

I am therefore bold enough to beg Schwarzschild to re-think his position, to return to his people and not to remove himself from his people. I love him for his Jewish compassion and his love of peace. But this war with almost the whole of the house of Israel must stop. Now.

The ethics of preferring one's own

Norbert Samuelson

Kant argued that it is morally illegitimate to give preference to any individual or group of individuals over any other person or group of persons in moral considerations. But clearly this claim is wrong. There are times and places in which individuals are at least justified morally in placing their own interests or the interests of their families or the interests of any extended group with whom they are identified over the interests of any other individuals or groups of individuals. The rejection of Kant's demand that morals to be moral must be universal is a dominant theme in most contemporary Jewish writing. It is most evident in moral discussions about identity with a Jewish community and loyalty to the state of Israel. Considerable evidence has been introduced in recent years to defend this ethical particularism as a teaching of rabbinic thought. But to conclude absolute moral particularism from these texts is a distortion. There is another side to this coin and Steven Schwarzschild is correct to point to the counter-balancing tendency of ethical universalism in rabbinic literature.

In truth there are times and places in which commitment to oneself or one's own group morally takes precedence over commitment to all of humanity and there are times and places in which it is immoral to deny the equality of all human beings before the bar of moral judgment. Just what these different contexts are and what rules we can employ to determine objectively what kind of context is relevant is an important area of ethical theory that has been given insufficient attention by scholars and religious thinkers. In the limited space available to me here I would like to make some preliminary remarks about what such an ethical theory should look like vis-a-vis moral obligations of Jews to Jews and gentiles. I prefer that our consideration of this question be rational. Therefore I will focus attention on some relatively minor instances of Jewish favoritism and avoid making my point in terms of highly emotive issues of national survival. At the same time it should be noted that if

the general rules concluded from the minor examples are valid, they will apply to major examples as well.

Particularism is an inescapable part of identity

Jews often give favored status to other Jews in their business relations. An argument in defense of this practice generally turns on the claim that to belong to the Jewish people is to belong to an extended family and it is both natural and right for members of a family to favor relatives. Hence some Jewish businessmen and physicians give special discounts to rabbis or members of their synagogue while some Jewish academics make a special effort to help fellow Jewish academics find employment. A consistent Kantian might object that such preferential behavior is immoral. If a businessman can take a given percent profit when dealing with members of his own group then he should be willing to take the same profit when dealing with anyone else. If a physician is able to charge one price for a member of his group then he should charge the same price for anyone else. Not to treat all customers and patients the same is unfair. Similarly it is immoral for an academician to consider any factor that has no relationship to his function as a member of a university in his work and relations within the university. It would be no more proper to give a Jew a teaching position because he is a Jew than it would be to give a student an A because he is a Jew. In all of these respects no form of collective identity has relevance.

In response we may say the following: If the stated moral attitude were widely applied, human interaction would be very different than it is. If our Kantian is correct, then no state has a right to have tariff laws to protect its workers and business over foreign workers and businesses. Similarly no state university should favor students from one state over another in admission policies. In other words, in fact, if not in theory, in some sense identity with a national collective takes precedence over all other forms of collective identity with the possible exception of one's immediate family. The emphasis in this last sentence should be placed on the qualifier "in some sense." Consider the following examples:

Three examples of preferential treatment

Assume that John is interviewing several candidates for a single position. Henry graduated from John's school but Frank did not. If Frank is qualified for the position but Henry is not, then it would be wrong to give the position to Henry. However if both men were equally qualified or if the difference between them is functionally irrelevant for the position under consideration it would not be wrong to let group identity

influence John's choice. (In this context programs of affirmative action for so-called minority groups are morally justified.)

Assume a tennis match between Frank and Henry where Frank but not Henry is John's son and John is the referee. As referee it would be immoral for John in any way to favor Frank because of their familial relationship. However it would be justifiable for John to give tennis lessons to Frank but not give them to Henry, in a way that would be unjustifiable for John to give this special attention to someone who is not his son while he ignores his own children. Although John may not influence the match in Frank's favor it would not be wrong for John quietly to hope that Frank wins. (I would assume that this rule applies to how Jews as Jews ought to judge the action of the state of Israel in competition with other nations.)

Assume a case where John is a businessman, a member of a fraternal society, and he makes a smaller profit in dealing with fraternity brothers than he does in dealing with other people. John may defend his policy on the grounds that everyone belongs to such economic-social associations. If John and his brothers are the only ones who do not act in this way then they would be depriving the members of their group unnecessarily of the advantages that all people enjoy within general society. Perhaps a society with one price for any service or good would be best. Certainly it would be simplest. But that is not the kind of world in which we live. Nor is it clear that such a world is most desirable. To prefer this simplistic ideal is to prefer a world in which no one may give special considerations to one's own family. In such a world there could be no right to inheritance, for why should one individual be given economic power without having earned it. Clearly most people would not opt for such a society. Now if a particular moral theory says that family is irrelevant in a way that a particular psychology says that family is relevant, it may be the case that something is wrong with the social psychology but it may equally be the case that something is wrong with the moral theory, particularly when the psychology is more or less universal and the moral theory is not.

Group loyalties prevail, except in moral issues

All three cases illustrate the following general judgments: Wherever the choice between two alternatives is a moral choice, no considerations may enter that are not relevant to the moral situation. However where neither choice is immoral and a choice must be made, it is legitimate to consider factors that otherwise would not be relevant. If both alternatives are

good then either choice is good. And if both alternatives are bad and they are the only alternatives, then to choose either is not bad. It is with respect to these kinds of situations that it is morally legitimate to allow the otherwise extraneous factor of group identity to enter moral decisions. Furthermore not only may national identity operate in the above non-moral cases but it ought to so operate.

Note that national or family loyalty has nothing to do with friendship. Objectively I may think that my brother is a fool or even worse. That realization will in no way make me say publicly that he is what he is not. I am not obligated to lie about him. In fact I may want nothing personally to do with him, which would mean that he would not be part of my circle of social friends. But still he is my brother, which imposes upon me at least emotionally if not morally obligations to his welfare that I would not have to a stranger. There are friends who sometimes become like family, but they do so because they are the kind of people that they are. However family is like family not because of *what* they are but because of *who* they are.

Life is balancing universal and particular

The above judgments will satisfy neither the extreme universalists nor the extreme particularists among the Jewish people. Yet I do believe that my statement preserves what is reasonable in both of their claims. Jewish particularists tend to see all questions of Jewish interest as matters of survival and they defend their claim that Jewish interests ought not extend beyond Jews by appealing to the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising and the defense of Masada. No individual or collective is morally obligated to opt for self-destruction. Yet neither Masada nor the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising can provide models for avoiding destruction. At best they suggest how to die, since as ideals they only assert that one form of death (*viz.* while killing your killer) is preferable to another (*viz.* while not killing anyone). Furthermore, if all Jews at the time of the wars against Rome had had the same character as the defenders of Masada, Judaism would have been a civilization that died with grace and dignity but nonetheless died. The heroism of its demise would today offer solace to none, although undoubtedly it would have been a topic of some interest to non-Jewish historians, archeologists, anthropologists and existential theologians.

It is not desirable to be a slave, but in all but the most extreme circumstances it is better to live poorly as a slave than not to live at all. To choose life and slavery today minimally leaves open the possibility of life

and freedom tomorrow. Once death is chosen, no options for improvement remain. Given the choice of life and death, let us choose life; but given the choice of life with and without moral character, let us choose moral character. In at least this limited sense there should be no conflict between ethical universalists and Jewish particularists.

Purim parodies, please!

Purim will be upon us before you can recite the names of Haman and his ten sons, and so will *Sh'ma's* annual Purim issue. So put on your three-cornered thinking cap, and write us a piece of Purim humor. We welcome all kinds of original wit done in the Purim spirit, particularly satires and parodies — as long as they reach us no later than February 9, 1977.

In case you're having trouble being so creative, how about contributing to our Purim personals — classified ads from throughout Jewish history? Here are two examples to set your mind working:

For Rent: Available indefinitely — 1 seat for High Holy Day services in synagogue of The Hague. Good location. Contact B. Spinoza. Box 73.

Personal: Mother — come back. I miss you. Sigmund.

Remember — the deadline is February 9th, so send us "lots" for Purim! Box 567, Port Washington, N.Y. 11050

. . . but others say about messianics . . .

Pity for jews who envy christianity, ignore judaism
I write because two of the articles in your November 26, 1976 issue (7/122) disturbed and saddened me deeply.

The first article which concerned me was that of Steven J. Mason who wrote of his evening spent with the "messianic" Jews. He praised their *ruach* and compared Reform Judaism services to the meeting of these poor, misguided people who seem to think they can believe Jesus to be the messiah and still call themselves Jews. It saddens me that Mr. Mason has to compare Reform Judaism to such non-Jewish things and that, particularly, he seeks to direct Reform Jews, who feel their services lack warmth and meaning, to such benighted, non-Jewish sources. If Reform Judaism seeks to reform itself, to restore meaning, ritual, a sense of community, and warmth to its services, let it seek among Jewish sources. How terribly

sad that Mr. Mason could not have visited a Hassidic service or a "havurah" instead. Then he could have seen legitimate Jews doing legitimately Jewish things full of fellowship, involvement and warmth. From such sources as those Mr. Mason could quickly and easily draw ideas and rituals that would add "the proper emotional climate" to "sterile and meaningless" Reform Jewish services.

The other article was that of Abraham Blinderman, who reprinted his letter to his two Christian students in which he explained why he could not join them in their Christianity. And how paltry and sad his reasons — historical proofs of Christian persecutions. Can Mr. Blinderman find nothing positive about Judaism which would cause him to reject Christianity? All he can give are negative aspects of Christianity. And his closing quotation incenses me: "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do."

Indeed, Jews do know what they do. They know very well. It is Christians who perhaps do not know. As history does show us, Christianity has little or no moral force. Christians do not practice the love and brotherhood they always speak of. Mr. Blinderman is well aware of that. But is he not aware of the positive nature of Judaism as opposed to Christianity? Is he not aware of the excellent reasons to embrace fully his Judaism, not merely to refuse to embrace Christianity and be left with "loneliness, fear, and avarice"?

I feel so sorry for Mr. Blinderman, envying the Christians their pretty Christmas trees and festive lights and proclaiming himself "isolated" with only "vestigial ties to Judaism." He seems to feel that Christians have everything (if they would but practice it) and that Jews have nothing but memories of persecution. I empathize. I *know* how he feels, isolated among Christians, because I come from a very small Midwestern town and a largely non-practicing Jewish home. I strongly urge Mr. Blinderman to do what I did — to find out about Judaism. He will be amazed at what pretty and festive lights Judaism has; he will be truly amazed at what Judaism has to offer — everything. I am not asking him to become a religious Jew. But I am asking him to study his Judaism, and he will discover how powerful a moral force it can be, how warm a community Judaism can embrace, how well-fitted, intellectually and sociologically, Jewish philosophy and practices can be in this world.

If he is now isolated in his ignorance of Judaism and his Christian surroundings, then I say to him, "In a place where there are no men, strive to be a man."

Let him go and learn better reasons for refusing his Christian students' offer.

Judith F. Siegel
Brooklyn, New York

Jews must actively oppose christianity
Your reference to "An evening with the messianics" in the Nov. 26th issue (*Sh'ma* 7/122) was extremely timely.

My feelings, however, are that we Jews are too condescending to the mythology of Christianity and passive in our reaction to their attempts at proselytizing. We should be more aggressive selling Judaism. By exposing Christianity for what it really is, and by trying to convert the gentile, we can reinforce our religion and offer an effective outlet for religious fervor.

The making of Yeshua into a godhead offers a study in propaganda. The creation of Christianity as a vehicle for state control through the Council of Nicaea in 324 C.E., and all aspects of the making of this myth, must be taught to equip our people to deal with this expansionist religion.

We can see Christianity for what it really is — by applying to them the model of the so-called *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, and finding that it suits them to a "T." They have been one of the most catastrophic forces to attempt to control the earth.

There is an apt story of an Aztec chief being roasted on a spit by Spanish soldiers while some priests were imploring him to convert to Christianity before he died, so that he could go to heaven and be with the other good Christians. The Indian replied no: he didn't want to meet any more Christians in the next life.

We must teach the truth. We must teach the Bible's historic message to the Jews and Gentiles that "I am the Lord thy God." By teaching the Mosaic concept of love, "It will come to pass in the future when great

nations will proclaim: let us go up to the mount of YHWH, that he may teach us his ways."

The belief that Yeshua was the Christ is not compatible with Judaism and truth, any more than worship of Jupiter would be.

Sy Warshawsky
West Bloomfield, Michigan

. . . but others say . . .

We apologize for obscuring the meaning
In your issue of December 10, 1976, the following statement appeared in my contribution to your symposium: "The well-meaning efforts of scholars to make classical Jewish texts 'accessible' to our time and our idiom helps, in the long run to keep Jews Jewishly literate."

This is precisely the opposite of my point. My original draft read: "Jewishly illiterate." I was, to be sure, trying to make a point that is painful (both to me and to my readers), and this may have motivated an attempt at editorial revision. The point, however, must still be made: we need to bring Jews to the texts, rather than the other way around. I pleaded for *Sefer-Ha-Aggadah* precisely because it did *not* fall into the category of what I termed the "well-meaning efforts, etc."

Joel Rosenberg
Middletown, Conn.

WE HAVE ALSO RECEIVED letters on the subject of gun control (*Sh'ma* 7/122), which do not appear here due to lack of space. We hope to include them in our next issue.

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