ADVANCING JEWISH THOUGHT

Mosaic

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EDITOR'S LETTER

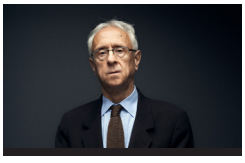
This week in *Mosaic*

Jonathan Silver looks back at the week

OBSERVATIONS

The Thawing of Israel's Relationship with India

India once stood out for its frosty attitude toward the Jewish state. But lately there's been a fascinating turnaround that's both pragmatic and ideological.



Who Is Pierre Manent?

One of the world's greatest living political philosophers reflects on his intellectual formation, and how he sees Europe, Israel, and America today.

Podcast: Shoshanna Keats Jaskoll on the Virtues and the Excesses of Jewish Modesty

The director of an organization dedicated to the healthy depiction of women in the Jewish public square joins us to talk modesty, what it's good for, and how it can be abused.

+ The best of the editors' picks of the week

Dear friends,

Five days to the premiere of *The Dawning of the Day*

This month's featured essay, "The Sage and Scribe of Modern Israel," introduces readers to the Israeli novelist Haim Sabato. Make sure to clear your calendar to join us on Wednesday, December 21 for the premiere of this year's dramatic adaptation of one of Sabato's most touching works, *The Dawning of the Day*. It's a novel that follows the story of Ezra Siman Tov, a Jerusalem laundryman who's tested by a vanished voice from his past and the potential destruction of his treasured way of life. After the performance, stick around for a conversation about it and about Sabato with the rabbi Daniel Bouskila and the celebrated novelist Ruby Namdar. You can stream the entire program from the comfort of your home, and it's free of charge to *Mosaic* subscribers.

The mayors stand up

The reemergence of anti-Semitism is unfortunately a wider phenomenon than Kanye West and Nick Fuentes, or the Black Hebrew Israelites marching in Brooklyn. The organization of politics against the Jews is taking place throughout the world. Yet with so many demoralizing social media posts and statistical reasons for concern, something encouraging took place a few weeks ago in Greece.

Earlier this month, the Combat Antisemitism Movement (CAM) convened its second yearly meeting of mayors to stand together in their opposition to anti-Semitism. Leaders came from some fifty cities drawn from over twenty countries, including the mayor of New York. As I see it, such activity is more valuable than statements from NGO leaders or official bodies like the UN.

That's because mayors have a real political constituency. They govern a political body that, most of the time, is small enough for them to know well; the mayor of a city is more intimately woven into the fabric of daily life than a governor, president, or prime minister. Closer to the cut and thrust of what happens on the streets of where Jews live, getting mayors to publicly commit to the protection of their Jewish citizens is valuable. Alongside grand pronouncements, it's good to see that someone is looking to mobilize the elected officials closest to the cities where the Jewish people are again threatened.

How to analyze nationalism: Indian, Jewish, and European

Like China, the states of the Arab Gulf, and many others, India is growing eager to increase trade with Israel and enjoy the benefits of the Jewish state's technological advancement. But, as the political analyst Mike Watson probes for us this week, in addition to these material reasons for the blossoming Israel-India relationship, there are also some shared ideological traditions at its foundation. That's somewhat surprising, since India's relations with Israel haven't always been all that warm. But as the impulse toward Hindu nationalism has grown and matured, it's easier to observe affinities with the Zionist tradition.

Later on in the week, we published a conversation I had with the French writer and political theorist Pierre Manent. Manent is a giant in the field of political philosophy. His *An Intellectual History of Liberalism* is perhaps the best short overview in English to the main currents of modern political thought. On many issues—nationalism, democracy, Christianity and modernity, the future and fate of Europe—his books are often the most eloquently written and wisest. (He has a new collected volume, *The Religion of Humanity: The Illusion of Our Time*, coming out later this month.)

Yet to my knowledge no one has really probed Manent's thinking about Israel and the Jewish people. So I asked him. In the process, I also try to elicit a portrait in full of the formation and basic worldview of one of the most distinguished and incisive political writers of our time.

Toe-gate 2022

Back in September, someone sent me a blog-post from the *Times of Israel* called "Toe-gate 2022," which describes a farcical advertisement for fake toes that Jewish women could buy in order to wear open-toed shoes without having to expose their real toes. The point of the article was to use an absurd joke to talk about an important trend in Orthodox media. The trend is to erase visual depictions of women in their news coverage and even advertisements, so that an article about Israel's cabinet, for example, would include a photo with the female ministers' faces pixelated or blurred out. Or an advertisement for children's clothing would depict several boys but would show a female doll instead of an actual girl. One magazine printed a story about the Shoah, and, in an image of the liberation of Auschwitz, it obscured the faces of the newly freed women.

Modern culture, in my view, needs to relearn the meaning of modesty. But the editorial decisions we see in these publications suggest that the virtue of modesty has mutated into excess and become a vice. So, on our podcast this week, I sat down with Shoshanna Keats Jaskoll, the author of "Toe-gate 2022" and the director of an organization devoted to combating misunderstandings of female modesty, to discuss what Jewish modesty is, why it's so important, and what it looks like when it grows distorted.

From the archives: Hanukkah

On Sunday, Hanukkah will be upon us, and the Jewish people will celebrate the Maccabees' victory over the Seleucid Greeks, the restoration of Jewish sovereignty in the land of Israel, and the miracle of the oil in the recaptured Temple. In our archive pick this week, the writer Sarah Rindner explores the nature of Hanukkah's primary symbol, the menorah, which, unlike other Temple adornments, continued to hold an important place in the Jewish public sphere even after the Temple was destroyed. Why did the menorah persist in the Jewish imagination, when so many other Temple-related symbols didn't?

With every good wish,

Jonathan Silver
Editor
Mosaic

An election campaign banner showing Benjamin Netanyahu shaking hands with Narendra Modi in September 2019. Ilia Yefimovich/picture alliance via Getty Images.

MIKE WATSON

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About the author
Mike Watson is associate director of Hudson Institute's Center for the Future of Liberal Society.

The Thawing of Israel's Relationship with India

India once stood out for its frosty attitude toward the Jewish state. But lately there's been a fascinating turnaround that's both pragmatic and ideological.

Benjamin Netanyahu's return to power has caused consternation in some parts of the Western world. The Biden administration has expressed its concern about several of Netanyahu's coalition partners, and Britain admonished the new government to respect minorities, implying that it suspects it will do the opposite. While most European countries have been quieter about the new Israeli cabinet, Netanyahu's unpopularity in the western half of the continent is well known.

India, by contrast, has greeted Netanyahu with equanimity. For a country that once stood out for its frosty attitude toward the Jewish state, this is a remarkable turnaround. That attitude dates back to the 1950s, when India became a founding member of the Nonaligned Movement that claimed neutrality during the cold war. Israelis and Westerners alike noticed, however, that the only sound more deafening than India's condemnation of Britain and Israel in the 1956 Suez war was its silence as the Soviets crushed the Hungarian uprising at the same time. The nadir of Indo-Israeli relations came in 1975, when New Delhi voted in favor of the infamous "Zionism is racism" resolution in the United Nations General Assembly. Relations have since improved, particularly under India's nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). Prime Minister Narendra Modi's and Netanyahu's hard-nosed politics and close personal relationship led many commentators to

see the two leaders as foundational members of a nationalist, anti-liberal alignment that in some fevered imaginations includes Vladimir Putin.

These concerns are overblown, to a sometimes absurd degree, but there are important and revealing similarities between Zionism and Hindu nationalism that merit attention. Neither movement sees the world precisely the way that most Americans do, and both will strongly affect American prosperity and security in the years to come. Israel is already one of the closest of U.S. allies, and its significance to American foreign policy is likely to increase as the Middle East becomes more unsettled. Of equal importance is its tech sector, which plays an outsized role in the global economy. India is part of the Quad partnership—along with the U.S., Japan, and Australia—in the Indo-Pacific, and is among the major powers that can contribute to maintaining stability in Asia and constraining Chinese ambitions. In both Israel and India, moreover, nationalism has emerged as a major political force, and Americans who understand their versions of nationalism will be better prepared for the world around them.

At first glance, the two countries could not be more dissimilar. The most obvious difference is size. India's population of 1.4 billion is more than three times that of the European Union, while Israel has fewer people than thirteen of the 27 EU members. There are deeper differences, too: they have long histories that rarely intersect, their dominant languages do not share ancestries, and until recently Israel saw itself as allied with the West, while India decisively did not. In a certain sense, the fundamental principles of their civilizations are at odds: Hindu nationalist intellectuals frequently comment on the dissimilarities between "Indic" and "Abrahamic" faiths, and they often find the moral systems of Jews, Christians, and Muslims to be downright puzzling. Even so, some of the most important figures in Hindu nationalism saw in the Jewish people and Zionism something that reflected aspects of India that they wanted for their own country.

When the two countries were both ruled from London, Indian thinkers used the Jewish people to illustrate their idea of a Hindu nation and its right to independence from British colonial governance. For instance, Judaism's role as both an ethnic and religious identity struck a chord with V.D. Savarkar (1883-1966), the intellectual who popularized the term Hindutva (Hinduness). Savarkar argued that what bound the Hindu nation was a holy land, common ancestry, and a shared culture, and that "no people in the world can more justly claim to get recognized as a racial unit than the Hindus and perhaps the Jews." He also observed that "the ideal conditions" for knitting together a nation are "found in the case of those people who inhabit a land they adore," and identified three places where these conditions applied: India, Arabia, and Mandatory Palestine.

Early leaders of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), one of the most influential Hindu nationalist organizations, saw Western support for Zionism as an affirmation of their own principles. M.S. Golwalkar, the second

leader of the RSS, saw the Jews of the 1930s as an example of why national groups needed territories of their own. As he put it, "with them live their religion, culture, and language. They are all still the same old Jews." They are, however, "a people in name and are not a nation; . . . all they wanted was their natural territory to complete their Nationality." To him, "the reconstruction of the Hebrew Nation in Palestine is just an affirmation of the fact that Country, Race, Religion, Culture, and Language must exist unavoidably together to form a full Nation idea," one that he wanted to see implemented in India.

Deen Dayal Upadhyaya, an RSS member who after independence led the Bharatiya Jana Sangh, a precursor to today's ruling BJP, downplayed Golwalkar's emphasis on race but kept an interest in Israel. In a series of speeches published in *Integral Humanism*, a book the BJP adopted as its ruling philosophy, Upadhyaya noted that, unlike other ancient civilizations, "Israeli Jews lived for centuries with other peoples scattered far and wide, yet they did not get annihilated in the societies in which they lived." He argued that Israel demonstrated "that the source of national feeling is not in staying on a particular piece of land, but is in something else." Unlike Savarkar and Golwalkar, who emphasized common ancestry, Upadhyaya claimed "when a group of persons lives with a goal, an ideal, a mission, and looks upon a particular piece of land as motherland, this group constitutes a nation."

Upadhyaya's search for India's mission points to another resonance between Jewish and Hindu nationalism. The former BJP National General Secretary Ram Madhav, an admirer of Upadhyaya, describes this mission as dharma. In *The Hindutva Paradigm*, Madhav writes "in Deen Dayal's opinion, [dharma] formed the basis for India's national identity." Although the term is often translated as "religion," Madhav states that "Dharma doesn't prescribe any one particular way of worship, nor does it prescribe any one single God." Rather, it "propounds a value system that binds society together, and gives it a direction and life mission." To Madhav, Indian social institutions fulfill their potential when they help Indians conform to dharma.

Madhav does not believe that the centrality of dharma was unique: other nations strive to follow a value system that they find within their own tradition. Like his predecessors, Madhav sees Israel as strikingly similar to India in this regard. To make his point, he quotes Shimon Peres's claim in his book *No Room for Small Dreams* that "the Jewish people have lived by the guiding principle of *tikkun olam*, the ambition to improve the whole world, not just ourselves." Peres saw "this simple set of values" is "the basis of our identity." While many Jews would reject Peres's assertions about *tikkun olam*, what matters for our purposes is that the term resonates with Madhav, who writes, "the choice of words shouldn't be missed—'set of values,' 'identity.' . . . It is those words that constitute a distinct worldview, on the lines similar to Dharma."

The similarities go beyond national ideology. Since gaining independence—less than year apart—the two countries have moved along parallel political trajectories, even if Israel, being smaller and nimbler, has generally travelled a few years ahead of India on this path. For the first few decades after the British withdrew, both were governed by a secular elite enamored of socialism and central planning. Jawaharlal Nehru was a more determined advocate of secularism than David Ben-Gurion, who allowed Judaism to play some role in Israel, but neither man was particularly religious. On economics, both would have fit more comfortably into the British Labor party or German Social Democrats than into the American Democratic party.

Over time, parts of their societies that felt ignored or disrespected by these elites rallied behind a more religious and socially conservative nationalist party that also adopted some pro-business, free-market policies. The Hindu nationalists won a governing majority in March 1977, two months before the Likud won its first plurality and formed a government, but they did so by merging with other parties that had opposed the two-year state of emergency imposed by Indira Gandhi, Nehru's daughter. Whereas Menachem Begin drove his government's agenda, the Hindu nationalists left the big-tent Janata Party in frustration after a few years, and the BJP did not form a stable majority of its own until 1998. In the ensuing decades, the left in Israel and India diminished, and ceased to be the natural ruling party of either country. The Likud has scrambled to regain power, and it is an open question how the BJP will fare electorally when Modi retires, but the right dominates the politics of both countries.

Despite these political similarities, it took many years before shared secured concerns began to drive New Delhi and Jerusalem together. Nehru recognized Israel's independence in 1950, but the two countries only exchanged ambassadors in 1992. The first major Indian political figure to visit Israel was the BJP cofounder L.K. Advani, who brought several senior security officials from the Home Ministry with him on his June 2000 trip. After Jaswant Singh, his counterpart in the Foreign Ministry, followed Advani later than year, the two countries established a joint counterterrorism commission. Since then, the defense relationship has flourished: Israel has provided India with advanced capabilities for monitoring the border with Pakistan and other high-tech equipment, and soldiers carrying Tavor rifles—designed in Israel and made in India—are far from uncommon around government buildings in New Delhi.

The two nationalist movements collaborate effectively in part because they share an enemy: radical Islamic terrorism. Both countries became independent as Britain relinquished most of its imperial possessions following World War II, and both experienced a violent partition as the British left. Each nationalist movement has a fraught relationship with a Muslim neighbor that came into existence because of that partition, and both of these neighbors have harbored and aided terrorists. Hindu nationalists and Zionists also have a complicated relationship with the Muslim popula-

tion within their borders. Despite this, the BJP has typically had a handful of Muslim parliamentarians, although the terms of their last three expired this summer. Zionists have historically been warier of the Muslim parties in Israel, many of which are anti-Zionist. Yet Begin urged the government to cease martial law over Israeli Arabs, Netanyahu courted Israeli Arab voters last year, and Yair Lapid and Naftali Bennett included the Arab and Islamist Ra'am in their coalition during their time in government.

Both groups also have mixed feelings about European-style liberalism. Theodor Herzl's main message to the Jews of Europe was that liberalism would not save them. Even though liberals like the Dreyfusards in France were stalwart advocates of Jewish rights, he warned, they were not powerful enough to hold out against the new generation of European politicians like Karl Lueger, the anti-Semitic mayor of Vienna. Jews needed a state of their own to defend themselves.

Other Zionist thinkers, like Ze'ev Jabotinsky, sharpened this point after Herzl's death, but events proved to be the most persuasive vindicator of Herzl's argument. Since Israeli independence, the lesson that many Israelis have learned is that their neighborhood is violent and unstable, their neighbors are often untrustworthy, and Herzl was correct about the necessity of a Jewish state in a dangerous world. Israel has treated its non-Jewish minorities far better than most of its neighbors treated their Jewish populations, and it is a generally tolerant and free society, but most Israelis realize that these achievements must be guarded with a ring of steel—or, in Jabotinsky's famous phrase, an Iron Wall. European criticisms about the situation of Palestinians or African refugees strike most Israelis as products of deluded fantasies.

Liberalism does not look much better in some parts of India. Indians got their most direct dose of European-style liberalism through the British empire, which they see as an alien conqueror that attempted to overthrow their way of life and selectively imposed its own values in a hypocritical and self-interested manner. The centrality of race to Savarkar's and Golwalkar's thinking is discomforting to modern readers, but it is remarkably similar to their British contemporaries' discussion of "Anglo-Saxon" and "Asiatic" races. Swapan Dasgupta, one of the most articulate intellectuals on the Hindu right, notes that Golwalkar's definition of race includes "Savarkar's emphasis on civilization and history," and is thus "different from the genetic orientation of the Nazi preoccupation with the Aryan race."

When thinking about their own histories, both Israelis and Indians take great pride in the fact that their respective nations achieved independence after centuries of domination by foreigners. The Jewish claim is obvious, since there have been few and scattered examples of Jewish self-rule since Bar Kokhba's defeat in 135 CE. Although British domination of India only began in the 18th century, Hindu nationalists assert that Indians lost their sovereignty when Muslim invaders arrived in the 9th century. Hence

Modi's lament that "the slave mentality of 1,200 years is troubling us," a sentiment not unlike an earlier generation of Zionists' emphasis on "negating the Diaspora" and its attendant modes of thinking. Madhav—who sees the history of foreign rule as going back even further, to such invaders as the Greeks under Alexander the Great—strikes a note familiar to Jews when he writes that the "state was under alien control. Yet, the nation didn't cease to exist. The soul of this nation existed elsewhere."

The role of the state in national life is one of the most important differences between Hindu nationalism and Zionism. Madhav argues that India's soul existed "in its religions, culture, pilgrimages, social institutions, and many other entities." Indeed, "the state as a political institution was seen as dispensable," partly because the *Mahabharata*, a canonical Hindu epic, describes periods where a stateless India still acted according to dharma. For many Hindu nationalists, a society that governs itself with minimal interference from the state is an ideal toward which they strive. Zionism, by contrast, is very state-centric. Although some Zionist leaders like Jabotinsky favored the more limited state of English classical liberalism, Herzl pointedly named his most famous book *Der Judenstaat* and David Ben-Gurion's concept of *mamlakhtiyut* (loosely, "statehood-ness") remains a major part of Israeli political thinking. The need for a strong national defense has reinforced the importance of the state in Israeli life.

Zionists and Hindu nationalists also perceive very differently the root causes of their disputes with their Muslim neighbors. For some Hindu nationalists, the problem is rooted in Islam's theology. Golwalkar stated in 1971 that "Indianization does not mean converting all people to Hinduism. . . . Rather we believe that a single religious system for the entire human society is not suitable." Instead, he believed that "the God of Islam, Christianity, and Hinduism is the same and we are all His devotees. Give people true knowledge of Islam." The RSS-affiliated journalist S. Gurumurthy has since argued that "the real problem of Hinduism lies in the theology of Islam and of Christianity. The problem is not the Muslims or Christians; not even the organized Church or the Mosque." As he sees it, proselytizing faiths cause conflict because of "their fundamental religious belief that negates other faiths the right to exist."

The implication of these arguments is that there cannot be peace unless Muslims agree that Hinduism and Islam are equally valid religions, or rather that a core tenet of Hinduism is correct and one of Islam's is untrue. Judaism, with its rejection of proselytism, would by this standard be unproblematic to either Golwalkar or Gurumurthy. But Gurumurthy makes a much harder request of Muslims than any the Zionists have, even the more hardnosed ones like Jabotinsky or the followers of Rabbi Zvi Yehuda Kook. Ironically, although many Hindus claim that their religion embraces diversity better than the Abrahamic faiths do, in practice Zionists are often more tolerant of religious differences.

That being said, there is an important faction of Hindu nationalists pull-

ing the group in a more humanistic direction. Dasgupta laments that "for decades, Hindu nationalism has had to confront charges of fascism on account of Golwalkar's ironclad definition of nationhood that delineated the nation into two classes: Hindu citizens with rights and others who had no entitlements and lived under sufferance." As he notes, this definition "went against the grain of nearly everything India stood for. Never mind the sections targeted, such an idea would be completely repugnant to the bulk of Hindus." Hindu nationalist parties had to disassociate themselves from Golwalkar, but "this was not a terribly daunting project," since "cultural nationalism" fit better into the RSS ideology than religious exclusion. The RSS disowned Golwalkar's book on that topic in 2006, and the current RSS leader, Mohan Bhagwat, omitted Golwalkar from his 2018 lecture series about RSS ideology.

More immediately, both countries have complex internal politics and are threatened by dangerous neighbors: many countries have failed to protect their citizen's liberties in much less challenging environments. Israel and India have proved doomsayers wrong time and again, and they have the tools to do so in the decades to come.

Although both democracies value their relationship with the United States, neither Israel nor India is a good fit for the NATO style of alliance that Americans often perceive as the gold standard. Unlike the Europeans, Israel does not wish for American forces to defend its territory, and India does not want to offer binding security guarantees to other countries. Even so, India is a key partner in the Quad, Israel is a central pillar of the Middle East's security architecture, and the two countries have joined the United Arab Emirates and the United States to form the I2U2 group for deeper economic collaboration.

As this broadening cooperation demonstrates, Zionism and Hindu nationalism are helpful forces for Washington. Both movements have a complicated relationship with liberalism, one of the fundamental forces in American politics, but neither's objections prevent them from working with the United States to accomplish shared goals. In both ideological and practical terms, they have far more in common with America than with authoritarian states like Russia, China, and Iran. That is not to say that there will always be smooth sailing in the future: some of the greatest accomplishments of the U.S.-Israel partnership have followed some of the bitterest disagreements, and this pattern may very well continue into the future. Both movements have their excesses that will at times dismay and even outrage Americans, but they fundamentally accept a partnership that benefits the U.S. Alienating either group would be tragically counterproductive.

Since the end of the cold war, it has been fashionable for a certain type of American intellectual to describe the Arab-Israeli conflict as a vestige of a dark and receding past. In reality, the close bond with Israel has acquainted Americans with some of the forces that will shape the decades to come

Pierre Manent on June 5, 2014 in Paris. Manuel Braun/Contour by Getty Images.

PIERRE MANENT AND JONATHAN SILVER

DECEMBER 15, 2022

About the authors

Pierre Manent is the author of more than ten books and dozens of essays on political philosophy, and public affairs in Europe. From 1992 until his retirement in 2015, Manent was director of studies of the Centre d'études sociologiques et politiques at the École des hautes études en sciences sociales in Paris.

Jonathan Silver is the editor of *Mosaic*.

Who Is Pierre Manent?

One of the world's greatest living political philosophers reflects on his intellectual formation, and how he sees Europe, Israel, and America today.

Recently, Mosaic's editor Jonathan Silver sat down for a conversation with the distinguished political philosopher Pierre Manent. The two discussed Manent's intellectual and moral influences, Manent's assessment of Europe's prospects, Israel and Judaism, and what surprises him about American culture now. A new volume his essays and excerpts, The Religion of Humanity: The Illusion of Our Times, will be published later this month.

This conversation has been lightly edited..

Formation

Jonathan Silver:

Tell us about your origins and your earliest influences.

Pierre Manent:

I came from Toulouse, a city in the south of France. It was a big city, where I had my education until the age of nineteen, when I came to Paris, to the École Normale Supérieure. I was born into a Communist family, where I got my first political education. And in my school, the typical French Lycée, I got my classical education, and I also encountered Christianity, which would become my religion, my faith. After my Baccalauréat, I studied in the classes préparatoires, where you prepare yourself for the École

Normale Supérieure. They had a teacher who was a Thomist philosopher.

Jonathan Silver:

Not a Communist then?

Pierre Manent:

No, no, no. The opposite. And he introduced me to St. Thomas Aquinas's thought, and more generally to Catholic and Christian perspectives. So, it was the beginning of my becoming Christian and Catholic.

Jonathan Silver:

Approximately how old were you when you first encountered the Thomist tradition?

Pierre Manent:

At the time, I was between seventeen and nineteen.

Jonathan Silver:

Please tell our readers what comprises a Lycée education? What is a classical education, and what is it for?

Pierre Manent:

I would say that the emphasis in my education was on French, French literature, the French language, but also on mathematics and the classical languages, that is, Latin and Greek. And so it was a rather serious education, I must say. It was very exacting. But it was a pleasant period for me. I suppose we accepted, at the time, the discipline of education more than people do these days. But I won't complain.

Jonathan Silver:

And at that time did you sense that the politics and the religion of your home life, Communism, were in tension with or compatible with your education? And how did you think of it in relation to your dawning Catholic devotion?

Pierre Manent:

The tension arose when I started to become more and more critical of Communism. Also, of course, when I opened myself to religion, which was off limits for my father, who was a convinced atheist, but who nevertheless was never angry at me. He was sad, but not angry. So, it went well with him and my family, although there were tensions, of course.

Jonathan Silver:

And can you say if anything in particular was calling you to the Catholic faith? Tell us about your conversion.

Pierre Manent:

Oh, it's a long story, and it's not really easy to narrate, because, first of all, it was mostly intellectual. I discovered that religion was not simply imagination or a flight of fancy or superstition. That there was a whole world of thought and feeling. So, it was first like the discovery of a foreign country, and I had to find my way.

As for becoming a Christian, the conversion itself—that took a few more years. When in Paris I met some very nice and settled and humane people from the circle of Jacques Maritain, a famous French Thomistic philosopher who was one of the theorists of neo-vitalism and an influential personality. And so I met people from his circle, because he was much older, of course, than I was. And then I made my way into the Catholic Church, around the age of twenty, twenty-one, twenty-two.

Jonathan Silver:

Now, there are many different motivations that bring someone to the Catholic Church. And one of them is a reaction to the instability of the ambient culture. One feels that the political foundations are crumbling, and in a world of chaos, this sort of convert seeks the order that the church offers. Did politics and culture have anything to do with your becoming Catholic? Or, when you say that it was due to your being an intellectual, do you mean something more metaphysical by that?

Pierre Manent:

It's a very interesting question. Yes, of course. In some sense, Thomism as a philosophy and theology is attractive to people who are troubled or unhappy with the disorder of the world because it offers a complete and satisfactory ordered view of the world and human life. And certainly, that was part of the attraction it exerted on me.

But I would say I did not stop there. My religious choice was not only a matter of reacting against the disorder of the world and finding order in the Catholic Church, if only because, at the time, the Catholic Church was itself full of turmoil. And this turmoil never ceased after that, because the church in the 20th century, and most of all after the Second Vatican Council, was not really a safe and ordered harbor. So, I think I went beyond this aspiration to order. And I suppose, I hope, that I entered into the heart of the faith, which of course is the relation with God, the Creator, that is proper to the Christian religion.

Teachers

Jonathan Silver:

I want to talk about your political formation, as well as your religious formation. And here, I should like you to introduce our readers to Raymond Aron. Tell us who he was in the context of the cold war, French politics, and French liberalism.

Pierre Manent:

What your readers should know about the French political moods, if I may say so, is that from the French Revolution, or even from the 18th century, onward the drift of the French spirit is towards the left, in a certain sense. The center of gravity—not always of the body politic, but of the intellectual class—is towards the left and sometimes towards the extreme left. That tendency was particularly pronounced after the Second World War because the country was very much impressed by the victory of the Red Army over Nazi Germany. And of course, a good part of the right was discredited by its complacent or feeble response to the extreme right, and even complicity with it. And some figures on the right were discredited by straightforward collaboration with Germany. Although, I must stress that many of the collaborators, in the narrow sense, were not specifically from the right. Many of them came out of pacifism, or even leftwing pacifism.

But the right, or the extreme right, was friendly or complacent toward Marshal Philippe Pétain, who was the head of the French state during the war and who accepted the policy of collaboration with Germany. So, after the war, the right was discredited, the left conveniently forgot the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, and of course the Communists and the fellow travelers were on the ascendancy.

During this time, many intellectuals, a good part of the university, was Communist or friendly to the Communists. It was in this context that Raymond Aron took his stand. His whole life, he was sober, never furious. He always kept his equilibrium. But he was a very firm, entrenched critic of Communism and its illusions. And not only of Communism as a political movement and as a political regime, but also of the intellectual drift that pushed non-Communists to be friendly or complacent toward Communism—what we called compagnons de route, fellow travelers.

Aron was a very incisive critic of the illusions of the left, and of the intellectual class. And he was, in some sense, expelled from the respectable intellectual class for much of his life. And he took this situation with an incredible tranquility of mind. Aron taught me that it was possible to live honorably without embracing, indeed, while actively opposing, your environment, your friends, and the people with whom you have studied and lived. He was a model of intellectual clarity and moral and political courage.
Aron introduced me to the seriousness of politics. When you are young, and

even when you are no longer young, you think you have politics on one side and ethics on the other side, and politics is the analytical part of life. Aron was aware of the analytical parts of politics, but he also was keenly aware of what is moral in the realm of political action. There is a morality proper to politics, and making the right choices in politics with full awareness of the political stakes is one of the most important parts of a moral life.

Jonathan Silver:

Perhaps you could say a word to fill in the substantive grounds on which he mounted his critique of Communism. The inescapably moral dimension of politics is not incidental to that critique.

Pierre Manent:

No, it isn't. One of the main things that repelled Aron in Communism was the lie—the enormous part that lying played in the Communist regime. People today speak about fake news and alternate truth, or the divided truth, or whatever. But Communism, in some sense, is a huge, enormous lie. And Aron felt keenly what Solzhenitsyn would say at the same time (although we in the West did not become aware of Solzhenitsyn until later): that the beginning and the basis of opposition to Communism was the will not to live by the lie, to refuse to live by lying and through lying. So, that was the ethical or moral heart of Aron's opposition to Communism.

Jonathan Silver:

He was of course not only a cold-war critic of Communism. We should perhaps say that Raymond Aron was a professor and editor and the author of dozens of books on everything from Max Weber to Clausewitz to the conditions of war and peace and many such subjects.

Pierre Manent:

Yes. And he commented on political life as a journalist, a columnist. As a teacher and as a columnist, as a public figure, he had a huge place in French political and public intellectual life. But at the same time, he was always on the margins of the intellectual class. It was only at the end of his life that he received public acknowledgement. Only later did people finally consider that, well, Aron had been right. And you could say that on his behalf. Often reluctantly, many people had to acknowledge in the end that, yes, Aron was right.

Jonathan Silver:

In this respect, your work parallels that of Aron. For you too write about figures from the history of ideas and offer analyses of, one could say, the history of political philosophy. And you also comment on the culture and what's happening in Europe and France.

Pierre Manent:

Yes, but I must add that I am much less active and competent than Aron was when it comes to commenting upon current political life. Aron, for 30 years or more, wrote two articles a week about politics, which I never did. So, I have more books than Aron. Although Aron read and wrote many books, I am more of a teacher—more exclusively a teacher—than Aron was. But it is true that, from time to time, I write something about the main political stakes in my country and Europe and the world.

Jonathan Silver:

You worked for and, to use an old-fashioned word, served as a kind of apprentice to him. What did you do for Raymond Aron? What did you learn from him?

Pierre Manent:

Officially, I had the position of his assistant. But in fact, I did not assist him very much. I was kind of his companion in conversation. I spent a lot of that time on my own work.

As for what I took away from my time with Aron, and from his example: part of the answer is what I said about the possibility of independence, of not sharing the silliness and aberrations of your contemporaries. Second, I learned the nobility and morality of politics, and the gravity of political choices—that choosing badly was a bad action, or an evil action. Taking political choices seriously was one lesson.

And of course, as a teacher, as a writer of books, he taught me many things through his books about the history of sociology, about Clausewitz, about strategic questions, and so on. He made up part of my political education.

Jonathan Silver:

Earlier you characterized Aron by his equilibrium, which I would say is a reflection on his temperament. Let me ask you about equanimity and judgment—not how Aron learned those things, but instead how a person today can come to acquire the sensibility that Aron demonstrates for us and that you yourself have tried to exemplify in your own writing. How would you recommend that a young person learn prudence?

Pierre Manent:

That's a very good question. And the Socratic philosophers ask the same question: can you learn virtue and prudence, in the full sense of the term? It's one of the most difficult virtues to learn because you can learn courage through exercising it yourself. Temperance too. Justice is more difficult, and prudence is most difficult of all because prudence is, as Aristotle says, the

crown of the virtues. And in some sense, you need to be prudent. You need to have a part of all the other virtues, and be prudent in addition. I would not volunteer to teach prudence as such to people, because you can only teach it by showing examples of prudent decisions.

Jonathan Silver:

That would suggest that history is the school of prudence, the study of wise and foolish decisions and what came of them.

Pierre Manent:

Yes. I think that studying statesmen, ancient or modern—Greek and Roman, then European and American—would be the best way to teach people about the meaning of prudence.

Leo Strauss, who played a big role in my philosophical education, recommended that we read Churchill to learn what prudence is. Churchill was, at one and the same time, both a magnanimous and a prudent statesman. And I think Strauss was right.

I would add that reading the ancients, Thucydides, Plutarch, and Aristotle, helps us understand the political virtues. Strauss has a very good line where he says that when he was young, he did not understand what Aristotle said about magnanimity or prudence. Then Churchill appeared. And at once, he understood what it meant. You have to read to understand the prudent man, because it's not always easy to discern who is truly prudent and who is not.

Jonathan Silver:

In some ways, the very act of attempting to discern prudence is itself a way to learn prudence.

Pierre Manent:

Yes, certainly.

Jonathan Silver:

You've now brought up Leo Strauss, which is another element that I wanted to ask you about in your own formation. We've spoken some about your religious formation, your political formation. I should now like to ask you about your philosophical formation. And you've already introduced us to Thomism and Catholic thought. Maybe you could say a few words about Strauss, a writer that perhaps more Mosaic readers will be familiar with because of his own penetrating writing about the Jewish condition.

But maybe you can say something about what you learned from Strauss, what you take from him, and where you've left him and parted ways from

his analysis.

Pierre Manent:

I learned from Strauss at least two things, two very important things. First, how to read. He taught his readers and listeners to read the philosophers and understand the art of philosophical writing. This was part of my education. I was attracted to authors like Machiavelli, Hobbes, Locke, and Rousseau, and Leo Strauss was a master when it came to unlocking how these authors wrote, what he called the ancient art of writing. He became very famous for this manner of interpretation, and also he was reviled for it by many as a dreamer or even a conspiratorialist.

When applied to my own reading, I found his method very convincing. And even more important than that, Strauss helped to free me from the power of modern philosophy. And modern philosophy means modern politics and the modern mind.

Because one of the strengths of modernity, of the modern mind, and of modern philosophy is that it produces the feeling that it is irreversible. At work in the modern dispensation is a sense of philosophical necessity: a demand that you believe in the newness of modernity as something that evolves inevitably out of the past and is by definition superior to it. That beginning with Descartes, or some genius, a ray of truth has shone through the darkness to enlighten mankind. Leo Strauss very deftly exposed the limitations of modern thought and made you understand that ancient philosophy was a possibility, that the mind was truly free, that you are not a slave of your time, that you are not forced to think and to feel just like your contemporaries. You can accept ancient ideas even if you live in modern times. The mind was truly free. You are not forced to think certain thoughts just because you are born into a certain age.

Strauss explains that there are alternatives available—that you can find your own way between the ancients and the moderns, and between philosophy and religion. These are the two great dichotomies to which Leo Strauss drew our attention: ancients versus moderns, and Athens versus Jerusalem—that is, philosophy versus revealed religion. With Strauss, I faced the heart of my torments. He was my constant companion for, I will say, twenty years, because I felt that he gave the clearest and most powerful expression to my own preoccupations.

Jonathan Silver:

Careful readers of Strauss tend to notice that some of the questions that gave him pause about the viability of liberalism and modernity are connected to the Jewish experience. Politically, in the failure of liberalism and modernity to deal with the Jewish question in Europe, and intellectually in the inability of modernity to take seriously the prospect of commandedness in history that is the Jewish experience from Moses onward. How did you encounter

those concerns as a Catholic reader?

Pierre Manent:

It was not at all off-putting. It was attractive to me. It was attractive to me because of course, when Strauss says "Jerusalem," he was not saying something foreign to me. As a Christian I felt that when he says Jerusalem, I felt authorized to think of Jerusalem and Christianity. Of course, I knew that for him, Jerusalem meant Jerusalem, and not the church or Christianity. But the church understands itself as intrinsically tied to Jewish revelation. And so also what he said about the relation of the Jewish question to modern liberalism, analogically, I felt the same in the tension between Christianity—and specifically the Catholic Church—and modern liberalism.

The modern liberal state could not do justice to the complete Jewish experience. On the Christian side the logic of modern politics tended toward the expulsion of religion from the center of society and human life. So even before I took a serious interest in the Jewish experience and Jewish thought, I could sympathize with Strauss's experience of the tension between the modern dispensation and the Jewish experience.

Europe

Jonathan Silver:

We have come to know a little bit about you and your formation, and now I would like to talk about your diagnosis of European nations and the European project. I want to discuss what you call "the religion of humanity," which you describe as a grand delusion.

But for us to understand what the religion of humanity is, and why you believe it's a delusion, perhaps first we need to understand the grammar of your political thought, the elemental building blocks that help you analyze politics. And I think the best way into that discussion is to have you articulate and explain the idea of political forms and how they emerge out of the human condition.

Pierre Manent:

I would be hard pressed to explain how they emerge from the human condition. But you observe them. You observe that you have two great political forms that shape human association. And that is, on the one hand, the city, of which the Greek cities were the example par excellence, and the empire on the other. That is, you have one form which entails a concentrated body politic that is small and very densely occupied and also has an active civic body. And on the contrary, a polity bent on indefinite territorial expansion. So these are, in some sense, the twin aspirations of the human species when

it comes to politics: one is the drive for concentration, homogeneity, and intimacy of association, the other for imperial expansion. You see that the ancient world provides the fundamental alternatives, city and empire. Rome became an empire, and the cities of Greece were overwhelmed by Phillip's Macedonian empire.

That's why it is so interesting that in the case of Europe, it was neither the city nor the empire that prevailed. Of course, you had many beautiful and strong cities. Think of the cities of Italy, the city of Lombardi, or the cities of the Hanseatic League around the Baltic and North Sea. And also you have empires, heirs to the Roman empire. But it was another form that prevailed, which is the nation.

And so I think human history or Western history has articulated these political forms: city, empire, then the nation. The political destinies of the Western world are tied to the political destinies of the nation, the national form. This has now been the case for the last 30 or 40 years, I would say.

The national state in Europe has lost its legitimacy and internal strength. In its place a different idea has prevailed, and that is that the only legitimate and viable political association is an association without attachment to some particular people, but a mode of association which was open to, in some sense, the whole world—what the ancients called a cosmopolis. Cosmopolitanism is thus the horizon of modern policy. And as far as my own intellectual life goes, this is my fight. I oppose the possibility, legitimacy, and goodness of the cosmopolitan state.

It's not really a serious and viable, or useful, or good possibility. Instead, I defend the national state, not unaware of its shortcomings and even potential vices, but because human destinies require loyalty to a particular people. Not blind loyalty, not loyalty leading to crime, but serious loyalty. And of course, in the case of the universal, you never lose sight of the unity of mankind, of what people like to call the universal. But your attachment to humankind, to the good of humankind is superficial, I would say, and ideological, and I would even say it is in some sense a lie.

Jonathan Silver:

You see, this is how I was imagining you might construct the argument out of the human condition: mankind requires, for its wellbeing, a receptacle for the loyalty which is natural for us to express. And the national form is the proper receptacle of political loyalty.

Incidentally, you derive the emergence of the national form with reference to classical antiquity, which of course makes sense. But let me put before you an alternative genealogy and see what you make of it.

There is a biblical articulation of the nation as well. It emerges on the one hand, as an alternative to the great empires of Assyria, and Babylon, and

Egypt; and on the other, it is an alternative to the instability which emerges out of the warring tribes, not cities in this case, but the warring tribes of ancient Mesopotamia and the land of Canaan. And the political theory of the Hebrew Bible begins from the Jewish nation's struggle to articulate a form that on the one hand has more stability than the anarchy of the tribes, and on the other hand avoids the idolatry of the empire.

Pierre Manent:

Yes, this is a perfectly defensible view, and I agree with this perspective. By the way, in my book on Pascal, I have a few pages about what Christians call the Old Testament, and I stress the political aspects of the Jewish scriptures. But Thomas Aquinas would agree with you, because when he speaks about the mixed regime, he mainly gives examples from the Greek and Romans, but he also cites Jewish history. So the two genealogies are compatible. And by the way, as you well know, for European nations, the model of the Jewish people and the Davidic monarchy at times played a very big role in their self-conception and development.

Jonathan Silver:

Now, in light of all this, what is the religion of humanity, and what's wrong with it?

Pierre Manent:

Humanity, as such, does not exist. Millions and millions of people exist, but they do so as members of political bodies. Humanity does not constitute a community. Even the organization of the United Nations is just that, an organization of nations. It's not the organization of mankind. Some people dream of making the UN the governing body of a global state, but of course it's not that. It depends on the nations that make it work.

Jonathan Silver:

You mean to emphasize that the UN is a forum for sovereign nations, not itself a sovereign body?

Pierre Manent:

Yes, it's a place where the nations meet, a building in New York. It suggests the idea of a global or world state, but it is not that.

And a world state, if it were possible, would be a tyranny because, of course, the distance between the head, the summit, and the base of the political body would be such that it could only rule through tyranny. So it's not really a real possibility.

And moreover, what the experience of humanity, of mankind teaches, is

that to get a full education, you have to live in a deeply united, articulated community. Because to learn humanity, to learn what makes man a man, you have to share many things with your brothers.

So common educations need a political structure, which is built upon common experiences, common life, common language, common references. And, to be fully deployed, human nature needs these institutions simply to exist. The creations of humanity are all mediated through specific nations. The geniuses of humanity are mediators, are educated through their own nation's languages, down to Goethe or Shakespeare and Plato—you cannot of think of them without thinking about what they share with specific communities and people.

Jonathan Silver:

It seems to me that here, the historical experience of the Jewish people provides an illustration. The Jewish people throughout history have been a rebuke to the idea that one can access humanity in an unmediated way. This is especially true in the diaspora, where Jewish communities refused to be melted into, and quite often could not be melted into, a common imperial or national political framework. The nations did not altogether want them, and they refused to melt into the nations altogether. The Jewish people insisted upon their own particularity in politics and culture and above all else, in their religious obligations.

Pierre Manent:

Oh, yes. And in some sense, the Jewish people is the most impressive example of the solidity of and durability and irreducibility of a people. I would say that, when you look at this history of the Jewish people, you see that of course it's a people, an exemplar of a people. But this is a paradox because at the same time the Jewish people cannot be an exemplar. So singular in its durability and the impossibility of its being fully absorbed into something other, it remains unique, I would say. The Jewish people is what people call a hapax—something without analogue. The Jews constitute a people, certainly, in some sense a people like other peoples, but they are also a people like no other people, because their experience is so singular.

Jonathan Silver:

And that paradox is expressed in the history of Zionism, too. The people that is both an example of a nation and a nation unlike any other has, since 1948, achieved and defended a political expression and a national home of its own. Israel, it seems to me, is in this sense a perfect reflection of this national paradox. But I want to defer our discussion of Israel and stay in Europe for a while longer.

When I first encountered your work, and when your main efforts to explain and defend nationalism appeared in English, we were in the midst of a very

different political moment. At the time—in the late 90s and early 2000s—the nationalism debates seemed to be bound up with the relativism and multiculturalism debates, perhaps even in a sense with the exhaustion of those debates.

The current moment is a very different one. At that time, you offered up the national form as an answer to the question of multiculturalism. For this very reason, it was understood to be naturally compatible with liberalism, and in fact the nation was a natural vessel of liberalism. Now, that premise is contested. In our political moment, nationalism is a proposed as an answer to the problem of liberalism itself.

Pierre Manent:

In a few words, I think that's a problem of European states, perhaps it's also the case in America, but mainly in Europe. There's been a divorce between the two components of the modern regime.

The modern regime is composed of the state as the keeper and guarantor of human rights. The state protects and warrants the equality of human rights, on one hand. And on the other hand, the modern regime is constituted by representative government, these organizations through which the body politic invents itself. And what developed in the last period is the divorcing of the two, the withering of the representative government, and the ascendancy of the state as keeper of rights.

As a result, the horizon of the citizen was no longer through the workings of the representative government, of the people governing itself, but through the state as the keeper of the equality of human rights.

Take this possibility to its next evolution. You even can imagine the disappearance of representative government altogether, and a host of jurisdictions handling human rights as they understand them. This is the vanguard view of the European governing class, who dream of a politics completely divorced from the people. European countries now find themselves in this situation where the class supposed to govern them no longer understands itself as an instrument of a truly political body, that is, an expression of the representative government. They aspire to be the promoters of a new humanity, a new political humanity built only upon human rights.

Jonathan Silver:

They wish to glide serenely above politics.

Pierre Manent:

Yes, the dream is to lead the people even though politics is abolished: abolishing political bodies, abolishing representative government. Of course, you keep some sort of hypothetical government, but the legitimacy has

deserted the representative government, and legitimacy concentrates in the state as the keeper of human rights.

Jonathan Silver:

Should we understand Brexit, and the popularity of Zemmour and Orban and other political figures like that as the reassertion of nationalism, and as a reaction to the dream of government without politics?

Pierre Manent:

Yes. It's certainly a reaction to that. The difference between this nationalism and the nationalism before World War II is that the nationalisms before World War II were aggressive and imperialist. While today, these nationalisms are defensive, I would say.

Jonathan Silver:

Let me raise another question in the European context, this time about another group that dwells in European nations and that refuses or is reluctant to assimilate. How do you analyze the political presence of Muslims living in Europe, and how it relates to the national civic forms that we've been talking about?

Pierre Manent:

The European nations, when they developed, of course, tended to expand their borders. And in some sense you cannot separate nationalism from some sort of imperialism when the nations are growing in strength. At some point—at the end of the 19th century and for part of the 20th—European nations ruled the world. After that, as you well know, the empire receded; Caesar disappeared.

And we thought at some point that we could just stay within the limits of our nation. In the case of France, after we left Algeria De Gaulle thought, I suppose, that now we had gotten rid of this inassimilable colony and France could be itself, could be independent. And strangely, some of the populations that we could no longer rule as colonial subjects decided to come to our shores.

After the military and political colonization of the Arab world by the Europeans, we have now a counter-movement of Arab Muslim populations coming to our shores. It is not a counter-colonization, exactly, but we are at a historical moment between going forward and retreating. Europeans do not know how to handle this situation, because they have not been able to say, "Well, now we have retreated within our borders, and we will safeguard these borders."

In the years after Algeria got her independence, the French began to re-

nounce their full independence. Because Charles De Gaulle was leading the country, that didn't seem possible, so it went unnoticed. But it quickly became evident that we were tired of our independence. And so our idea of expansion, our idea of a thing greater than we were, took hold again of our mind and heart. But it was no longer our empire, it was the European Union, and we felt that we could expand through Europe.

But of course that was an illusion, and indulging in this illusion led us to abandon our national independence. We disarmed and thought we need no longer defend our borders. We accepted immigration, not with enthusiasm, but not knowing what else to do, and not finding in our heart or mind strong reasons to say no. So now we are here. It's too late in some sense to put up a serious defense. I hope we can put up some limits on what's happening, but I'm not sure we can.

Jonathan Silver:

If Europe cannot summon the will to defend itself, if it no longer has the confidence that it is something that is worthy of defense, then what is it? What is Europe now, would you say?

Pierre Manent:

Europe lives off its past victories and domination, due to which it still has some standing in the world, but at the same time it wants to forget this history. So it's the reign of reputation.

Jonathan Silver:

Let's focus this part of the discussion by seeing it through a more practical angle of vision. There was a time, maybe fifteen or twenty years ago, when the discussion of the moment was whether the frontiers of Europe extend into Turkey, and whether Turkey should join the EU. And those who were skeptical about Turkey's accession into the European Union argued that it was a fundamentally different political culture. It's just not the same as Europe.

In light of what's happened in Turkey over the years, that criticism has turned out to have been warranted. Turkey operates on a different civilizational basis than Europe. But the question is, compared to that, what is the basis of Europe's civilization now?

Pierre Manent:

I think that it's evident for everybody that Turkey will not join Europe. But Turkey has become a mighty partner. And I suppose that, although it is not part of the organization of the European Union, it is a protagonist in the European political situation. You see, Europe is a zone of low pressure.

Jonathan Silver:

What does that mean?

Pierre Manent:

All of Europe is like an area of low atmospheric pressure. We are ceding to everything that comes to us. We are a pushover.

Israel

Jonathan Silver:

Let's now discuss Israel, contemporary Israel, beginning with its relation to Europe and the European imagination. For certain figures leading the response to cosmopolitanism who want to reassert the dignity of the national form in Europe, Israel is often seen as an example. And by the way, sometimes the very people who imagine Israel as an example also harbor ferociously anti-Jewish attitudes. But even so, do you see Israel as an example that might instruct European nationalism?

Pierre Manent:

It's very difficult to answer. In a sense, the answer is yes, because Israel defends itself and Israel feels itself to have legitimacy, to have the right to defend itself. And for Europeans who do not think they have the right to defend themselves, it can be a model or reference or an inspiration.

At the same time, everybody understands that Israel is not like other European nations. That there is something unique to it. And part of its legitimacy in the eyes of Europeans is the fact that you cannot understand present-day Israel without reference to the fate of the Jewish people and the destruction of European Jewry.

I think that in the consciousness of Europe, the superior legitimacy of the Jewish nation of Israel as a political body is due to the Shoah. The Shoah warrants Israel's self-confidence and no European nation feels itself able to claim that moral right.

Jonathan Silver:

On this point, may I say that I have always thought that Europeans exaggerate the relation of Israel to the Holocaust. They exaggerate because it is a way for Europeans to atone for their own guilt. But that is not the way that Zionist history presents itself.

Pierre Manent:

Certainly, certainly. I understand that. But Israel is in some sense built on the model of the European state, yet in another sense it is freed from Europe. It's impossible to disentangle the proximity and distance—the proximity of our nations to Israel and the distance because of the specificity of Jewish destiny. I would not risk a few quick expressions to capture this situation.

Jonathan Silver:

How do you see the future of Europe's relations with Israel?

Pierre Manent:

I hope they will not continue to deteriorate, but I would not bet on it because the religion of humanity has deeply penetrated all sectors of European opinion. And the majority of Europeans, I would say, feel that they have neither the force, the strength, nor the right to defend themselves. They feel that they must open themselves to the world, and that there is no future if you put yourself in a defensive position.

And so, as I began to say a few minutes ago, whether it is by the Americans, whether it is by Russia, whether it is by Turkey, whether it is by Muslim populations or African population from the south, Europe lets herself get pushed around. It's incredible to observe how much Europe lets itself be pushed around.

Jonathan Silver:

The barometer that one can use to observe this phenomenon most clearly has to do with European defense policy and the willingness to accept a truth that I believe Israelis have accepted, which is that soft power is good, and diplomacy is good, and multilateral institutions and agreements are good—but the only way to defend oneself is with muscle and steel. And unless one is willing to erect that kind of security architecture, one betrays a lack of self-regard.

Pierre Manent:

Yes. Europe has gone beyond the point where she would still be capable of building strength in muscle and steel. I really think that. I don't know what will happen in the coming years, but I do not see how we are disposed to mount that kind of defense, having done what we have done these last 40 years. I do not see how we could bring ourselves to muster the necessary political resolution, to build up the necessary military instruments and be ready to use those instruments.

It's a very, very strange situation because Europe is still full of wealth and capacities and talents and technical capabilities. But the Europeans do not want to defend what they love. They do not love themselves. Or at the very least, they do not want to defend themselves.

That is a very strange development in the history of the world. It is a refusal to defend ourselves coupled with a hope that either our values will win the day, or our enemies are not really so bad.

Jonathan Silver:

Let me put forth a conclusion and see if you accept its formulation. I think your analysis suggests that, while on the outside it may look like the presence of Islam in Europe is an external invasion, it isn't. Instead, the presence of Islam in Europe merely reveals the true cause of European decline, which is an internal lack of self-confidence. The presence of Islam helps us see that more vividly, but it is not its cause. The cause of decline is the collapse of inner resolve, not the domination by an external force.

Pierre Manent:

Yes, I accept this diagnosis. A collapse of the will and a hollowing-out of the body politic. You have seen how quickly the moral traditions of France have disappeared. Religion, Catholicism, socialism, Christian democracy—all these traditions, what we called the spiritual families of France, have all withered away. And now we have the apparatus of a modern society but without its living soul. And people feel that. And they seem to say, "Oh, now so little remains of us. Why should we risk our lives for this little bit that remains of us?"

America

Let me now ask you about America. You've written one of the most penetrating commentaries on Tocqueville's Democracy in America. In that work, and others, you put a primacy on defending the nobility of the political. We discussed that as one of the things you took from Raymond Aron, and that must have been reinforced in your study of Tocqueville.

Now, I see your "defense of the political" as relating to a political context that I believe has given way to something else. At the time of your writing on America, what was needed was to prevent Americans from retreating into their personal, private spaces and luxuriating in post-cold-war decadence. You drew inspiration from Tocqueville to teach us that politics has a nobility, it activates something deep in our nature, and our way of life depends on our civic health.

But when I think about those notions today, I think we have an entirely different problem in America. It seems to me that everything is over-politicized. Our problem is not the retreat into the private realm, but the incursion of politics into all realms. Partisans of the red team buy this kind of razor for shaving, and partisans of the blue team buy that kind of razor for shaving. My children's favorite brand of cookies expresses opinions about

gender ideology. Can you explain that change?

Pierre Manent:

Nobody would have bet that America would divide itself like that. What is strange is that the danger that Tocqueville said that America had escaped, a revolutionary spirit, has in fact just arrived. Who would have thought that a new constitution would have been added to the old constitution, which was based on nondiscrimination?

The old constitution was built on the Declaration of Independence, and it says that America should strive to eliminate even the smallest discrimination between the sexes, the races, and so on. That was implied in the logic of the constitutional order.

Effectively, there is upon and above the old constitution another constitution and another project. You have the old American project, the American dream, and upon and above that another project which is to reassert various kinds of discrimination in an effort to achieve perfect equity.

And of course, the Americans have put themselves in a terrible situation because this project is impossible to accomplish. Tocqueville thought that Americans are practical and he spoke about the politics of the possible. This current project strives to achieve the impossible.

Americans, who were supposed to be the pragmatists and the practical people, have now embarked upon on an experiment that simply will fail. It will fail. And you will become more and more angry at yourselves for failing. First, for attempting this experiment, and also for failing at it. And so, America's prospects are not good.

Jonathan Silver:

Tocqueville famously thought that one of the most effective ways to arrest the revolutionary spirit and democracy's excesses was for the people to be devoted to traditional religious life, and the limits it imposes. And it seems to me that just as politics has penetrated razor blades and cookies, so politics has penetrated the confessional life of American religious institutions. And one wonders if they have the capacity to counterbalance democracy's excesses because they are themselves expressions of the democratic spirit now.

Pierre Manent:

Yes, I think so. I do not know enough to weigh in on this point, but I think that for instance, some Catholics are the most thoughtful conservatives in America and the most thoughtful opponents of the new order. But I cannot evaluate the strengths of the different parts of American society. My guess is for that even in America religion no longer has the weight or the capacity to

temper the excesses of democracy that it had in Tocqueville's time, and even for many, many years after Tocqueville.

Jonathan Silver:

If we Americans have before us the example of the European collapse of confidence, what advice would you have for us? In particular, what advice would you have for Americans who belong to traditional Jewish and Christian communities? What can we do to prevent, or at least to arrest, the collapse in national vitality that could come to United States, too?

Pierre Manent:

The answer would be in the question. Do not let yourselves lose your principal strengths, which are a serious sense of loyalty to your people and attachment to serious religion. I think that this is clearly the only available source of resistance to what is going on, which touches on the deepest resources of the human soul.

We are engaged in a fight about the nature of man. What is in man? Either a self or a soul. Are we selves or are we souls? And that is the question that lies before us.

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SHOSHANNA KEATS JASKOLL AND TIKVAH PODCAST AT MOSAIC

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About the authors

A weekly podcast, produced in partnership with the Tikvah Fund, offering up the best thinking on Jewish thought and culture.

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The director of an organization dedicated to the healthy depiction of women in the Jewish public square joins us to talk modesty, what it's good for, and how it can be abused.

This Week's Guest: Shoshanna Keats Jaskoll

There was never an explicit announcement to men that they no longer needed to wear bowties and could wear neckties instead, just like there was no announcement that they didn't need to wear ties at all. Those cultural norms shifted gradually, and are understood even as they do so.

In Orthodox Jewish communities, the way cultural norms work are a bit similar and a bit different. They come both from unspoken social cues and from explicit instruction, including from religious texts. The latter approach reflects the insight that how a person dresses isn't a purely superficial matter, but communicates something of substance. Is the human form public or private, should it be open to the gaze of all or only to select people within a circle of trust or family? What should be covered, and how? Such questions involve reflecting on men, women, and human sexuality too, of course.

This week, Mosaic's editor Jonathan Silver sat down with Shoshanna Keats Jaskoll to explore the virtues of Jewish modesty, and how those virtues can be radicalized, grow excessive, and—like all virtues—transform into vice.

Jaskoll is the director Chochmat Nashim ("The Wisdom of Women"), an organization dedicated to the healthy depiction of women in the Jewish public square that opposes removing pictures of women completely, while still supporting modesty. They discuss what modesty is, what it's for, why it deserves protection, and how it can be exaggerated and abused.

Excerpt:

What happens is a young man is told, "You cannot see a girl, you cannot see a woman, you have to put your head down, you have to look away," and all of a sudden that thing becomes a forbidden and tempting thing. Why can't I see her? "Oh, because you might sin." Why would I sin? "Oh, because you'll get excited when you see her." Now instead of talking about a very specific situation where someone is being sexual or being seen as sexual, you are now sexualizing every interaction—every time I see a woman, every glimpse, every glance. There's no normal gaze anymore. You've removed the normal, and so now everything is sexual.

I have unfortunately spoke to young men who have such a distorted sense of women that they have to relearn how to interact in a normal way with a girl, and it is tragically painful for them to relearn how not to see her as an object, as something that's going to make him sin, as something that he needs to avoid. Someone actually described to me as "putting change into a cashier's hand felt so illicit tome that I had to go and recover afterwards." It's a shocking thing that most of us can't even think about. You go from saying not everything should be sexualized and not everyone should be naked all the time, and most people will agree, but then when we hide people we're literally doing the same thing. We're just creating a world where every interaction between male and female is sexual and there's no more normal. And if we're not modeling normal, where are young boys going to learn normal?.

Diego Rivera's Cryptic Artistic Tribute to Mexican Crypto-Jews

DECEMBER 12, 2022
From *FirstOneThrough*

Considered one of Mexico's greatest artists, and twice the husband of Frida Kahlo, Diego Rivera once remarked, "Jewishness is the dominant element of my life." Although not Jewish himself, he was proud of his descent from Spanish Jews who converted to Catholicism rather than face expulsion. Many such conversos or "New Christians" came to the New World hoping to get away from the prying eyes of the Inquisition, or to escape the stigma attached to their ancestry. Among them was Luis de Carvajal the Elder (1539-1591), who was appointed royal governor of Mexico in 1579, and came there with his family—at least some of whom adhered to Judaism in secret. In his 51-foot-long mural Dreams of a Sunday in the Alameda (1946-7), which depicts the history of Mexico City, Rivera pays tribute to the Carvajals. The blog **FirstOneThrough** explains what became of them, and their significance for Rivera:

> In 1589, the viceroy of New Spain arrested Luis the Elder for a commercial matter, and in the investigation, it came out that Luis knew of, but did not report on, his family's secret Jewish faith. He was thereby transferred from the royal prison to the prisons of the Inquisition.
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> The whole family became implicated, including Luis the Younger (1566-1596), his sister Isabel, and mother Francesca. At the auto-da-fé on February 25, 1590, inquisitors sentenced the entire family to various penances and wearing of sambenito, penitential garb. Not long after, Luis the Younger, his mother, and sisters resumed their forbidden practices in hiding. They were caught again after a friend gave them up in February 1595. This time, they did not get off. Francisca, Isabel, Leonor, Catalina, and Luis the Younger were all burned at the stake at the auto-da-fé of December 8, 1596, as relapsos, or recidivist Judaizing heretics. This history was detailed in the diary of Luis the Younger, an important document in the history of Mexico.
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> Rivera chose to mark this slaughter of the Carvajal family as the beginning of the history of Mexico City. Four members of the Carvajal family can be seen in the background with pointy hats tied to the stake with flames around them. The mother, Francesca, with head shaven, is before them being lashed by one inquisitor while a member of the church sticks a cross in her face.
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> While the history of Mexico City did not start in 1596, [Rivera's] personal history of the city began then due to his connection to conversos in the past. His tenth birthday was likely marked with the 300-year commemoration of the burning of the famous Jews at the stake.

Nakba Day Mourns Wounded Arab Pride, Not Humanitarian Catastrophe

DECEMBER 13, 2020
From Adi Schwartz at *Israel Hayom*

At the Riyadh Arab-China summit on Friday, the Palestinian Authority president Mahmoud Abbas demanded that the UK and the U.S. apologize for the Balfour Declaration, and that Israel apologize for the nakba (i.e., the "catastrophe" that befell Palestinian Arabs in 1948). Of a piece with this rhetorical focus on past grievances was the UN General Assembly's recent vote to mark May 15 as "Nakba Day." **Adi Schwartz** comments:

> Contrary to popular belief in the West (and in certain circles in Israel), Nakba Day was not intended to mark the alleged humanitarian disaster that befell the Palestinian people in the 1948 war. They do not mourn the dead, the wounded, or the exiled, but the very establishment of the Jewish state. They mourn Jews gaining independence rather than the human cost of the war.
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> The term nakba was coined by the Syrian Arab intellectual Constantin Zureiq in a book he wrote in the summer of 1948 titled "The Meaning of Disaster." Analyzing the Arab response to their failure to prevent the establishment of Israel, he wrote, "Seven Arab states declare war on Zionism in Palestine, stop impotent before it, and turn on their heels."
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> The thought that 600,000 Jews managed to defeat 60 million Muslim Arabs at the time was—and still is—unimaginable to the Arabs. This is the greatest humiliation, the source of the frustration, rage, and violence directed toward the state of Israel. This is the true meaning of "nakba," the disaster of the Jews' success to declare a state despite all the efforts by the Arabs to prevent them from doing so.
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> The fact that Palestinians commemorate Nakba Day on May 15 is a clear indication of this. If the occasion was truly meant to remember the casualties among Palestinians, they could have a day that had more meaning loss-wise, such as the fighting in the Deir Yassin village or the day when Arab Haifa fell to the Jews. These events had a great impact on the course of the war, and they reflect a real Palestinian loss. But on May 15, nothing happened but the very declaration of Israel's independence."

Do Not Overinterpret Qatar's Hostility toward Israelis

DECEMBER 12, 2022
From Hussein Aboubakr at *EMET*

In order to host the World Cup soccer championship, Qatar—a major funder of Hamas and exporter of anti-Semitism—agreed to allow Israeli fans and reporters into its borders for the duration of the tournament. Many of the roughly 4,000 citizens of the Jewish state who came to the emirate for the games were surprised at the animus they encountered from soccer fans, local businesses, and even cab drivers. **Hussein Aboubakr** writes:

> Pro-Palestinian activists and Palestinian media picked up these stories in the most celebratory ways, making video compilations and using them to prove that the Abraham Accords never represented the true opinion of most Arabs. Many of them, including sympathetic Western observers, used them to bolster the claim that the Palestinian cause pretty much remains the unifying cause of all the Arabs.
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> But while a first emotional impression might indicate such a possibility, this is more of a propagandistic depiction of reality than the truth. All such incidents, including the hysterical waving of Palestinian flags by many Arab fans, were utterly ignored by Emirati, Saudi, and Bahraini media outlets. Many of the Arab Gulf social-media personalities sympathetic to the Abraham Accords even used the opportunity to deride Qatar and the hatred the Palestinian cause produces.
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> [T]here is little doubt such hostility would not have occurred without the official anti-Israel policy and climate that Qatar insists on maintaining and funding domestically and regionally. The . . . experience of Israelis in Qatar is a stark contrast to their experience in the UAE, where Israelis flooded Dubai only to find a welcoming and hospitable environment. . . . The intimidation and harassment of Israelis in Doha didn't occur because of the spontaneous outbreak of love of Palestine but because everyone knows the leaders of Qatar approve of it. If this proves anything, it is not that the Abraham Accords do not work; it is that they most certainly do."

Why Al Jazeera's Lawsuit against Israel at the ICC May Backfire

DECEMBER 13, 2022
From Rafael Medoff
at *Jerusalem Post*

In May, the Qatar-based Al Jazeera network requested that the International Criminal Court (ICC) investigate the death of its reporter Shireen Abu Akleh, who was hit by a stray bullet during a shootout between the IDF and Palestinian guerrillas. **Rafael Medoff** suggests that this exercise in lawfare may end up hurting Al Jazeera—not just because its claim against Israel has no merit, but because the proceeding might reveal the news organization for what it is: an arm of the Qatari government tasked with disseminating anti-Semitism, anti-Americanism, and Islamism. Medoff cites a historical precedent:

> Al Jazeera's suit against Israel is somewhat reminiscent of the legal actions initiated by the anti-Semitic agitator, Benjamin Freedman, against American Jewish organizations in the 1940s. Freedman, a New York businessman who was born Jewish but embraced Catholicism, placed large advertisements in the American press in 1946 accusing Jews of trying to, "drag [the U.S.] into a war to create a nationalist sovereign Jew state in Palestine." The ads were signed by the "League for Peace with Justice in Palestine."
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> The American Jewish Committee (AJC) charged that the purported interfaith coalition was a sham. . . . Freedman promptly filed suit, demanding $5 million in damages. An AJC leader welcomed the suit as, "an opportunity to demonstrate in court the nature and character" of Freedman and his alleged organization. The suit was dismissed before it went far enough to delve into those details, but two years later, the litigious Freedman re-opened that pandora's box.
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> The defense [in the subsequent case] produced a cable sent by Freedman to Haj Amin el-Husseini, the Palestinian Arab mufti and Nazi collaborator, praising Husseini's "vision, courage, strength, and struggle [on] behalf [of] justice" and vowing "fullest cooperation" with the mufti's war against the Jews. The defense also revealed a document in which Freedman reported to an associate that he had recently, "negotiated [the] immediate establishment" of a "sub-machine gun factory" in Pakistan.
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> Not surprisingly, the judge dismissed the suit, finding that Freedman was "a crackpot," and that [the criticism he claimed to be libelous] was "proven to be true."

Will a New Israeli Left Arise from the Ashes of the Old?

DECEMBER 14, 2022
From Eran Lerman at *Jerusalem Strategic Tribune*

In last month's Knesset elections, Labor—which dominated the first three decades of Israeli politics—emerged as the smallest party with only four seats. Meretz, the party to its left, failed to win any seats. **Eran Lerman** evaluates the decline and collapse of the country's left wing, and its possible future:

> In September 2000, the Camp David Summit between then-Prime Minister Ehud Barak and Yasir Arafat failed. Soon a wave of violence and terror—guided from above, yet mistakenly referred to as the "second intifada" or popular uprising—engulfed Israel and the Palestinians. . . . A sharp decline in the fortunes of the traditional left and center-left parties became all but inevitable. Peace had become their byword, and peace had become nearly synonymous with an increase in terrorist attacks in Israel.
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> There was little else the left could latch on to. Old-style socialism was a thing of the past. Economically disadvantaged groups in Israeli society, especially the refugees from Arab countries who came in the 1950s, felt disenfranchised in the first 30 years of Israel's establishment and saw Likud as their political home, as do their descendants today. Resentment of the elite refused to die, and both Labor and Meretz found it difficult to rid themselves of an association with the sybaritic Tel Aviv cosmopolitan "haves" as opposed to the "have nots" of Israel's social and geographic periphery.
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> Can the Zionist left regain its past position as the dominant force in Israeli life? Probably not, owing to demographic changes. It did not help its cause that Benjamin Netanyahu managed to make headway toward new relations with several Arab countries, even without securing Palestinian consent—which the left had repeatedly argued would be impossible. At the same time, voting results from the last four elections show center-left and left parties, including Israeli Arab parties, consistently garnering slightly under half the vote.
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> Parties on the left could find new pathways to a majority, particularly with the support of those who resent the rise of the radical right and seek to uphold the image of Israel as an open, tolerant society. These parties of the left will not merge but may run on a joint platform. They may yet dig themselves out of the rubble of the present collapse and build a center-left coalition.