Jews and Cosmopolitanism:
An Arc of European Thought

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Židé a kosmopolitanismus: Oblouk evropského myšlení

Abstract: Isaac Deutscher, raised in his youth to be a Talmudic scholar, instead became a communist. In 1958, he addressed the World Jewish Congress on the topic of "The Non-Jewish Jew." There was a Jewish tradition – Deutscher began, citing Spinoza and Marx, Freud and Luxemburg and Trotsky – of breaking with Jewish tradition. Jews had always been restless and rootless, always lived on the borders of various heritages, languages, and cultures, at once in and apart from society. Victimized by religious intolerance and nationalist sentiments, Jews longed for a universalist *Weltanschauung*. It is true that "non-Jewish Jews" played a disproportionate role in the history of European Marxism. Yet Jews' contributions to Marxism might be understood in a larger context: namely, that "non-Jewish Jews" have played a disproportionate role in the intellectual history of modern Europe much more broadly. This essay is an attempt to place the relationship between Jews and Marxism in a larger context – less the larger sociological context than the larger intellectual context of European modernity.

Keywords: Jews; cosmopolitanism; Marxism; phenomenology; post-structuralism; psychoanalysis; Critical Theory; avant-garde

On 21 November 2013 Ukrainian president Viktor Yanukovych unexpectedly refused to sign an association agreement with the European Union. Around 8 pm that evening a thirty-two year-old Afghan-Ukrainian journalist named Mustafa Nayem posted a note on his Facebook page: "Come on guys, let's be serious. If you really want to do something, don't just 'like' this post" [*Nayem 2014*]. He proposed a meeting at 10:30 pm, near the monument in the middle of the Maidan in Kiev. That was the beginning of a revolution. Nayem had spent his childhood in his native Afghanistan before moving to Ukraine around the age of eight. He speaks Ukrainian and Russian and Persian and English. History is often made by such cosmopolitan types.

There were Ukrainian Jews who played a prominent role in the Ukrainian revolution initiated by Mustafa Nayem. At a certain moment these Ukrainian Jews on the Maidan began to refer to themselves, half-ironically, as "Zhido-Bandera" ("Judeo-Bandera"). Seventy-some years earlier, Stepan Bandera had been the leading of an antisemitic Ukrainian fascist organization – hence the self-conscious irony. The phrase "Zhido-Bandera" contains as well an intertextual reference to "Zhido-komuna" ("Judeo-Bolshevism," spelled żydokomuna in Polish), a virtually untranslatable anti-Semitic – and anti-communist – pejorative

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referring to the impression that Marxism in general and Stalinism in particular was a kind of Judeo-Bolshevik conspiracy.

In 2004, the Russian-American historian Yuri Slezkine opened his book *The Jewish Century* with the statement, "The Modern Age is the Jewish Age, and the twentieth century, in particular, is the Jewish Century" [*Slezkine 2004: 1*]. Slezkine went on to make the very controversial argument that "zhido-komuna" was not merely a myth; there *was* something special about the relationship between Jews and communism. By the time Slezkine wrote this book, explanations for the relationship between Jewishness and Marxism, Bolshevism in particular, had generated a large literature. Stanisław Krajewski emphasized the elements of rationalism and moralism shared by Judaism and communism, and the traditions of textual learning and social justice deeply rooted in both [*Krajewski 1996*]. Aleksander Smolar wrote of Jews' desire to flee ghettoized particularism to a utopian brotherhood of all peoples, a place where Jews would be welcomed as rootless individuals [*Smolar 1986*]. Others have similarly pointed out that in times of virulent antisemitism, communism promised racial blindness, equality and justice for all. Slezkine makes the argument that Marxism, like Zionism, offered a solution to the "Jewish predicament" – in particular an "absence of dignified manliness." Slezkine's most radical metaphor is one he takes from Isaac Babel: embracing communism, becoming Soviet, was a way for the emasculated Jew to finally be able to satisfy a Russian woman in bed.

Among the most famous Jewish Marxists was Isaac Deutscher (1907–1967), raised in his youth to be a Talmudic scholar. Instead Deutscher became a Polish communist and later a renegade Trotskyite, expelled from the Communist Party of Poland in 1932. A quarter century later, now living in England, he addressed the World Jewish Congress on the topic of "The Non-Jewish Jew." There was a Jewish tradition – Deutscher began, citing Spinoza and Marx, Freud and Luxemburg and Trotsky – of breaking with Jewish tradition. Jews had always been restless and rootless, always lived on the borders of various heritages, languages, and cultures, at once in and apart from society. Victimized by religious intolerance and nationalist sentiments, Jews longed for a universalist *Weltanschauung* [*Deutscher 1968*].

It is true that "non-Jewish Jews" played a disproportionate role in the history of European Marxism. Yet Jews' contributions to Marxism might be understood in a larger context: namely, that "non-Jewish Jews" have played a disproportionate role in the intellectual history of modern Europe much more broadly. For even in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, an age seemingly dominated by nation-building paradigms, cosmopolitan intellectuals continued searching for universal truths. Universalism is a way of perceiving the world; cosmopolitanism is an identity – and a capability: to be conversant in multiple languages, to have access to multiple literatures, to move among multiple cultures. As Deutscher understood well, the connection between cosmopolitan identity and universalist thought has its own logic: a search for ways to understand the world that would transcend national frameworks. He suggested that there was a special kind of insight born of marginality, that borders might serve as a privileged vantage point from which to glimpse a larger whole. In European history, it was disproportionately Jews not wedded to "Jewishness" who conceived of the universalist concepts and theories that have formed the central narrative arc of a modern history of ideas. The sketch that follows is an attempt to place "zhido-komuna" in a larger context – less the larger sociological context than the larger intellectual context of European modernity. Central to European modernity in all spheres

of intellectual life was the struggle to overcome alienation. "Thus the Jews stood for the discontents of the Modern Age as much as they did for its accomplishments," Slezkine wrote, "Jewishness and existential loneliness became synonyms …" [*Slezkine 2004: 75*].

Marxism

"Non-Jewish Jews" gained prominence in European intellectual life in the century following the Enlightenment – above all with Karl Marx (1818–1883). Born in Prussia, Marx was raised in a middle-class, assimilated Jewish family amidst both Enlightenment and Romantic philosophy. Decisive was his reading of G. W. F. Hegel (1770–1831), for whom history did not proceed arbitrarily, but rather moved inexorably in a certain direction, producing a meaning that could only be grasped retrospectively. This movement did not take place along a smooth line, but rather in leaps forward, its momentum propelled by "dialectics." Hegel insisted on the creative necessity not only of conflict, but also of destruction. Every process for him was one of struggle between incompatible forces; it was this clash that generated forward movement. Most critical was what Hegel called *Aufhebung*, from the untranslatable German verb *aufheben*: to lift up; that is, at once to cancel and synthesize, abolish and assimilate, preserve and overcome. In this way things always contained within themselves both their own negation and their own fulfillment. And by means of *Aufhebung* – this principle of perpetual absorption and resolution in an ever higher unity – historical processes possessed an inner logic, and human history moved forward towards ever greater self-realization. The movement was merciless: history, Hegel described, was "the slaughter-bench at which the happiness of peoples, the wisdom of States, and the virtue of individuals have been victimized" [*Hegel 2004: 21–22*].

Marx absorbed two further aspects of Hegel's thought. The first was the collapsing of the distinction between facts and values: that which triumphed was by definition that which *should* triumph. The second was Hegel's idea that all of the variegated aspects of the universe were part of an organic, totalistic whole. "*Das Wahre ist das Ganze*," Hegel famously wrote. "The true is the whole" [*Hegel 1970: 24*].

In February 1848, Marx and Friedrich Engels published *The Communist Manifesto*, which presented not only an historical model, but also a prophecy. "A spectre is haunting Europe – the spectre of Communism," the manifesto began [*Marx – Engels 2002: 72*]. This spectre was not a ghost from the past, but rather a spectre *to come*. Marx and Engels' theory of the future proceeded directly from their theory of the past. History, for Marx, was History in the Hegelian sense: historical movement was dialectical. In the modern world the site of contradiction was the exploitative bourgeois order, which eventually would produce in the exploited proletariat the consciousness that this order must be violently overthrown, that private property must be abolished, and that a society must be established where each person worked according to his ability, and received according to his need. "What the bourgeoisie therefore produces, above all," Marx and Engels wrote, "are its own grave-diggers. Its fall and the victory of the proletariat are equally inevitable" [*Marx – Engels 2002: 78*]. In time not only would private property be abolished, but the state itself would also wither away, together with national distinctions. "Workers of the world unite!" Marx and Engels concluded *The Communist Manifesto.* The proletariat's overthrow of the bourgeoisie would happen around the world. For Marx the factual was the normative: the worldwide proletarian

revolution was destined to occur. He had disdain for romanticism and idealism, even for "utopian socialism," which depended upon voluntarism. In this sense Marx was heir to the Enlightenment: reason was always right. What was objectively necessary was also subjectively good.

For Marx, everything not part of the primary economic relationship between oppressors and oppressed was derivative. Only material conditions were generative historical factors; ideas were not causes. Human consciousness itself was likewise derivative, determined by socio-economic conditions. By implication human nature was not innate, but rather emerged from a given political-social-economic situation. "Consciousness," Marx and Engels insisted, "does not determine life, but life determines consciousness" [*Marx – Engels 1994:* 112]. Thus Marxism's defining philosophical features were determinism and totality. Like Hegel, he insisted on thinking big: for Marx it was not possible to solve one problem without solving them all. Once one was inside Marxism, it purported to explain everything. And this proved peculiarly seductive.

Among the most intellectually significant Marxists of the next generations were Rosa Luxemburg (1871–1919), Georg Lukács (1885–1971), and Leon Trotsky (1879–1940). A revolutionary from her youth, Rosa Luxemburg grew up in a Jewish family in a Polish town under Russian rule. A founder of both the Social Democratic Party of the Kingdom of Poland and Lithuania and the German Communist Party, she was an uncompromising internationalist. She was also Lenin's most important interlocutor on various matters, including the question of "rushing History."

In 1902 Lenin published *Chto delat'?* (*What Is To Be Done?*) proposing a revision to the Marxism of *The Communist Manifesto*. Lenin fully agreed with Marx that History was moving inexorably in a certain direction. He agreed, too, that the proletariat would acquire class consciousness and come to understand the need to rise up and overthrow the capitalist order. For Lenin, though, this was taking a frustratingly long time. In *Chto delat'?* Lenin called for a conspiratorial, tightly-knit, highly centralized Party, led by a vanguard of professional revolutionaries who would bring class consciousness to the proletariat. That is, they would enlighten workers as to their predestined revolutionary role – and thereby nudge History along.

Rosa Luxemburg disagreed. She believed that Lenin's centralism too tightly separated the core cadre of leaders from the proletarian masses – in whom she had considerably more faith. For her the idea of an elite vanguard was a dangerous one: for an elite, she believed, would always turn conservative in the end. The only potential for sustained radicalism she saw in the proletariat. Moreover, she insisted on respect for historical phases. "The logic of the historic process," she wrote in 1904, "comes before the subjective logic of the human beings who participate in the historic process" [*Luxemburg 1961: 93*]. History must be allowed to shape consciousness; History would do its job.

Georg Lukács (1885–1971) admired Rosa Luxemburg very much. He valued in particular her understanding of the dialectical unity of theory and *praxis*, and her appreciation for Marxist totality. "In her work," Lukács wrote, "we see how the last flowering of capitalism is transformed into a ghastly dance of death, into the inexorable march of Oedipus to his doom" [*Lukács 2002: 32–33*]. Nonetheless, Lukács sided with Lenin: Luxemburg underplayed the role of the Party and overestimated the "elemental spontaneity of the masses." For Lukács everything depended on the class consciousness of the proletariat.

It was consciousness that was the link between theory and *Praxis*, and the Party that was the embodiment of class consciousness. He argued, too, against "vulgar Marxism," which "opportunistically" waited for History to play itself out. He believed that the proletariat must *act*, sometimes with ruthless force; he believed in violence as historical necessity.

If Rosa Luxemburg was the leading Marxist internationalist of her generation, Lukács was the leading Hegelian universalist, devoted to the idea that reality could only be grasped as a whole. Nothing could be understood, or resolved, in a piecemeal fashion. For "the whole system of Marxism," Lukács wrote, "stands and falls with the principle that revolution is the product of a point of view in which the category of totality is dominant" [*Lukács 2002: 29*].

By the time Georg Lukács completed *History and Class Consciousness* in 1922, Rosa Luxemburg was no longer alive. On 15 January 1919, she was among the leaders of the German Communist Party captured in Berlin during the Spartacus rebellion. Together with her comrade Karl Liebknecht, Rosa Luxemburg was shot, her body thrown into the Spree River.

"She was a woman of genius," Leon Trotsky (1879–1940) wrote of Rosa Luxemburg in his eulogy. Trotsky recalled having heard Luxemburg speak at a congress in Jena, when "small and fragilely built she mounted the platform of the congress as the personification of the proletarian revolution" [*Trotsky 1919*]. Trotsky himself was born to a family of Russian Jewish peasant farmers. He was a Menshevik, a Marxist who resisted Leninism – until 1917, when joined Lenin in Petrograd in carrying out the Bolshevik Revolution. Trotsky became one of the Revolution's heroes. Yet following Lenin's early death in 1924, he lost the power struggle to Stalin, and was forced into exile.

In was in exile, in the 1930s, that Trotsky wrote *The Revolution Betrayed*. Under Stalin, Trotsky argued, bureaucracy had swallowed the revolutionary vanguard. Freedom of criticism had vanished, and the masses had been pushed away from the Party leadership. Not only had the Soviet system become ossified, but so, too, had a new privileged class arisen. Soviet Party officials rode in limousines, and the Soviet Union had surpassed the capitalist countries in its inequality. Trotsky called for a new revolution, this time a revolution against "bureaucratic absolutism" [*Trotsky 1996: 289*].

Trotsky called for something else as well. In 1917, Lenin had deeply believed that once the communist revolution happened in Russia, workers all around the world would follow more or less at once. When the worldwide workers' revolution failed to occur, Stalin announced the doctrine of "Socialism in One Country." For Trotsky this, too, was a betrayal of Marxism. He insisted, in contrast, on "permanent revolution": ultimately socialism would prevail in one country only when it prevailed around the world.

History did not go Trotsky's way. Inspired by visions of an egalitarian utopia, communism in practice turned into Stalinist terror. Like the French Revolution, the Bolshevik Revolution devoured its own children. Trotsky was only one of many. Stalin's henchmen pursued him across continents, until in 1940 Stalin finally succeeded in having Trotsky murdered in Mexico, by ice pick.

Imperial cosmopolitanism

Marx and his followers, while "objectively" optimists, tended to express their optimism with a brutal edge. A much gentler optimism characterized the philosophy of Ludwik Zamenhof (1859–1917), a native of Polish-, Russian-, Yiddish-, and German-speaking

Białystok. A Polish Jewish optometrist, Zamenhof was a cosmopolitan from a provincial town who studied in Warsaw, Moscow and Vienna. These years of the rise of nationalism were years of increasing ethnic tensions in both the Russian and Habsburg empires, and Zamenhof became obsessed with the idea that it was the problem of communication across national lines that was responsible for so much ill will and misunderstanding. "Though language is the prime motor of civilisation, and to it alone we owe the having raised ourselves above the level of other animals," he wrote, "difference of speech is a cause of antipathy, nay even of hatred, between people" [*Zamenhof 1889*].

In Warsaw in 1887, Zamenhof, under the pen name "Dr. Esperanto" – "Dr. Hopeful" – published *An Attempt Towards an International Language*. There he proposed the worldwide adoption of Esperanto, a new language he himself had invented. The etymological and structural influences were European; the grammar was perfectly regular; and the language perfectly phonetic, for Zamenhof had designed it to be as easy to learn as possible. His vision involved no abandonment of already-existing languages – Esperanto was created to be a universally shared second language. It was an extraordinary linguistic achievement. In 1905, the year of massive demonstrations, protests and strikes throughout the Russian empire, some 700 language enthusiasts came to Boulogne-sur-Mer for the first World Esperanto Congress.

Ludwik Zamenhof's universalist project was implicitly a European one – at a time when "Europe" as such did not yet exist. To the extent that it did, it did so largely in the minds of Europe's "non-Jewish Jews." The writer Stefan Zweig (1881–1942) expressed this poignantly. An aesthete from a bourgeois Jewish family steeped in Viennese culture, Zweig grew up in the twilight of the Habsburg Empire. Later he called the Vienna of those years a "world of security" in an age of reason. Nineteenth-century liberalism with its optimistic faith in progress set the tone of Zweig's bourgeois world. "It was sweet to live here," he wrote, "in this atmosphere of spiritual conciliation, and subconsciously every citizen became supranational, cosmopolitan, a citizen of the world" [*Zweig 1964: 13*].

Stefan Zweig grew up in Viennese coffeehouses, which constituted then a civil society unto itself. It was a time and space of worship of Art, and Zweig's generation was blinded by its faith in the purely aesthetic. In Café Griensteidl would gather the writers of Jung-Wien, Arthur Schnitzler and Hugo von Hoffmannsthal among them, nearly all of them were of Jews by birth. And Jewishness was important to Zweig – or rather, it was important in its absence of particularity. In a letter to the Zionist Martin Buber, Zweig wrote, "I have never wanted the Jews to become a nation again, and thus to lower itself to taking part with the others in the rivalry of realities. I love the Diaspora and affirm it as the meaning of Jewish idealism, as Jewry's cosmopolitan human mission" [*Stanislawski 2004: 124*].

Zweig's world came to an end on 29 June 1914, with a single shot fired in Sarajevo. Patriotism prevailed and European nations turned against one another. Yet this did nothing to change Zweig's feelings towards nationalism in general or Zionism in particular. In 1917 Zweig wrote to Martin Buber, explaining that what he valued most in his Jewishness, was the "absolute freedom to choose among nations, to feel oneself a guest everywhere, to be both participant and mediator. This supranational feeling of freedom from the madness of a fanatical world has saved me psychologically during these trying times, and I feel with gratitude that it is Judaism that has made his supranational feeling possible for me" [*Stanislawski 2004: 125*].

Cosmopolitanism for Zweig was not only an identity, but also an ideology. Like universalism, it was for him synonymous with "Europeanness." When it was no longer possible to travel in Europe without a passport, this was for Zweig an expulsion from paradise. He fought against it. A devoted cultural attaché for a Europe that did then exist, Zweig travelled from country to country, promoting Europe's intellectual unification, giving lectures in Switzerland and Holland, in Belgium and Italy, speaking in German and French and English and Italian.

Zweig's was a failed project. "Europe" did not then come into being. Instead, in 1933 Hitler came to power in Germany; the following year Zweig fled Austria. From wartime exile, he wrote *Die Welt von Gestern: Erinnerungen eines Europäers* (*The World of Yesterday*), a work of overwhelming nostalgia, a memoir that was less an autobiography than a eulogy to a lost world. It was his generation, "we, who once knew a world of individual freedom" who "know and can give testimony that Europe once, without a care, enjoyed its kaleidoscopic play of color." *The World of Yesterday* appeared in 1943 – posthumously, for Zweig had committed suicide in Brazil the previous year.

Zweig believed that it was not by chance that psychoanalysis was born in Vienna. He valued his friendship with Sigmund Freud (1856–1939), who even in the blissful "world of security" saw many causes of human misery. From the beginning, Freud was interested in solving the great mysteries of human existence. He studied medicine at the University of Vienna during the reign of positivism, with its objectivist, materialist, empiricist inclinations. Psychology, like biology, was understood then as something that could be explained by physical forces and chemical reactions. A speculative thinker, Freud broke away from positivism by asserting that the mind could be the cause of its own illness. Illness, that is, could be caused by *ideas*.

The tripartite model Freud developed of the self was a universal one: each person possessed an id (*das Es*), a superego (*das Überich*), and an ego (*das Ich*). The id was libido, pure desire, and included the twin drives of Eros and Thanatos. Eros was the life instinct, the drive for sex and survival. Thanatos was the death instinct, the drive for aggression and (self-)destruction. The superego was society internalized as conscience. It was left then to the ego to mediate between the guilt of the superego and the desires of the id.

"The first of these displeasing propositions of psycho-analysis is this," Freud told his audience during a lecture, "that mental processes are essentially unconscious, and that those which are conscious are merely isolated acts and parts of the whole psychic entity" [*Freud 1989: 25*]. For Freud every self was divided into a conscious and unconscious part, and it was the latter – that psychic closet into which everything too traumatic for the conscious mind was tossed – that was more determinate. More or less everything important happened in the unconscious.

Freud's model was in a sense dialectical: the self was always in conflict with itself. Further, the self was a closed-energy system, characterized by "the return of the repressed": sublimated trauma and desires did not disappear, but rather reappeared as neuroses or other symptoms of mental illness. Thwarted aggression would always turn inwards. Yet this thwarting of aggression was necessary, he argued in *Civilization and Its Discontents*, for society required the repression of Eros and Thanatos, an exchange of happiness for security. Civilization, in short, was responsible for our misery. Yet the repression inherent in civilization was a necessity: there was no other choice.

Freud shared with Marx a predilection for grandiosity. In essence both of these thinkers asked the same question: why were people unhappy in the modern world? They gave very different answers. While Marx embraced materialism, Freud revolted against materialism by insisting on the agency of ideas. In Freud's mind Marxism was based on the flawed premise that man was good and only private property had corrupted his natural goodness. Freud, in contrast, rejected the idea that aggression was created by either property or capitalism. The aggressive instinct, he believed, was primordial and universal. Marxists, in turn, called psychoanalysis the last bourgeois attempt to stave off the revolution.

As Freud developed it, psychoanalysis was the process by which the unconscious was coaxed into revealing itself. Yet unlike in Marxism, in psychoanalysis there was no happily ever after. Culture was paid for by repression, and all civilization was built on individual suffering and renunciation. Psychoanalysis might alleviate some of the symptoms, but success could only ever be partial. For Freud, unlike for Marx, there was no way out.

In fact against the objectivist materialism of both Marx and the nineteenth century natural sciences emerged from the Austrian Empire two distinct subjectivist rebellions: the psychoanalytic self and the phenomenological self. Both involved rejections of positivism, and both argued that understanding the world meant understanding the primacy of the individual human subject. Yet these two subjectivist rebellions were otherwise very different. Edmund Husserl (1859–1938) was Freud's exact contemporary. Born in Habsburg Moravia, Husserl was a German-speaking Jew who, together with his wife, rejected both Judaism and Jewishness. Of Malvine Husserl Emmanuel Levinas once wrote, "*Madame Husserl parlait de juifs rigoureusement à la troisième personne, pas même à la deuxième*" [*Schuhmann 1988: 119*].

While Freud was concerned with what was hidden, Husserl was concerned with what was illuminated. His philosophy began with epistemological questions: what is knowledge? Where do we begin? How can we know the world? "How can I, the cognizing subject," Husserl asked, "know if I can ever really know that there exist not only my own mental processes, these acts of cognizing, but also that which I apprehend?" [*Husserl 1990: 16*]. Like René Descartes and Immanuel Kant, Husserl desired to clear away everything uncertain and begin afresh, building a science on a foundation of what could be known absolutely and universally. For Kant, the *Ding-an-sich* – the "thing in itself" – referred to what lay beyond the limits of knowledge: the real thing was that which could not be known. Husserl rejected this Kantian fatalism. The more optimistic Husserl was interested in the *possibility* of knowledge. And phenomenology emerged as a philosophy of radical subjectivity with a claim to objective truth.

For Husserl "the world" was a singularity, the most all-encompassing context, the widest whole. The subject – the self, the "I," the "transcendental ego" – was a second singularity, the center of this whole. Objects, for Husserl, were always transcendent – that is, they lay *outside* of our consciousness. Only human beings had transcendental egos, meaning only we were reflective beings with the possibility of transcendence. And transcendence, for Husserl, meant the subject's ability to reach outside of himself to the objects comprising the world.

Husserl's prose style was that of a mathematician: dry and technical. Yet he was very much a humanist in the sense that he regarded the human subject as the source of all meaning. Knowledge *was* possible, but not apart from human beings, for knowledge was inextricably bound up with human consciousness. The problem of knowing was

a universal one, it was the problem of transcendence: how could we – subjects, transcendental egos – reach the object? In other words, how could we transcend ourselves as subjects to know the world? Husserl denied that the subject and the object were separated by a gaping abyss; he insisted rather that subject and object, while distinct, were inextricably connected by "intentionality." For Husserl consciousness was *intentional* – that is, directed towards something, like a transitive verb that required an object. Consciousness was always consciousness *of something*. The transcendental ego "burst forth" towards the object, overcoming the seemingly unbridgeable distance between them. In this sense, the parts preceded the whole: that is, the *a priori* connectedness between subject and object preceded a separate existence of either.

There was a critical difference between Freud and Husserl's respective understandings of subjectivity. For Freud, there was no transparency: the self was always concealed from the self; the real was the hidden. For Husserl in contrast, the most essential self – "pure consciousness" or the "transcendental ego" – was transparent, and what was real was by definition what appeared. In this way phenomenology's transcendental ego was both radically subjective and curiously generic.

After the Nazis came to power in 1933, the aging Edmund Husserl was cast out of the University of Freiburg under the rectorship of his own protégé, Martin Heidegger. Less than two years later, nearing the end of his life, Husserl wrote to his friend of many decades, the founding Czechoslovak president Tomáš Masaryk. In the letter Husserl expressed his wish that Masaryk's vision for the new state of Czechoslovakia come true, a vision of a "*Staatsvolk* not divided by the various languages, but rather mutually enriched and elevated by their participation in linguistically formed cultural achievements. You inculcated in me this ideal all those years ago in Leipzig! May the Republic through such political-ethical ennoblement become the foundation for the renewal of *European* culture, direly endangered by nationalist degeneracy" [*Husserl 1994: 120*].

Masaryk's Czechoslovakia did not then have long to live. The time of the Masaryks and Husserls, the Zweigs and Zamenhofs and Freuds, had passed. In the three preceding decades, among Husserl's talented students had been the Germans Hans Lipps and Martin Heidegger; the Pole Roman Ingarden; the German Jews who converted to Christianity Hedwig Conrad-Martius, Adolf Reinach, Max Scheler, and Edith Stein; the Russian Gustav Shpet; the Czech Jan Patočka; and the Russian Jew who had come to Göttingen from Kaunas via Kharkov and Strasbourg, Emmanuel Levinas. They had come to Germany from Lemberg, Vienna, Moscow, Breslau, Cracow, Strasbourg and Prague. They had come to try to understand subjectivity apart from race, nation, or class. In an age of nationalism, the students of phenomenology gathered around Husserl – first in Göttingen and later in Freiburg – represented a last moment of imperial cosmopolitanism in Central Europe. By 1935 that had come to end.

Words and feelings

God's death, announced by Friedrich Nietzsche in 1882, brought a lurking threat of nothingness [*Nietzsche 1975: 126*]. In politics, nation and class arose as alternative identities. In philosophy, teleology and subjectivity arose as alternative structures for thinking about the world. The tension between subjectivity and telos was to define European

thought throughout the twentieth century. This was true in the aesthetic realm as well, where "non-Jewish Jews" played a disproportionately large role in twentieth-century modernism.

Like Freud and Husserl, Franz Kafka (1883–1924) was a subject of the Habsburg monarchy, and an assimilated Jew from the Czech lands who wrote in German. He lived in *fin-de-siècle* Prague, a city in linguistic and cultural transition. The city's Jews occupied a liminal position – and yet at once a central one in German-Czech cultural dialogue. Kafka, together with his friends Franz Werfel (1890–1945) and Max Brod (1884–1968) – the "Prague Circle" of German expressionists – represented a certain de-nationalized German culture. In a 1911 diary entry, Kafka wrote of his own Prague German as a "deterritorialized language, appropriate for strange and minor uses" [*Spector 2000: 28*]. He was painfully conscious of himself as an outsider to all national communities – Czech, German, and Jewish alike. "What have I in common with Jews?" he wrote in his diary in 1914, "I have hardly anything in common with myself" [*Kafka 1965: 11*].

Giving expression to anxiety and alienation was Kafka's great contribution to European literature. His novel, *The Metamorphosis*, opened with the line: "When Gregor Samsa woke up one morning from unsettling dreams, he found himself changed in his bed into a monstrous vermin" [*Kafka 1972: 3*]. For Kafka it was the uncertainty of reality, the absence of stable identity that made this world so difficult to live in. He expressed poignantly the fear of acting, the impotence of the outsider, the anguish of solitude, and the torments of the psychological self, which had no fixed identity.

Kafka suffered from anxiety, depression, neuroses, migraines, and various psychologically-induced ailments. When he died very young, however, it was of tuberculosis. Before his death he was involved in various unsuccessful relationships with women, most famously with his Czech translator, Milena Jesenská, an independent-minded woman attracted, at various times, to feminism, communism, bisexuality, cocaine, and the avant-garde.

The avant-garde was "second-wave" modernism. The (anguishes of the) psychological self at the center of "first-wave" literary modernism revealed themselves to be existentially unbearable. Avant-gardists fled from this subjectivity, turning instead to the materiality of language. From the beginning of the century linguistics and poetics were growing more intimate. At the center of this nexus was the precocious polyglot Roman Jakobson (1896–1982), who during the First World War, while still a teenager, was among the small group of Moscow students who founded the Moscow Linguistic Circle. The following year Viktor Shklovsky (1893–1984) and Osip Brik (1888–1945) were instrumental in forming the Moscow Linguistic Circle's Petersburg counterpart, the Society for the Study of Poetic Language. Jakobson took part, too, in the Petersburg meetings, which were hosted by Osip Brik's wife and the futurist poet Vladimir Mayakovsky's muse Lilia Brik (1891–1978).

From these circles came Russian Formalism, committed to "literature as such" – that is, the study of aesthetic devices, considered unto and for themselves. Never had linguistics and literature been so close, and no one did more to effect this coupling than Roman Jakobson. As the Formalists studied the autonomous nature of poetic language, the Russian futurists invented a poetry of the "self-sufficient," "self-valuing" word [*Khlebnikov – Kruchënych 1967*]. Words were material things, independent of the things they signified, and poetry, for Jakobson, meant "language in its aesthetic function" [*Jakobson 1992: 179*].

The new poetry of the avant-garde broke with representation in favor of the "laying bare" of the aesthetic device.

"Art was always free of life," Viktor Shklovsky declared, "and its color never reflected the color of the flag which waved over the fortress of the city" [*Erlich 2006: 129*]. These linguists and poets were polyglots and cosmopolitans, and Russian Formalism shared with phenomenology a search for universal principles. It shared much more than that, however. Among Formalism's most important contributions was Viktor Shklovsky's idea of *ostranenie*, "estrangement," or "making strange." In 1917 Shklovsky proclaimed the purpose of art: to break the spell of automization, the automatization that "eats away at things, at clothes, at furniture, at our wives, and at our fear of war" [*Shklovsky 1990: 5*]. *Ostranenie* shocked us out of our habitual state; it "return[ed] sensation to our limbs" [*Shklovsky 1990: 6*]. In essence the aim of Shklovsky's *ostranenie* was that of what Husserl called "bracketing": that is, to make us self-conscious about what we were seeing, about how objects appeared to us.

In 1920, in the midst of the Bolshevik Civil War, Jakobson left Russia for Prague. Once there, Jakobson tried to persuade Shklovsky to join him. "To live in Prague and believe that you're living in Europe is foolish," Shklovsky wrote to Jakobson. He added, "Do you wear round glasses? All the Jews are wearing them, don't be an assimilator" [*Baran 1999: 116–119*]. Although Shklovsky preferred Berlin, Jakobson was not to be lonely in Prague. There, as in Moscow and Petersburg, he continued his manically energetic social, intellectual, and artistic life. He founded the Prague Linguistic Circle, at whose meetings "seldom was Czech without an accent heard. Even those who hardly knew how to speak any other language but their native Czech acquired a queer pronunciation after some time" [*Součková 1978: 2*].

Jakobson became involved, too, with the Czech avant-garde group, Devětsil, who like the avant-gardes in other places, found inspiration from varied sources. One was linguistic structuralism, in which Jakobson played a leading role. The critical insight here, first articulated by the Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure, was that language was a form, not a substance. Further, the linguistic sign – the unity of signifier (*signifiant*) and signified (*signifié*), the word and the thing it represented – was arbitrary, defined only by contrast and obtaining only within a given system [*Saussure 1996*]. This decoupling of form and content gave the avant-garde tremendous freedom: suddenly words were things, you could do what you wanted with them. Avant-garde poets disregarded disciplinary distinctions; they played with atonal meters, with rhyme and assonance and alliteration, setting aside what would traditionally be considered the meaning of words. They wrote sound poems, nonreferential verse, and poetry in graphic form. They rejected grammatical rules and played with words like toys. This break with referentiality had a still more profound dimension: for art, then, had no obligation to mimic life, and it was the avant-gardists, before the socialist realists, who made the leap from art as representation to art as transformation.

In general the avant-gardists refused to acknowledge any hitherto obtaining rules – be they of literature, of convention, or of *politesse*. The result was much provocation and some scandal. The avant-gardists took rather literally the announcement by Nietzsche's madman of God's death, and Zarathustra's declaration that "what is falling we should still push" [*Nietzsche 1978: 209*]. The old world was dead, and now all was possible. Modernity was emptiness, a space for play. It was a nihilism that resembled less catastrophism than it did

nothingness in the sense that Jean-Paul Sartre would later articulate it: absolute nothingness as absolute freedom.

All of this took place against the background of the crisis of liberalism and the rise of nationalism. In the wake of World War I, Wilsonian self-determination had prevailed in Eastern Europe. The richly multicultural Habsburg Empire fell, and in its place new states were created, founded on the principle that national and state borders should coincide. Now the cosmopolitanism that had characterized so much of intellectual life under empires gave way to the self-conscious internationalism of the avant-garde. Like Leon Trotsky and Rosa Luxemburg, the avant-garde artists and writers were adamant internationalists. Yet now this stance betrayed an implicit acceptance that no longer could cosmopolitanism be taken for granted: now borders had to be deliberately transgressed.

The various European avant-garde movements – futurism and dadaism, constructivism and surrealism – were created by a cast of colorful characters, a disproportionate number of whom were "non-Jewish Jews." These included the Russian Jewish constructivists in Berlin, El Lissitzky (1890–1941) and Ilya Ehrenburg (1891–1967), who published the multilingual avant-garde journal *Veshch'/Gegenstand/Object*. Geometric forms, the constructivists believed, possessed universal meaning. These included, too, Tristan Tzara (1896–1963), founder of dada, who declared in his 1918 manifesto, "I am against systems, the most acceptable system is on principle none" [*Tzara 2002*]. The Romanian-Jewish-Swiss Tzara was himself a national nihilist par excellence who embraced disunity: "People are different. Diversity creates interest for life. There is no common basis in human minds" [*Tzara 1922*]. Of Tzara and the dadaists Roman Jakobson wrote, "They do not object to the war ('still today for war' (*heute noch für den Krieg*)), yet they are the first to proclaim the cause of erasing the boundaries between yesterday's warring powers ('me, I'm of many nationalities' (*Je suis, moi, de plusieurs nationalités*))" [*Jakobson 2002*].

The Polish-Jewish graphic artist Henryk Berlewi (1894–1967) spent the years 1921 to 1923 in Berlin, in the company of Hungarian, Russian, and German painters and poets. In 1923 Berlewi returned to Warsaw, and founded, together with Aleksander Wat (1900–1967) and another futurist friend, a graphic design advertising agency. Like Berlewi and like the constructivists in Berlin, the young polyglot futurist Wat had explicitly internationalist aspirations. In July 1921 he and two friends, Bruno Jasieński (1901–1938) and Anatol Stern (1899–1968) sent a letter to the Russian futurist Vladimir Mayakovsky: "Polish futurists, establishing contact with futurists from all countries, send the Russian futurists fraternal greetings. Beginning in September of the present year we will publish in Warsaw the first large international journal-newspaper devoted to universal futurist poetry in all languages."[1]

Europe's ashes

The avant-garde's conviction that anything was now possible revealed itself to be darkly true. In his story "The Eternally Wandering Jew," written in the mid-1920s, Wat described Europe as "cannibalistic, impoverished, mystical, sadistic, prostituted" [*Wat 1990: 8*].

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[1] Bruno Iasenskii, Aleksander Vat, and Anatol' Stern to Vladimir Maiakovskii, Warsaw, 1 July 1921, 2852/1/599, Rossiiskii Gosudarstvennyi Arkhiv Literatury i Iskusstva, Moscow.

Fifteen years later Europe was much worse: by the mid-twentieth century, Europe was a bloodbath.

This fact was to define the arc of Europe's intellectual life. The philosophers of the Institute for Social Research (*Institut für Sozialforschung*) established in 1923 at the University of Frankfurt were Hegelians and Marxists of varying sorts. All of them had come under the influences of Marxism, psychoanalysis, and phenomenology. Nearly all of them were German Jews, including Theodor Adorno (1903–1969), Walter Benjamin (1892–1940), Max Horkheimer (1895–1973), Herbert Marcuse (1898–1979), and Wilhelm Reich (1897–1957). Collectively they developed "Critical Theory" – a synthetic, interdisciplinary blend of philosophy and social science. Beginning from a dialectical understanding of history, Critical Theory integrated Freudian psychoanalysis with phenomenological notions of subjectivity and a revised, Western Marxism. Critical Theory was explicitly normative: it was concerned with explaining not only how things were, but also how they should be. Individual happiness and fulfillment, the Frankfurt School believed, depended upon a transformation of society. All of these thinkers were preoccupied with the integration of theory and *praxis* – despite the fact that they themselves, rarely politically engaged, led rather bourgeois lives.

The Frankfurt School philosophers were assimilated German Jews on the Left, deeply tied to German culture. They were, in fact, Weimar's Germany intellectual elite. Almost every one of them denied the relevance of Jewishness and the Jewish question in Germany. In the end, though, their subjective conviction of belonging objectively proved to no avail. When the Nazis came to power in Germany, Walter Benjamin, who "knew Goethe's work inside out the way a devout Christian might know the Bible," fled to Paris [*Perloff 2004: 80–81*]. After the Gestapo confiscated his apartment there, he intended to emigrate to the United States via Spain and Portugal. Yet Benjamin arrived at the Spanish border town one evening in September 1940, only to learn that the Spain had just that day closed the border, and the refugees would be returned to France. That night he took his own life.

Walter Benjamin's colleagues fared better. Adorno, Horkheimer, Marcuse and Reich all reached the other side of the Atlantic. And it was, there, in American exile, that they learned of the Holocaust. It changed all of them. For Adorno, as for many of his contemporaries, Auschwitz came to be that which revealed all hidden meaning. The Holocaust had forced the Frankfurt School philosophers to question the meaning of modernity: had it meant enlightenment or had it meant terror? It was in the immediate wake of the news of Auschwitz that Adorno and Horkheimer wrote *The Dialectic of Enlightenment*, posing the question of whether it was possible to draw a line between Enlightenment and totalitarianism.

The authors of *The Dialectic of Enlightenment* aimed to expose the many contradictions, paradoxes and dialectical processes that characterized the path from eighteenth-century Enlightenment to twentieth-century Nazi totalitarianism. The Enlightenment project of looking upon the world as an object to be molded by people had resulted in domination as a mode of behavior. People had always insisted on the very ideology that enslaved them, and the desire to be enslaved "always already" co-existed with the desire to be free: "The strain of holding the I together adheres to the I in all stages, and the temptation to lose it has always been there with the blind determination to maintain it" [*Horkheimer – Adorno 1996: 33*]. The totalitarian quality implicit in Enlightenment rested on the dialectic inherent in the individual's surrendering subjectivity as a means of achieving subjectivity:

the self was sacrificed to the self, and the negated self was lost to the herd. The result of man's sacrifice of himself was ultimately a false society in which everyone was superfluous and everyone was deceived. Ultimately, Enlightenment was self-negating.

Hannah Arendt (1906–1975), Adorno's contemporary who very much shared his intellectual background, was also among his fiercest critics. She, too, fled Nazi Germany, first to Paris and later to New York, where in 1943 the news of the Holocaust reached her. "What was decisive," she said, "was not the year 1933, at least not for me. What was decisive was the day we learned about Auschwitz" [*Arendt 2003b: 13*].

Like Adorno and Horkheimer and so many others of their generation, Arendt was consumed with the need to understand what had happened. In the years immediately following the war she wrote *Origins of Totalitarianism*, a study born in part of the observation of Nazism's and Stalinism's essential similarities. Yet in contrast to Adorno and Horkheimer, Arendt rejected any kind of Hegelian historical determinism and insisted that Nazism was a departure from the Enlightenment's trajectory and a deviation from Western history. Arendt searched for the origins of both racialism in general and antisemitism in particular, of imperialism, of the breakdown of liberalism and the modern democratic state, of totalitarianism. She emphasized ideology itself, and the dehumanizing nature of teleology. She sought a genealogy of the destruction of human subjectivity that lay at the heart of the totalitarian experience. Totalitarianism, having recruited its perpetrators from the atomized masses, required the extinguishing of individual identity on the part of both victims and perpetrators. By the time the victims were led to the gas chambers, their selves were already dead. Yet this was true of their executioners as well: in exchange for an end to their isolation, the selves of the perpetrators, too, were extinguished.

"We may say," Arendt wrote, "that radical evil has emerged in connection with a system in which all men have become equally superfluous" [*Arendt 1973: 459*]. In this way "the distinguishing line between persecutor and persecuted, between the murderer and his victim, is constantly blurred" [*Arendt 1973: 453*]. This distinction between victims and oppressors was one of the critical boundaries effaced by totalitarianism, together with the distinction between public and private spheres, and between truth and falsehood. "What meaning has the concept of murder when we are confronted with the mass production of corpses?" she asked [*Arendt 1973: 441*]. All was possible in this fictional world. And the Nazi camps served as laboratories where this conviction was being verified.

Arendt ended *Origins of Totalitarianism* by speaking about "radical evil" and "crimes which can neither be punished nor forgiven" [*Arendt 1973: 459*]. Later in her life, though, she was to consider whether Nazi evil was not only radical, but also banal. In 1961, she traveled to Jerusalem for the trial of Adolf Eichmann, who had organized the transports to Auschwitz. In *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, she maintained that what was striking about Adolf Eichmann was not that he was evil, but rather that he was ordinary. Not especially intelligent, Eichmann was rather an obedient bureaucratic interested in career advancement. "The subject of a good government is lucky," Eichmann said in his own defense, "the subject of a bad government is unlucky. I had no luck" [*Arendt 1977: 175*]. Arendt found Eichmann to be "incapable of uttering a single sentence that was not a cliché" [*Arendt 1977: 48*]. "The longer one listened to him," she wrote, "the more obvious it became that his inability to speak was closely connected with an inability to *think*" [*Arendt 1977: 49*]. In Arendt's opinion, this man, whom the Israeli prosecutors desperately wanted to portray as

the embodiment of evil, failed to emerge as a monster. On the contrary, she wrote, "it was difficult indeed not to suspect that he was a clown" [*Arendt 1977: 54*]. This is precisely why he was so terrifying. This was not the only point Arendt made in *Eichmann in Jerusalem* that enraged so many Jewish readers. For she wrote, too, of the *Judenrats'* role in facilitating Eichmann's task, and suggested that had Europe's Jewish communities been unorganized and lacking in leadership, it would have been much more difficult to exterminate them.

Arendt has long been accused of blaming the victims; of exculpating German culture; of distinguishing insufficiently between Germans and Jews. Though she was Adorno's critic, Arendt nonetheless shared with him and the Frankfurt School thinkers a universalist understanding of the Holocaust. The lesson of totalitarianism, they believed, was not about Germans or Jews. The lesson of totalitarianism was rather about the pathologies of European modernity. For very many people the idea that the Germans were simply evil had a certain appeal, as it offered the possibility of sleeping soundly at night, far away from any Germans. Arendt's idea that it was neither in the essence of Germans to be executioners nor in the essence of Jews to be victims was an infinitely more disturbing one. For if the Holocaust was rather the exploitation of a universal human potential, then no one should ever sleep soundly again. "For many years now," Arendt wrote after the war, "we have met Germans who declare that they are ashamed of being Germans. I have often felt tempted to answer that I am ashamed of being human" [*Arendt 2003a: 154*].

After modernity

The generation of intellectuals who followed Adorno and Arendt have continued to struggle with the same post-totalitarian questions. They have continued to be haunted by Marxism's path to Stalinism, and haunted by Auschwitz. In August 1968 Czechoslovakia's attempt to create "socialism with a human face" was violently put down by Warsaw Pact tanks. And so did Marxism, the last and most enduring of modern Europe's grand narratives, die in Europe. It left behind an intellectual void: how, now, was one to make sense of the modern world?

Jacques Derrida (1930–2004) was an Algerian-born French philosopher of Jewish origin, influenced both by structuralism and phenomenology. His early work began in dialogue with Claude Lévi-Strauss (1908–2009), probing structuralism's contradictions and limitations. Structuralism posited that meaning was always relational and existed only within a given system. Meaning was contingent, but also stable. Structuralism, then, presupposed a totality: the system – that is, the structure – had to be whole; it had to have boundaries to hold the meaning in place.

Yet what if, Derrida asked, life were not like a chessboard, and the boundaries of the structure were not so clear? What if there were no closed structures? For structuralists, the relationship between the signifier and the signified might have been arbitrary, but the sign still constituted a unity amidst a heterogeneity of signs. Derrida began to question this unity. In order for a stable unity to exist, he argued, there must be a "transcendental signified" – be it God, *Geist*, the Self, or some such thing. That is, structures needed a center, a grounding point, a way to contain the play of signifiers and so establish stable meaning.

And what if there were no God, no *Geist*, no capitalized version of History, no stable subject, no unifying first principle of any kind? In that case, Derrida said, the "absence of

the transcendental signified extends the domain and play of signification infinitely" [*Derrida 1978: 280*]. "Play" was an important concept for Derrida. The signified was always a product of an infinitely complex interaction of signifiers, these signifiers were "always already" in play, working with, against, off of, and around one another. Each sign bore traces of other signs within itself, each signified was "always already" entangled with other signifiers and signifieds, perpetually in motion. For this reason a given sign was never exactly the same as it had been in a previous instance. Language was by its very nature unstable, prone to undermine itself. Meaning always flickered.

The post-structuralism of which Derrida was the most articulate theorist was based on the idea that there were no closed texts, or closed structures of any kind – that life went on, so to speak, and therefore no determinate meaning was possible. By this Derrida did not wish to imply, however, that no meaning was ever possible. He only wished to imply that no *stable* meaning was possible. Meaning was always present in excess: there was no lack of meaning, but rather a surplus.

Derrida's post-structuralism belonged among the ideas loosely grouped together as "post-modernism": a rejection of all grand narratives and a loss of faith in stable meaning. For Derrida this philosophical stance was political, and he believed it to be ethical as well: it deconstructed ideologies. He understood it as an antidote to the way of thinking that had led to Stalinism and Nazism.

Derrida's friend Hélène Cixous (b. 1937) shares with him a similar background: a French Algerian of Spanish-German-Slovak Jewish heritage, Hélène Cixous spent her childhood in multilingual, multiethnic Oran, where her mother spoke to her in German. Later Cixous moved to Paris, where she became a professor of English literature and founded the *Centre de Recherches en Etudes Féminines*. "I was no one," Cixous wrote in an essay about how she came to writing. "'Being' was reserved for those full, well-defined, scornful people who occupied the world with their assurance, took their places without hesitation, were at home everything where I 'was'-n't, except as an infraction, intruder, little scrap from elsewhere, always on the alert" [*Cixous 1991: 16*].

A feminist and post-structuralist, Cixous has long been preoccupied with the "the Other": how to know, feel, be the Other. At Stanford University in 1998 she presented the lecture, "The PasSage through the University or How I started on my request for '*je est un autre.*'" For Cixous the impossibility of stable, grounded meaning is mirrored in the impossibility of stable, grounded identity. Among the themes of her work are homelessness and wandering, rootlessness and the "diaspora effect," and the tragedy – and beauty – of cosmopolitanism. "In German, I weep," Cixous wrote, "in English, I play; in French, I fly, I am a thief. No per*man*ent residence" [*Cixous 1991: 36*].

Epilogue: Anti-utopianism

So did the twentieth century end with post-modernism's skepticism towards the possibility of a single, unified truth. In both Derrida's and other versions, post-modernism was the decisive break with Hegel. No longer was there any plan, any order, any direction, any faith in the resolution of contradictions. Isaiah Berlin (1909–1997) was quite far from being a post-structuralist. Yet he shared Derrida's conviction that what was authentic defied a closed, harmonious system in which all the pieces fit together and made sense.

Berlin shared, too, the broader critique of teleological narratives. Hegelian thought, in his description, was "like a very dark wood, and those who once enter it very seldom come back to tell us what they have seen" [*Berlin 2003: 74*].

A Russian Jewish émigré to Britain, Isaiah Berlin spent his life in dialogue with British, American, French, Russian, German, and Jewish intellectuals of both the present and the past. Among his interlocutors, living and dead, were Rousseau and Marx and Tolstoy, Chaim Weizmann and Anna Akhmatova, Stephen Spender and Aleksandr Herzen.

In the 1930s, Isaiah Berlin was among the very last liberals in Europe. He was also perhaps a post-modernist *avant la lettre*, in his distrust of all absolute truth claims and utopian projects. Berlin's work was framed by a critique of the Enlightenment distinct from that of Horkheimer and Adorno: Enlightenment thought denied tragedy in favor of an insistence on harmony, compatibility, the possibility of knowledge and the idea that truth, happiness, virtue were elements of a whole. This, for Berlin, had always been a misunderstanding: for society was not a harmonious whole. On the contrary, we were fated to live in a world of irreducible multiplicity. He warned of the danger of relating everything to a single vision, and insisted on the value of human freedom, which necessitated imperfection. All of the great social engineering projects contained within themselves totalitarian potential. There could be no utopia, for tragedy was inherent in the human condition: there would always be competing and irreconcilable goods, we would always face the necessity of choice. Berlin's simplest point was also his most profound: some good things necessarily excluded other good things.

Tony Judt (1948–2000) is in many ways heir to Isaiah Berlin's legacy: in his lucidity, in his talent for distilling abstruse thought; in his distrust of utopian visions. Following a commitment in his youth to socialist Zionism, Judt spent much of his adult life grappling with the implications of both Zionism and Marxism [*Judt – Snyder 2013*]. Raised in London, of East European Jewish origin, Judt lived for extended periods of time in France and in the United States. An historian of modern Europe, he was also politically *engagé* as a public intellectual. In 2003, in his *The New York Review of Books* essay "Israel: The Alternative," Judt took a sharp tone: "the founders of the Jewish state had been influenced by the same concept and categories as their fin-de-siècle contemporaries back in Warsaw, or Odessa, or Bucharest; not surprisingly, Israel's ethno-religious self-definition, and its discrimination against internal 'foreigners,' has always had more in common with, say, the practices of post-Habsburg Romania than either party might care to acknowledge" [*Judt 2003*]. Now, however, the time of separatist social engineering projects with aspirations towards ethno-national exclusivity had passed. Israel, Judt argued, was an anachronism.

With a relentlessly harsh clarity, Judt engaged Israel's contradictory aspirations: the desire to be a Jewish state and the desire to be a democracy. These presented a vivid example of Isaiah Berlin's view of ethics: the desirable was not always compatible. Judt supposed that, whether for better or for worse, the two-state solution had long been doomed to failure, and that the true choice now was the one between an ethnically cleansed Israel and an integrated multinational state of Jews and Arabs.

"But what if," Judt posed the question, "there were no place in the world today for a 'Jewish state'? What if the binational solution were not just increasingly likely, but actually a desirable outcome? It is not such a very odd thought. Most of the readers of this essay live in pluralist states which have long since become multiethnic and multicultural. 'Christian

Europe,' *pace* M. Valéry Giscard d'Estaing, is a dead letter; Western civilization today is a patchwork of colors and religions and languages" [*Judt 2003*].

The essay generated sharp controversy. "Where is this beautiful cosmopolitan planet, this merrily deracinated family of man, in which Israel is the disfiguring exception?" wrote *The New Republic* literary editor Leon Wieseltier in an angry rebuttal [*Wieseltier 2003*]. Judt's article also provoked accusations of a "new antisemitism": through the writings of Judt and likeminded others, Alvin Rosenfeld wrote, "the arguments for the elimination of the Jewish state – every anti-Semite's cherished dream – are contributed by Jews themselves" [*Rosenfeld 2006: 27–28*]. Yet the position Judt took in that essay was rather the classic position of Deutscher's "non-Jewish Jew": the cosmopolitan intellectual familiar with many cultures (British, French, East European Jewish, Israeli, American) and languages (English, French, Hebrew, German, and Czech) while belonging fully to none of them, who is committed to searching for solutions that transcend national categories. What Judt took from Isaiah Berlin was less political than philosophical: namely, the idea that ethics are possible even though an ideal society is not. There are such things as better and worse choices, better and worse forms of social and political organization. There is, however, no possibility of a perfect world – be it a universalist or a particularist one. Post-modern era's skepticism towards absolute truth claims has often been (mis)interpreted as nihilism. Judt, in any case, was not a post-modernist. Not was he was a triumphant liberal: what he articulated was not "the end of history"; it was not liberalism superseding Marxism in a post-communist age.

It was rather, the overcoming of all potentially totalizing utopianisms through an anti-utopianism that was for Judt, as for Berlin, not nihilism at all, but rather a universal moral imperative.

"Israel: An Alternative" was part of Judt's settling of accounts with his former self – both Zionist and Marxist. Judt's anti-Zionism resembled the anti-communism of Arthur Koestler or Aleksander Wat: a bitterness whose core is self-criticism. The passion of his critique was the kind of passion that comes from having once been on the inside. This was true as well of his most controversial book, *Past Imperfect: French Intellectuals, 1944–1956*, an excoriating attack on Jean-Paul Sartre, Simone de Beauvoir, Louis Aragon, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, and Emmanuel Mounier, among others, the best and brightest of the French intellectuals who after the Second World War become not only "fellow travellers," but also Stalinist apologists.

Past Imperfect is a book about the peculiar responsibility of intellectuals; it is also a book about Eastern Europe. What Judt names "the great silence" is the silence about "the blood of others." Sartre was silent about the Rudolf Slánský trial, silent about the "Doctors' Plot," silent about the "Night of the Murdered Poets" that brought a macabre end to a great Yiddish literature in the Soviet Union. Judt described this as "double-entry moral bookkeeping": a special set of standards applied to Soviet communism; the West – Sartre and his friends believed – could not criticize communism because Western intellectuals were distorted by bourgeois capitalist thinking. "Nothing in Sartre's other achievements comes close to me to compensating for his refusal to intervene or even speak out when faced with the show trials in central Europe," Judt insisted nearly two decades after he'd written *Past Imperfect*.[2]

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[2] Tony Judt, personal correspondence, 21 April 2009.

Past Imperfect, a book about West European intellectuals who betrayed their East European counterparts, is a deeply autobiographical book. A member of the generation of 1968, Judt experienced that revolutionary year in Paris, "jump[ing] up and down quite so enthusiastically at the demonstrations as we shouted Ho, Ho, Ho Chi Minh."[3] He saw only belatedly that in 1968, history was being made much less in Paris than it was in Warsaw and Prague. He came to understand this through friendship – with Jan Gross and Irena Grudzińska Gross, with Barbara Toruńczyk, Aleksander Smolar and Adam Michnik, all of whom, precisely at that moment in May 1968 when Judt was jumping up and down shouting "Ho, Ho, Ho Chi Minh," were sitting in communist prison.

Tony Judt died of Amyotrophic lateral sclerosis in 2010, at the age of sixty-two. He did not live to see his friends and colleagues on both sides of the Atlantic, in Western Europe and Eastern Europe, come to Kiev in May 2014 to support the Ukrainian revolution that began with Mustafa Nayem's Facebook post. In his address opening the Kiev congress, Timothy Snyder spoke of "the tradition of Tony Judt, the great historian of Europe of his era, who understood that the West made no sense without the East, and politics no sense without ideas" [*Snyder 2014*]. This congress of intellectuals in support of Ukraine was originally the idea of Leon Wieseltier. He and Judt had been friends for many years, but after the publication of "Israel: An Alternative," Wieseltier no longer spoke to Judt. If Tony were here, Wieseltier told Snyder as they were organizing the conference, he would have been the first person I would have asked to come.

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