Judaism “would seem to be, in this sense, voluntary. It is a body of persons linked by a common adherence to a determinate doctrine of the nature of God and to the determinate way of life for man which that doctrine is held to require.” Drawing on Maimonides’s history and sociology of religion, Roth stresses that this doctrine is “the original religion of the whole human race, it was only re-discovered by Abraham.” The revelation at Mount Sinai was only the reaffirmation of this doctrine, adding to the mix the covenantal calling for Abraham’s descendants as a “kingdom of priests and a holy nation.” If one could be tempted (as the nationalist reading obviously is) to read this to mean “we are special, and better than others” Roth’s reading of Maimonides stresses the exact opposite lesson: “This ‘nation’ is thus in intention infinitely expandible. Its outer limits are every single human being [...] [T]he two sides of the Torah, its religious truth and its moral discipline, are not secret. They are there for all to learn and live by.”³⁷

Furthermore, the promise entailed in the act of electing the people is *conditional*, dependent on the chosen people’s adherence to the calling entailed in this holiness. Roth laments how Jews have forgotten the “if ...” in prophetic promises: “[W]e forget the condition. We forget that the promises must be earned. But that *is* the condition, the *sine qua non*. If we ‘do not hearken’, then we have no right to claim the fulfilment of the promises, far less to proclaim to the world that in us of this generation the promises are fulfilled.”³⁸

This leads Roth to directly discuss the political implications of the contemporaneous Zionist claim to chosen-ness. Forgetting this lesson of the prophets, Jews have come to see themselves as unconditionally deserving the benefits of the divine promise (of the Land, the special privilege of the chosen). This, he says, amounts to heresy. “No doubt the politicians and diplomats will disagree. But politicians, and even diplomats, are sometimes wrong”. Indeed, the politician’s proclivity to be wrong “is one of the great, and one of the abiding, lessons which the biblical prophets have to teach us.”³⁹ Judaism in this scheme becomes the judge of politics, not its enabler.

Yet, Roth insists, Judaism, the teaching that constitutes the Jews, cannot exist without a collective body practising, interpreting, and upholding it – without, that is, a collective of Jewish people. The precedence of Judaism over the Jews, in other words, does not annul the latter. This is an important point, shifting our attention to focus squarely on politics, as it insists that a collective body – the subject of this politics – is a necessary element of Judaism. To make the point, Roth depicts the relationship between Judaism and the Jews as that between spirit and body, stressing the importance of the actual practice of the “teaching” for the viability of the very notion of Jewish peoplehood. “The body of Judaism is clearly the ‘Jews’ or ‘Jewry’ or the ‘Jewish people’”, and “it is agreed universally that such a body is required and exists. Judaism is not mere spirit. The ‘remnant’, the ‘saints’, the ‘witnesses’, ‘the Kingdom’ – are

all [...], in Hobbes's phrase, real, not metaphorical. The way of God is a life to be lived in this world by human beings in association."⁴⁰

This is an important point, since it holds Roth apart from those who suggest that Judaism could or even should be viewed as a "purely" intellectual and ethical "spirit," that can exist without a group of people living their lives as Jewish (and composing a Jewish people) – in essence, denying the relevance of Jewish politics, by focusing exclusively on a universal, apolitical notion of ethics. Roth's ethical intervention is fully committed to the particularism of the carrier of this universalist message. There is plenty in his writing to suggest that he is angry at the Jews for failing their ethical mission; nevertheless, he does not consider the option of Judaism (or the Jewish "spirit") viable without a sociopolitical body carrying this spirit.

Yet Roth rejects the notion that this "body" is somehow "biologically", "racially", "ethnically" or even "sociologically" pre-determined: the political "body" of the carriers of Judaism is defined by the tradition they practise. "Ideally", he summarizes the lesson from Maimonides, "the community or 'body' of Judaism is coterminous with the whole of mankind. It is not confined to those born Jews or to those inhabiting a particular parcel of earth, except in so far as being born into a tradition, and living in an environment in which it is practised, makes that tradition more 'natural' and therefore more easy to follow." This, then, is a *historical, traditional* (meaning, constituted by a lived, practised tradition) sense of Jewish peoplehood, which is at the same time "metaphysical," dedicated to a meta-historical calling, "either moving nearer to or going away from, an identifiable goal."⁴¹

This notion of Jewish peoplehood is closely aligned with Roth's conception of Judaism, which he understands as a living, ever developing tradition. Critically, while engaging thoroughly and continually with Judaism, Roth has not bothered to "define" Judaism in his work, a matter that touches the very core of his engagement with Judaism. As Katzew, who offers a detailed discussion of Roth's conception of Judaism, puts it, "Definitions limit: they 'fence in'. Roth set out to do the antithesis, to liberate Judaism from scientific precision, and relate to it as a living organism or as the subject of an artistic work."⁴² Roth "harbor[ed] no scientific pretensions" in his engagement with questions of Judaism, which "retained an essential integrity throughout his life." Among other things, this phenomenological position allows for competing understandings of Judaism to co-exist: "there is a tacit acknowledgement that his portrait [of Judaism] is only one of the many that are possible. It is not a definitive text about Judaism [...]."⁴³

*

The modern history of nationalism renders Roth's view a diatribe against the onslaught of ethno-nationalism and of a quasi-racial notion of Jewishness that has come to dominate Zionism. Roth's concluding chapters of *Judaism: A Portrait* narrate the rapid reversal of roles in the relationship between Judaism and

the Jews in modern Europe. Shifting his main concern “from the theoretical [...] to the practical,” he offers a harsh, prophetic judgment of a political movement built around a collective self-perception of being a “chosen” people. Moving from theology to socio-history he does not mince his words, opening with a blunt summation of the narrative told by the Bible, which is to be read as a contemporary lesson:

Moses (or was it God?) knew his Jews. They were stiff-necked, corrupt, unwise, a crooked and perverse generation. They took every occasion for sinning, and they sinned every kind of sin [...] There is no idealization of Jewry in Scripture. On the contrary, it is because the Jews were what they were that their need for Judaism was apparent. The picture given throughout is that of a violent and self-willed people whom God tried to educate without success.⁴⁴

Religion vs. politics

One of Zionist ideology’s foundational arguments is that nationalism, as the political aspiration for establishing national statehood, is the all-encompassing, meta historical framework of Jewish peoplehood. In this framework, which is seen as “secular” but carries obvious theopolitical tones, religion is seen as but a partial aspect, archaic and apolitical (“exilic”, in the Zionist parlance), of the nation’s life. It is, in the best of cases, to be tolerated within the framework of the political. This is the background against which to consider Roth’s decrying of the “politicization of Judaism” as a sin, and his redemptive suggestion that a “Judaization of our politics” is the great need of our time.

As noted earlier, Roth is highly attentive to the historical nature of Judaism. As he notes, any attempt to identify “the essence of Judaism” is bound to be futile. Judaism cannot be discussed as a “single unit in the world”, nor can it be easily compared with other “cases”, since it is not clear at all to what conceptual field it belongs in the first place. Yet his “portrait” of Judaism makes it apparent that Roth takes Maimonides and his “fresh creation” of Judaism as a “unity of intellectual doctrine and moral discipline” as the ultimate benchmark for appreciating the diverse manifestations of Judaism.⁴⁵ It is the Maimonidean Judaism, Roth asserts, that “prepared Jewry in advance for what, on the European stage, was to be its greatest test”.⁴⁶

This “test” was a political one, embodied in and motivated by the granting of civil rights to Jews. Civil emancipation entailed a foundational reversal of roles between Jews and Judaism, and between politics and tradition: “Till now Judaism had made the Jew. From now on the Jew made Judaism. The tradition was made pliable to the political fact. [...] In the resulting struggle, the struggle to save the Jew for Judaism, it was, if anything, Judaism which was sacrificed.”⁴⁷

Roth identifies these changes as manifested most fully in the thought of Moses Mendelssohn. It was exactly the attempt to draw a clear line separating Judaism (seen as mere “religion”) from politics (defined or epitomized by the

“secular” nation-state) – a line which Mendelssohn was demarcating in order to allow Jews to partake in the modern politics of the European nation-state – that resulted in the demise of Judaism itself.⁴⁸

By reimagining or reinventing Judaism as a “confession” to fit within the modern (nation-statist) European political theory – on its discourse of religious toleration and political integration – Mendelssohn has instigated a process where Jews have lost Judaism:

Thus, the door was open to the Jew of English, French or German citizenship to become successively (i) the English, French, or German citizen of the Jewish confession (or ‘persuasion’), (ii) the Englishman, Frenchman or German of the Jewish persuasion, and (iii) the Englishman, Frenchman or German without the Jewish persuasion.

It is in this context, and only as a parenthetical note, that Roth offers a rather devastating critique of Israeli nationalism, and specifically Israel’s (and by extension: Zionism’s) claim to Jewish identity. “Paradoxically”, he writes, “the clearest example of this ‘Mendelssohnian’ development is now provided by the citizenry of the new state of Israel.” The message is clear: Zionism has produced in the newly established state the Israeli *without* Judaism.⁴⁹

Nationalism, in this reading, brings about an unwarranted reversal of the relation between religion and politics, “politicizing” religion. Nationalism would justify unethical behaviour as the expression of collective identity, or as serving the higher cause of the national interest. Roth addresses the biblical prophets as role models to resisting such politicization. Their (moral, religious, and only consequently political) power lay exactly in their refusal to be “swallowed up by nationalism.” Formulated by the prophets, what would come to be called Judaism and Jewish religion “demanded what the Israelite [meaning here: Jewish] nationalism did not give it, and often the opposite of what this nationalism gave it.” This prophetic religion was the institution that “exposed the sins of the nation, and did not cover them.” Buttressed by their moral-religious message, “they stood up against the kings, against the heads of the nation”, and condemned the behaviour of the masses as they did their leaders’. “The prophets didn’t accept quietly what the spirit of the nation offered them; they objected to it repeatedly.” Politicization neutralizes religion: “up until our days, religion has functioned as a conscience for nationalism. Now it cannot function as a conscience since it has been subjugated to nationalism, became part of nationalism, swallowed by nationalism.”⁵⁰

Religion was and remains that which can contest this politicization of life, meaning that “religion [...] has a political (or, if you like, and anti-political) role.” Roth thus suggests that the main impetus of religion’s political role – which, he says, is especially important in the immediate context of World War II and the escalating fight over Palestine – is what could be seen, paradoxically, as an *anti-political* message.⁵¹

Crucially, Roth made this intervention in Hebrew, in Mandatory Palestine of 1942 – a context dominated by a Zionist ideology that is built exactly on the notion of politicizing Jewish identity, if not Judaism at large. Indeed, much of the impetus of dominant readings of modern European Jewish identity, including dominant streams within Zionist ideology, has aimed exactly at “normalizing” the Jews, rendering them “a nation like all other nations” – that is, explicitly or implicitly, shedding away the notion of the people’s “holiness” – exactly by “politicizing” it, namely redefining it in terms of the politics of the sovereign nation-state. Roth is obviously writing in the context of the triumph of political Zionism over competing notions of Jewish nationalism. This background instils his complicated treatment of the state with a flavour of heterodoxy that at the same time does not translate into an outright negation of the Zionist aspiration for sovereign nation-statehood.

Roth utilizes Judaism exactly to check the state and its politics, and to offer an external judgment of these. He holds a notion of religion as directly opposed to the state, contradicting the Protestant notion of religion as an apolitical matter that is relegated to the private realm – outside of the reach of the state and away from its politics. Judaism, Roth argues, does not fit the “opinion” that “religion has nothing to do with authority”, that it is “primarily a matter of feeling” and is “personal.” Confronted with the biblical message, this notion emerges as “unsatisfactory”. This is worth noting here, because it is Roth’s “thick” notion of Judaism that is incompatible with the politics of Zionism; we must remember that the state is happy with a “purely spiritual”, “thin” and apolitical religion. Roth, in contrast, is suggesting that the moral, ethical, “thick” religion of the covenant is that which would counter the state.⁵²

It is interesting to note that Roth addresses the modern state primarily in the context of discussing liberty and bondage, which he parallels, correspondingly, to worshiping God and submitting to idols. He does so as part of a wider discussion on the Jewish contribution to civilization, stressing that it was Jewish monotheism that enabled human liberty. “Bondage”, he says, takes different forms, either spiritual or material. But “The ultimate bondage is of the mind”, taking the form of submission to particulars:

Mind is bound being confined to any categories which are less than those of the whole. There are many such - stocks and stones, phrases, myths, wealth, political power. These all cramp and confine, and against them the Jewish mind has always waged war. Its God is jealous and will have none other gods besides himself. He is thus the supreme liberator.⁵³

And it is in the context of this bondage of the mind – clearly “un-Jewish” – that the coercive power of modern state emerges in its fullest: “The last and most brutalizing of all the idols created by man” is the modern nation-state, “the all-controlling and all-interfering state.” Against the totalizing rule of this state, “the last freedom comes to men from the recognition of their individual

and immediate dependence on the God of the spirits of all flesh.” It is *against* the modern state, then – not within or through it – that the liberating force of Judaism emerges in its fullest form. “If there is such a thing as a ‘Jewish mind’, and if the Jewish mind as such has anything to contribute to mankind’s common store, it may be said to consist in this sense of absolutes.”⁵⁴

Returning elsewhere to discussing the concept of idol worshiping, Roth immediately turns to the state – this time couched in accompanying political concepts, all of which are but human creations – as a modern object of what the Bible sees as the ultimate sin:

In religious language, myth is an idol. Idols are manufactured objects of worship, and the Bible mocks at the men who bow down to the work of their own hands. Yet graven images are not the only idols. They are only the more obvious ones. And they are today not the most dangerous. The dangerous idols are those we make of words, phrases like ‘the state’, ‘race’, ‘way of life’, ‘progress’, ‘democracy’ [...] ‘They that make them become like them’, empty, hollow, unreal.⁵⁵

This juxtaposition of Judaism and the state fits within a larger framework, where generic “religion” proves to be, in Roth’s view, the only institution to stand up to the “the great arrogance of our time, the arrogance of the state.”⁵⁶ Echoing Antigone’s evocation of the divine commandment to counter the earthly rule of the king, Roth contrasts religion and politics, and specifically religion and the modern state, to argue against the apparent triumph of the latter. “Political authority is essentially temporary and relative, a device to meet the changing circumstance of ever-shifting power. It is myth, not truth. When it claims to be absolute, it is doomed. It nullifies itself and engenders its own destruction.”⁵⁷

Granted, religion too limits individual liberty and seeks to dictate one’s behaviour, even if unlike the state its power is more “symbolic” than material. But here the major difference emerges: “the arrogance of politics enslaves our humanity. The arrogance of religion creates it and gives it shape. The power of the one crushes and destroys; the authority of the other raises up.”⁵⁸

Commenting on the rabbinical treatment of the story of the Maccabean revolt against the Romans, Roth suggests that the suppression of the militaristic aspects of this story, aspects which, he must have been aware, have been highlighted by the Zionist reinterpretation and commemoration of the story, betrays a wider message, that bears immediate relevance to our appreciation of the modern sovereign state:

If, as a principle of universal application, *God’s* power is to be equated with his goodness, perhaps, in the rabbinic mind and as a principle of equally universal application, *man’s power* also is to be equated with his goodness. Perhaps they [the rabbis] thought sincerely, apart altogether from the fear of the policeman and other considerations of the higher diplomacy, that there are virtues superior to the military. They made great use of the doctrine of the Imitation of God and constantly urge us to follow God in his

moral attributes: ‘As he is merciful, be thou merciful.’ I am not aware of any passage in which we are urged to follow God in his *military* capacity.⁵⁹

Roth also made note of the discrepancy between the form of the state and the various, more diverse manifestations of Jewish peoplehood, suggesting that the state is not necessary for political Jewish self-expression: “State is but one of several forms of organizing society. It is indeed an important form, but not necessary, and surely not exclusive. There are several forms that match the demands of a human being, demands that are no less important than those that are fulfilled in the statist organization.”⁶⁰

These comments suggest that Judaism is essentially opposed to the institution of the modern, sovereign state *per se*. However, any discussion of Judaism and state in the current context must also consider the fact that Roth’s writing on political theory, and his advocacy of British liberal democracy strongly suggest that he aimed his critique not at the modern state in general terms, but specifically at the authoritarian, the “all controlling and all-interfering” state, suggesting a basic distinction between the two.

Yet Roth – a reader of Hobbes and a teacher of his works – could not have ignored the fact that this liberal democratic framework is itself founded on a totalizing – indeed: “Hobbesian” – notion of sovereignty. Ultimately, Roth, too, was unable to release the political mind from the bondage of modern sovereignty. In this regard, he seems to have been forecasting the difficulties or contradictions of liberal Zionism, although he was surely released from its debilitating secularist premises.

Ahad Ha`am, the misleading father figure

Roth’s intellectual milieu in Mandatory Palestine generally and in the Hebrew University more particularly has celebrated Ahad Ha`am as an ideological father figure of sorts. In Roth’s own words, “we are all of us, in some sense and in some degree, disciples of Ahad Ha`am. We all use his ideas, all speak his language.”⁶¹ This milieu, and the wider “we” Roth seems to refer to, had tended to align with Ahad Ha`am’s “cultural” or “spiritual” brand of Zionism. Contrasted with political Zionism, this ideological stream viewed the national cultural reformation and rejuvenation, or the “spiritual resurrection” of the Jewish people, as a necessary precondition for any future claim to sovereignty. While it had failed to dominate the Zionist project at large, Ahad Ha`am’s thought has had an enduring influence, especially with matters having to do with Israel’s and Israelis’ Jewish identity.⁶² Throughout Israeli history, commentators have repeatedly evoked Ahad Ha`am’s vision as a remedy to the Israeli Jewish identity “problem” or “crisis”, namely the apparent inability of Israeli nationalism to come to terms with its own claim to Jewish identity.

Roth's own engagement with Ahad Ha'am is coloured by this affinity. In his capacity as the inaugural holder of the Ahad Ha'am Chair in Philosophy at the Hebrew University, Roth delivered a series of talks commemorating Ahad Ha'am; he was also tasked with writing the introduction to Ahad Ha'am's collected writings.⁶³ It is against this background that Roth's critical engagement with Ahad Ha'am's thought and its heritage emerges as a challenge not only to this ideological father figure, but also to Zionism and even to Israeli Jewish identity more generally. Not unlike Kurtzweil's own critical engagement with Ahad Ha'am's thought and its legacy, Roth's critique can be read as an argument not only with or against the man himself, but primarily so with the politico-cultural (or theopolitical) structure built upon his thought.⁶⁴

Offering somewhat of an Oedipal release from the shadow of the father figure, Roth depicts the intellectual legacy of Ahad Ha'am's as out of its time and place, and Ahad Ha'am the intellectual leader (as opposed to Ahad Ha'am the man) as out of his (philosophical, intellectual) depth. It is important for Roth to put Ahad Ha'am in his correct *intellectual* place, repeating in several places that Ahad Ha'am was not a philosopher, but merely used some prevalent ideas of others that were available to him. "Regretfully", he concludes, "we have to strip Ahad Ha'am down."⁶⁵ This leaves Roth with "the uncomfortable impression that many of the ideas Ahad Ha'am used so abundantly were ultimately unsound and ultimately incompatible with one another."⁶⁶

Crucially, Roth finds Ahad Ha'am's interventions regarding Judaism – especially on Jewish ethics – "doubtful."⁶⁷ While he sees in Ahad Ha'am the "clearest recognition of the general nature of the problem" of modern Jewry, he judges Ahad Ha'am as having approached the problem from the wrong angle, as it were: Ahad Ha'am's commitment to modernism, specifically to the utilitarian and evolutionary thought of his time led him astray. In Roth's terminology, this amounted to Ahad Ha'am shifting the onus of discussion, along the lines of the predominant modern thought, from metaphysics to psychology. "Religion" is turned in this scheme into a sub-segment of "culture", an element of the "national creative power" in Ahad Ha'am's phrasing: It is (only) a historical manifestation of an essence, and it has become outdated in modernity, bound to evolve into something else.⁶⁸

Roth judges Ahad Ha'am severely for having failed to appreciate the effects of his historicizing of Judaism. For Roth, this is the origin of the Zionist/Israeli disregard for religion. It is an undermining of Judaism's ethical message more generally by rendering it a matter of "*mores*, habits of action: what men as a fact do, how men as a fact behave." Ahad Ha'am fails to provide a binding reason for the continued commitment to Jewish ethics. His nationalist-mythic notion of the "national spirit" implies that "[e]verything we do is ultimately the result of our spirit. This means that there is no deed of our deeds that cannot be justified."⁶⁹

For Roth, who wishes to preserve an external moral perspective from which the state or national politics can still be critiqued, this is an aberration. “All common differences are swallowed up by the concept of the nation. There is no longer sacred and profane, light and darkness, and good and evil since they are only secondary, subordinated and subjected to the ‘absolutist’ spirit of the nation.” Religion, too, is a victim of this attitude, “enslaved to this omnipotent master.”⁷⁰

The fault lies, then, with the “ethnicist” root of Ahad Ha’am’s thought and that of most other Zionist ideologues, the notion that Jews, as a “nation”, a “collective living organism,” precede Judaism.⁷¹ As many of Ahad Ha’am’s ideological adversaries argued, he could not provide a satisfactory justification for his “essentialism”, namely, his insistence that the collective “organism” of the nation should remain loyal to its past creation since it holds the core of Jewish authenticity. His critics thus viewed themselves as free to “destroy the temples” of past times, and to build new ones, nourishing on any source they or the collective Jewish national body would deem fit for purpose.⁷²

One way of reading this critique is to see Roth as identifying Ahad Ha’am’s elitism as prohibiting the latter from seeing the dangerous implications of his (unintended?) relativism, which Roth finds to be a defining feature of Israeli Jewishness. Roth makes sure to note that Ahad Ha’am himself was no relativist but insists that he failed to see how his “psychologizing” of Judaism would naturally lead to a relativistic conclusion: “[O]n the sociological theory, and it was this which was held by Ahad Ha’am, there is not and cannot be such a thing as an absolute. So, we are faced with a dilemma. If we accept his general theory, we have to abandon his moral outlook, if we accept his moral outlook, we have to abandon his general theory.”⁷³

The Qibya Letter – an application of ethics to politics

What would it mean to “Judaize” politics (instead of “politicizing Judaism”)? Roth does not offer a comprehensive vision of a political programme that would be “Judaized”, beyond, of course, his insistence that politics should be subjected to the judgment of what he presents as Jewish ethics. It seems to me that a good way to appreciate what this would mean in practice is reflected in his intervention on the debate surrounding the Qibya massacre.⁷⁴ (Roth was either signatory or co-signatory to several other letters protesting Zionist or Israeli atrocities, such as a public letter decrying the Sharafat massacre in 1951,⁷⁵ and a letter to Prime Minister David Ben Gurion protesting the Israeli decision in 1949 to settle Jewish immigrants in Deir Yassin, the locus of another massacre.⁷⁶) I find his intervention, especially given the politico-discursive context in which it came,⁷⁷ to distil an explication of what it would mean for the state to be subjected to an external, Jewish judgment. Specifically, it gives a very concrete sense of the price exerted from Judaism

itself by the “*realpolitik*” of the running of a state viewed as “Jewish” (in other words, the price exerted from Judaism by its politicization⁷⁸).

On the night of 14–15 October 1953, a recently established commando group of the Israeli military set out to carry a “reprisal operation” in the then Jordanian West Bank. The operation was a reaction to the killing of a mother and her two children in the Israeli town of Yahud. They were killed by a Palestinian Fedayeen unit, who crossed the border into Israel near the village of Qibya. (Yahud was established in 1948 on the ruins of the Palestinian village Al-Yahudiya/Al Abbasiyya, which neighboured Qibya). The Fedayeen’s attack was a link in a series of similar acts, which threatened the fragile Israeli sense of security. The Israeli soldiers killed sixty-nine civilians, two-thirds of them women and children, and destroyed 45 houses in the village.⁷⁹

The Qibya massacre brought about a storm of international condemnation and protest, unprecedented in the state’s short history. Importantly, many of those condemning it were spokespeople for Jewish communities outside of Israel. The debate that took place over Jewish platforms outlined what would later become the familiar lines of critique and apologetics concerning the State of Israel. The Israeli “*hasbara*” was loyally formulated by Rabbi Abraham Cohen, President of the Board of Deputies of British Jews, and the Rabbi of Birmingham. Cohen summarized his defence of Israel in three “propositions”: (1) In principle, “[r]eprisals are morally wrong.” But (2) those who have themselves carried such actions in the past cannot condemn others for doing the same. And lastly (3):

No individual, Jew or Gentile, is entitled to condemn the Israelis who felt impelled to take such drastic action at Qibya, unless he can conscientiously assert: ‘If I were living in that area and my own or my neighbour’s wife and children had been murdered by Arab infiltrates [*sic*], I would oppose any suggestion to retaliate’.

Cohen further suggested that those Jews who condemn Israel but fail this condition are “probably moved not so much by moral indignation as by self-interest on the plea [...] ‘What will the Gentiles say?’” The bottom line of the President of the Board of Deputies was accordingly unequivocal: “many of the judges, both governments and individuals, who condemned [the Israelis] so unsparingly should have maintained a decent silence after searching their conscience.”⁸⁰

Roth’s letter was formulated as a direct reaction to Cohen’s “propositions,” identifying the issue at stake not as a political or communal matter, but as an ethical one. He suggests that Cohen, exempting Israelis from responsibility and directing his judgment towards the Gentiles, failed to consider other important factors of what is at stake: “There is, for example, the religion, or the system of thought, called Judaism. And there are, too, the non-Israeli Jews considered either in themselves or in so far as they represent, or profess, Judaism.” The issue at hand, then, is specifically Jewish, as in having

to do with Judaism; “The problem is whether either Judaism or Jewry can acquiesce in this ‘incident.’” A historical view would suggest an almost immediate rejection of such operation, “the type of action which we have been accustomed to say that Judaism taught the world to condemn and from which Jewry itself has so often suffered.”

For Roth, the abrogation of *Jewish* principles and values for the sake of the interests of the (“Jewish”) state may simply be too dear a price to pay. If Israelis and Jews condone such actions, he rhetorically asks,

Shall we still be able to say that we demand one law for all and that we do not do to others what we do not wish others to do to us? That the *lex talionis* is not Jewish; that we abhor the spilling of blood, even of animals; that we are commanded in the Pentateuch to care for the non-Jew (“love the stranger”), as was noted by the rabbis [...] thirty-six times? Shall we still be able to say that institution of properly constituted courts or the investigation of crime is one of the fundamental moral requirements of Judaism; that the Torah bans private revenge and insists on due process of law; that fathers should not be killed for the sins of children nor children for the sins of fathers, but each man should suffer for his own acts; that responsibility before both God and man is in Jewish eyes personal?

Ultimately, the main victim of the abrogation of these Jewish foundations are the Israeli Jews themselves. Roth does not mince his words when making this point:

The real tragedy is of course for the Israelis. And it does not lie in the political deterioration of their borders. It lies in the moral deterioration of their souls. What manner of men are these who could contrive this action, or what persons could carry it out? And what manner of men are those who, arrogantly dismissing the moral issue, bemuse themselves and us with their *realpolitik*? Where terrorism is used as an instrument of policy the worst consequences fall on those who use it.

The supremacy of (Jewish) ethics over (Israeli or Jewish) politics dictates that this politics is to be judged “from the outside”, as it were, a judgment that is not bound by the logic or the interest of the state, but is rather determined by a universal message, which is necessarily “external” to the politics of the state: “It is surely a truism that the very meaning of morality is the correction of feeling by judgement. Judgement to be judgement must be external to the facts.”

Roth confirms that Jewishly (i.e. ethically), there cannot be even a “half-hearted approval” of the Israeli attack on Qibya. He does not hesitate to compare this attack to war atrocities carried by the Nazis in Lidice and Oradea, equally and unequivocally condemning all atrocities. Furthermore, Roth’s commitment to the universality of Jewish ethics dictates that a Jewishly moral judgement is not the exclusive prerogative of Jews alone. Gentiles, too, can employ a Jewish ethical perspective to judge the politics of the Jewish state. “[C]an we cry out against honest and liberal-minded men, even of

other religions and types of thought, who on the grounds taught by Judaism recognize an Israeli action for what it is?”

Conclusion

Roth clearly expected the Zionist enterprise in Palestine to be guided by a Jewish ethical calling, and to yield a socio-political reality that is committed to this ethics and, in this regard, would be anything but “normal” (as in the Zionist yearning to “normalize” the Jews and to make them “a nation like all other nations.”). His moral message is clear, even if often left only implicitly articulated: a people committed to its holiness must be guided by a higher ethical directive. Yet this may be revealed to be a non- or even anti-political horizon for Zionism, and Roth has not bothered to offer a clear explication of what a commitment to the notion of the “holiness” of the nation may yield politically. A narrative arc that begins with the notion of holiness or sacredness as emerging from the Creator, and goes on to discuss the qualities manifested by this sacredness, ends with a rather cryptic note on the holiness of the people, the land and the tongue.

It may be argued that Roth ultimately failed to form a coherent, systematic, and ultimately influential political voice because he was indebted to the notion of modern sovereignty. In this, he may be exemplifying the problematic nature of any attempt to think outside of and to speak against a dominant order of the world. As I mentioned earlier, Roth pivoted towards political philosophy and, implicitly, to politico-philosophical, liberal-democratic advocacy in the pivotal moment when the Zionist community in Palestine was forming into a sovereign state. This led him to a detailed engagement with liberal democratic tradition and theory and, in a sense, *away* from Jewish matters as in a discourse on/of Judaism and from within Judaism.⁸¹ He did make a point of reading certain elements in Jewish tradition or history (e.g. Maimonides’s rationalism) as “fitting into” the democratic form. But this was not so much an engagement with Judaism as it was a reading of Judaism so as to make it *fit in* with liberal democracy.

This strikes me as crucial, since as I hope my discussion has shown, his interventions hold a potential for a critical Jewish appreciation of Zionist, Israeli nation-statehood, taking part in a conversation carried by such thinkers as those mentioned in the introduction. Yet Roth himself seems, at this moment of heightened attention to politico-philosophical matters, and from within the soon-to-be-state, to relegate Judaism aside, and to focus on liberal democracy based on the English precedence as the blueprint for the Zionist polity. It is as if he agreed, in the most pivotal of political moments, that considerations of Judaism are secondary to politics.

In light of this, what is even more striking is the fact that Roth offers what could be considered his most systematic Jewish critique of certain tendencies

within political Zionism (even if he does not always explicate the point) only after having left Israel: It is as if the prophet had to first leave the confines of the political framework (of which he was a subject since immigrating to Palestine) to be able to formalize a Jewish critique of political Zionism and the State of Israel.

In this regard, Roth may be pointing, again, to the problematics of formulating a Jewish critique from within the Zionist discourse, or the nation-statist discourse more generally. In other words, he is showing the precariousness of a position of “exile withing sovereignty.”⁸² Or, to paraphrase Mahmoud Mamdani⁸³ and Raif Zreik,⁸⁴ he is putting in question the possibility of a Jewish person to still arrive at (or remain in) Palestine as an immigrant instead of a settler. Can such a person – committed to Judaism and taking part in the Zionist or Israeli enterprise – hold on to a view of Judaism that contradicts the nationalist politicization of Judaism *a la* Zionist ideology? Roth’s own tragic arc suggests a negative answer: the nationalization of Judaism seems to be stronger than the Jewish person himself.

Notes

1. Roth, *Is There a Jewish Philosophy?*, 168.
2. It would be futile to try and properly cite here an ever-growing body of literature on these thinkers. For some of the latest works, see: Vatter, *Living Law*; Barak-Gorodetsky, *Judah Magnes*; Meir, “Rosenzweig and the Cohen-Buber Dispute on Zionism,” 83–96; Fiebig, “From Scepticism to Tolerance of ‘the Other’”; Gordon, *Toward Nationalism’s End*.
3. Myers, *Between Jew and Arab*.
4. Boyarin, *Unheroic Conduct*; Boyarin and Boyarin, *Powers of Diaspora*; Rabkin, *A Threat from Within*; Butler, *Parting Ways*; Kaplan, “Rabbi Joel Teitelbaum, Zionism, and Hungarian Ultra-Orthodoxy.”
5. As David Heyd commented recently, most teachers and students of philosophy in Israel would have never heard of Roth. See Heyd, “Leon Roth’s Utopian Vision of a Liberal State.”
6. The closest we have is Jan Katzew’s unpublished PhD dissertation on Roth: Katzew, “Leon Roth – His Life and Work”. See also, Batnitzky, “A Tale of Two Leo(n)s”; Heyd, “Leon Roth’s Utopian Vision of a Liberal State”; Katzew, “Completing Creation Through Education”; Katzew, “Leon Roth’s Judaism”; Gordon and Motzkin, “Between Universalism and Particularism”; Gordon, “Zionism, Translation and the Politics of Erasure”; Gordon, “A Jewish Voice for Co-Existence”; Harvey, “Leon Roth on Hebrew, English, and Arabic”; Harvey, “After Qibya”; Harvey, “The Religious-Political Paradox According to Leon Roth”; Schvarcz, “Democracy and Judaism in Leon Roth’s Actions and Thought”; Schvarcz and Brodsky, “Love, Freedom, and Bondage in the Writings of Leon Roth”; Roswald, “Leon Roth”. Finally, I should also add that the fact that Roth is relatively little studied also overshadows the comparative study of his thought, as the primary step – an exposition and analysis of his thought on its own terms, which is my aim here – must precede the juxtaposition of his thought with those of other, much more thoroughly studied, thinkers.

7. Gordon and Motzkin, "Between Universalism and Particularism."
8. (Ahad Ha'am), who was a father figure to the Hebrew University in general, and to many of its founding members, including Roth, in particular, died a year earlier. Zipperstein, *Elusive Prophet*; Goldstein, *Ahad Ha'am*.
9. Heyd, "Leon Roth's Utopian Vision of a Liberal State," 100.
10. For lack of space, I will not reference all of Roth's works here. For a comprehensive list of his publications see Loewe, *Studies in Rationalism, Judaism & Universalism*, 323–36. Many of the books and articles by (and also on) Roth are available on the Leon Roth Foundation's website (leonroth.org). See also, Heyd, "Leon Roth's Utopian Vision of a Liberal State," 100–1; see also Gordon and Motzkin, "Between Universalism and Particularism."
11. Gordon, "A Jewish Voice for Co-Existence." Heyd further notes that Roth, who came from a comfortable background and had his income secured by his family, donated his university salary to the translation project. Heyd, "Leon Roth's Utopian Vision of a Liberal State," 100.
12. Katzew, "A Jewish State Ought to Be a Democratic State" (Leon Roth Conference, Jerusalem, 2019), 1.
13. Katzew, 1.
14. Katzew, "Leon Roth's Judaism," 93.
15. Katzew, "A Jewish State Ought to Be a Democratic State," 1.
16. Loewe, "Memoir," 3.
17. "Prof. L. Roth Stirs Wrath of Zionists", *B'nai B'rith Messenger*, 6 June 1947.
18. Loewe, "Memoir," 3.
19. For a detailed consideration of Roth's potential motivations to leave see: Schvarcz, "Democracy and Judaism in Leon Roth's Actions and Thought"; Schvarcz, "Ma sheyakholti latet nattati."
20. Loewe, "Memoir," 5.
21. Schmidt, "Herbert Samuel's Moral Philosophy," 268.
22. Loewe, "Preface," xi.
23. Loewe, "Memoir," 8–9.
24. Gordon, "A Jewish Voice for Co-Existence," 150.
25. Loewe, "Memoir," 8.
26. Hertzberg, *The Zionist Idea; a Historical Analysis and Reader*; Shimoni, *The Zionist Ideology*; Avineri, *The Making of Modern Zionism*.
27. Smith, *Chosen Peoples*.
28. Gurkan, *The Jews as a Chosen People*, chaps 7, 10; Abulof, "The Roles of Religion in National Legitimation"; Saposnik, *Zionism's Redemptions*.
29. Raz-Krakotzkin, "There Is No God, but He Promised Us the land."
30. Raz-Krakotzkin, "Religion and Nationalism in the Jewish and Zionist Context"; Yadgar, *Sovereign Jews*.
31. Roth, *Judaism – A Portrait*, 16.
32. Roth, 16.
33. Yadgar, "'Jewish' Politics or the Politics of 'Jews'?"
34. Roth, *Judaism – A Portrait*, 16.
35. Roth, 16.
36. Roth, 17.
37. Roth, 99.
38. Roth, *Is There a Jewish Philosophy?*, 78.
39. Roth, 78–9.
40. Roth, *Judaism – A Portrait*, 99.

41. Roth, 100.
42. Katzew, "Leon Roth's Judaism," 91.
43. Katzew, 92–3.
44. Roth, *Judaism – A Portrait*, 203.
45. Roth, 215, 214.
46. Roth, 216.
47. Roth, 217.
48. Roth, 220.
49. Roth, 221.
50. Roth, "Mekom Hadat Bevinyan Haaretz," 75.
51. Roth, 75–6.
52. Roth, *Is There a Jewish Philosophy?*, 123.
53. Roth, 72.
54. Roth, 72.
55. Roth, 126.
56. Roth, 104.
57. Roth, 121.
58. Roth, 104.
59. Roth, 142.
60. Roth, "medinyut ufolitika betorat aplatón," 10.
61. Roth, *Is There a Jewish Philosophy?*, 156.
62. Zameret, "Ahad Ha'am and the Shaping of Secular Education."
63. Tellingly, as Baruch Kurzweil notes, Roth in effects "negates all of Ahad Ha'am pre-mises" in this introduction. Kurzweil, *Our New Literature*, 193.
64. Kurzweil, 190–224.
65. Roth, *Is There a Jewish Philosophy?*, 157.
66. Roth, 167.
67. Roth, 167.
68. Roth, *Judaism – A Portrait*, 223.
69. Roth, 225.
70. Roth, "Mekom Hadat Bevinyan Haaretz," 74.
71. Shimoni, *The Zionist Ideology*, 15.
72. Yadgar, *Sovereign Jews*, chap. 5.
73. Roth, *Judaism – A Portrait*, 226.
74. Roth, "Right Is Might – Professor Roth on the Moral Issue."
75. Bentwich et al., "Readers' Letters: The Sharafat Incident"; On the massacre see: Morris, *The Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem Revisited*, 206–7.
76. Martin Buber, Ernest Simon, W.D. Senator, and H.Y. Roth to Ben Gurion, 6 June 1949, State Archives, Prime Minister's Office, Absorption of Immigrants in Agriculture, 7133 5559/C. See also: Segev, *1949 the First Israelis*, 87–8; Epstein, "For the Sake of Freedom"; For a detailed consideration of somewhat of a less complimenting public letter of Roth (Roth, "Disorder in Palestine"); See: Dubnov, "The Most Vicious Lies as Told in Silence."
77. For a consideration of the context, and an evaluation of the letter in comparison to Y. Leibowitz's famous letter protesting the same massacre, see Harvey, "After Qibya."
78. In this, the letter is not unreminiscent of Ahad Ha'am's famous letter to *Haaretz* from 1 September 1922, protesting a "revenge killing" of a Palestinian Arab boy by Jews.
79. Shlaim, *The Iron Wall*, 95–6.
80. Cohen, "Right Is Might – Dr. Cohen's Propositions."
81. Heyd, "Leon Roth's Utopian Vision of a Liberal State."

82. Raz-Krakotzkin, "Exile, History and the Nationalization of Jewish Memory."
83. Mamdani, *Neither Settler nor Native*, 19.
84. Zreik, "When Does a Settler Become a Native?"

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