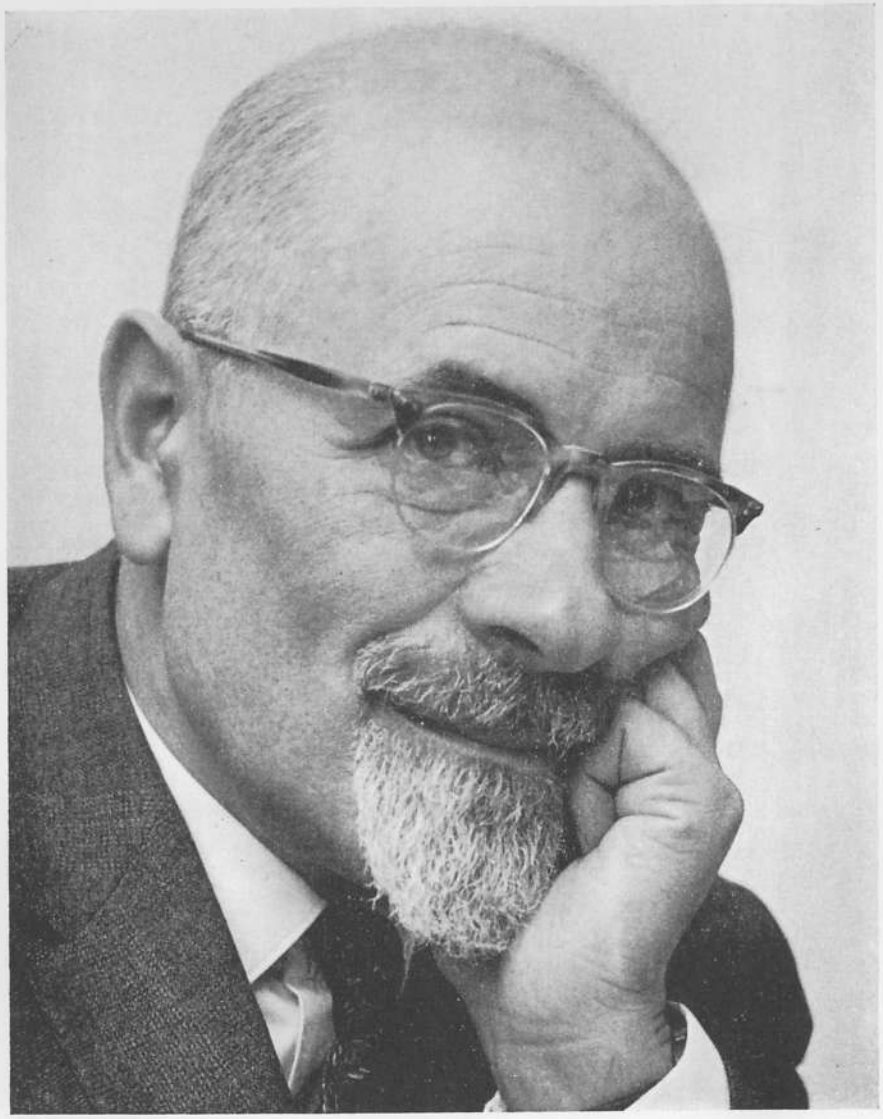

THE NON-JEWISH JEW

and other essays

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Temple. Generations of Jews have been shedding tears and sighing at the thought of the calamity.'

More than half a century had passed since Isaac's imagination was stirred when he heard this tragic story from the lips of his teacher, the poetic visionary, red-bearded *rebe* of the Jewish school.

Isaac's road from the *kheder* of Chrzanów to the lecture halls of Cambridge and Harvard, to the Berkeley campus of rebelling students was very long; it was also solitary and arduous.

> 'The childhood shows the man
> As morning shows the day'

wrote Milton. It seems that Isaac obeyed Milton's behest:

> 'Be famous then
> By wisdom; as thy empire must extend,
> So let extend thy mind o'er all the world.'

London, December 1967 *Tamara Deutscher*

I

The non-Jewish Jew[1]

THERE is an old Talmudic saying: 'A Jew who has sinned still remains a Jew.' My own thinking is, of course, beyond the idea of 'sin' or 'no sin'; but this saying has brought to my mind a memory from childhood which may not be irrelevant to my theme.

I remember that when as a child I read the *Midrash*, I came across a story and a description of a scene which gripped my imagination. It was the story of Rabbi Meir, the great saint and sage, the pillar of Mosaic orthodoxy, and co-author of the *Mishnah*, who took lessons in theology from a heretic, Elisha ben Abiyuh, called Akher (The Stranger). Once on a Sabbath Rabbi Meir was with his teacher, and as usual they became engaged in a deep argument. The heretic was riding a donkey, and Rabbi Meir, as he could not ride on a Sabbath, walked by his side and listened so intently to the words of wisdom falling from his heretical lips that he failed to notice that he and his teacher had reached the ritual boundary which Jews were not allowed to cross on a Sabbath. The great heretic turned to his orthodox pupil and said: 'Look, we have reached the boundary—we must part now; you must not accompany

[1] This essay is based on a lecture given during Jewish Book Week to the World Jewish Congress, in February 1958.

me any farther—go back!' Rabbi Meir went back to the Jewish community, while the heretic rode on—beyond the boundaries of Jewry.

There was enough in this scene to puzzle an orthodox Jewish child. Why, I wondered, did Rabbi Meir, that leading light of orthodoxy, take his lessons from the heretic? Why did he show him so much affection? Why did he defend him against other rabbis? My heart, it seems, was with the heretic. Who was he? He appeared to be in Jewry and yet out of it. He showed a curious respect for his pupil's orthodoxy, when he sent him back to the Jews on the Holy Sabbath; but he himself, disregarding canon and ritual, rode beyond the boundaries. When I was thirteen, or perhaps fourteen, I began to write a play about Akher and Rabbi Meir and I tried to find out more about Akher's character. What made him transcend Judaism? Was he a Gnostic? Was he an adherent of some other school of Greek or Roman philosophy? I could not find the answers, and did not manage to get beyond the first act.

The Jewish heretic who transcends Jewry belongs to a Jewish tradition. You may, if you like, see Akher as a prototype of those great revolutionaries of modern thought: Spinoza, Heine, Marx, Rosa Luxemburg, Trotsky, and Freud. You may, if you wish to, place them within a Jewish tradition. They all went beyond the boundaries of Jewry. They all found Jewry too narrow, too archaic, and too constricting. They all looked for ideals and fulfilment beyond it, and they represent the sum and substance of much that is greatest in modern thought, the sum and substance of the most profound upheavals that have taken place in philosophy, sociology, economics, and politics in the last three centuries.

Did they have anything in common with one another? Have they perhaps impressed mankind's thought so greatly because of their special 'Jewish genius'? I do not believe in the exclusive genius of any race. Yet I think that in some ways they were very Jewish indeed. They had in themselves something of the quintessence of Jewish life and of the Jewish intellect. They were *a priori* exceptional in that as Jews they dwelt on the borderlines of various civilizations, religions, and national cultures. They were born and brought up on the borderlines of various epochs. Their mind matured where the most diverse cultural influences crossed and fertilized each other. They lived on the margins or in the nooks and crannies of their respective nations. Each of them was in society and yet not in it, of it and yet not of it. It was this that enabled them to rise in thought above their societies, above their nations, above their times and generations, and to strike out mentally into wide new horizons and far into the future.

It was, I think, an English Protestant biographer of Spinoza who said that only a Jew could have carried out that upheaval in the philosophy of his age that Spinoza carried out—a Jew who was not bound by the dogmas of the Christian Churches, Catholic and Protestant, nor by those of the faith in which he had been born.[1] Neither Descartes nor Leibnitz could free themselves to the same extent from the shackles of the medieval scholastical tradition in philosophy.

[1] 'It is a serious disadvantage resulting from the great outward triumph of Christianity that the thinkers of Christendom rarely come into vital contact with other religions and other modes of world orientation. The consequence of this inexperience is that Christian ways of looking at the world are assumed to be true as a matter of course. . . . The boldest and most original thinker . . . was Spinoza, who stood above the theological prejudices from which the others could not entirely extricate themselves.' (*The Correspondence of Spinoza*; Introduction by A. Wolf.)

Spinoza was brought up under the influences of Spain, Holland, Germany, England, and the Italy of the Renaissance—all the trends of human thought that were at work at that time shaped his mind. His native Holland was in the throes of bourgeois revolution. His ancestors, before they came to the Netherlands, had been Spanish-Portuguese *Maranim*, crypto-Jews, at heart Jews, outwardly Christian, as were many Spanish Jews on whom the Inquisition had forced the baptism. After the Spinozas had come to the Netherlands, they disclosed themselves as Jews; but, of course, neither they nor their close descendants were strangers to the intellectual climate of Christianity.

Spinoza himself, when he started out as independent thinker and as initiator of modern criticism of the Bible, seized at once the cardinal contradiction in Judaism, the contradiction between the monotheistic and universal God and the setting in which that God appears in the Jewish religion—as a God attached to one people only; the contradiction between the universal God and his 'chosen people'. We know what the realization of this contradiction brought upon Spinoza: banishment from the Jewish community and excommunication. He had to fight against the Jewish clergy which, itself recently a victim of the Inquisition, became infected with the spirit of the Inquisition. Then he had to face the hostility of the Catholic clergy and Calvinistic priests. His whole life was a struggle to overcome the limitations of the religions and cultures of his time.

Among Jews of great intellect exposed to the contradiction of various religions and cultures some were so pulled in various directions by contradictory influences and pressures that they could not find spiritual balance, and broke down. One of these was Uriel Acosta, Spinoza's elder and

forerunner. Many times he rebelled against Judaism; and many times he recanted. The rabbis excommunicated him repeatedly; he repeatedly prostrated himself before them on the floor of the Amsterdam Synagogue. Unlike Acosta, Spinoza had the great intellectual happiness of being able to harmonize the conflicting influences and to create out of them a higher outlook on the world and an integrated philosophy.

In almost every generation, whenever the Jewish intellectual, placed at the concatenation of various cultures, struggles with himself and with the problems of his time, we find someone who, like Uriel Acosta, breaks down under the burden, and someone who, like Spinoza, makes of that burden the wings of his greatness. Heine was in a sense the Uriel Acosta of a later age. His relation to Marx, Spinoza's intellectual grandson, is comparable to Uriel Acosta's relation to Spinoza.

Heine was torn between Christianity and Jewry, and between France and Germany. In his native Rhineland there clashed the influences of the French Revolution and of the Napoleonic Empire with those of the old Holy Roman Empire of the German Kaisers. He grew up within the orbit of classical German philosophy and within the orbit of French Republicanism; and he saw Kant as a Robespierre and Fichte as a Napoleon in the realm of the spirit; and so he describes them in one of the most profound and moving passages of *Zur Geschichte der Religion and Philosophie in Deutschland*. In his later years he came in contact with French and German socialism and communism; and he met Marx with that apprehensive admiration and sympathy with which Acosta had met Spinoza.

Marx likewise grew up in the Rhineland. His parents

having ceased to be Jews, he did not struggle with the Jewish heritage as Heine did. All the more intense was his opposition to the social and spiritual backwardness of contemporary Germany. An exile most of his life, his thought was shaped by German philosophy, French socialism, and English political economy. In no other contemporary mind did such diverse influences meet so fruitfully. Marx rose above German philosophy, French socialism, and English political economy; he absorbed what was best in each of these trends and transcended the limitations of each.

To come nearer to our time, there were Rosa Luxemburg, Trotsky, and Freud, each of whom was formed amid historic cross-currents. Rosa Luxemburg is a unique blend of the German, Polish, and Russian characters and of the Jewish temperament; Trotsky was the pupil of a Lutheran Russo-German gymnasium in cosmopolitan Odessa on the fringe of the Greek-Orthodox Empire of the Tsars; and Freud's mind matured in Vienna in estrangement from Jewry and in opposition to the Catholic clericalism of the Habsburg capital. All of them had this in common, that the very conditions in which they lived and worked did not allow them to reconcile themselves to ideas which were nationally or religiously limited and induced them to strive for a universal *Weltanschauung*.

Spinoza's ethics were no longer the Jewish ethics, but the ethics of man at large—just as his God was no longer the Jewish God: his God, merged with nature, shed his separate and distinctive divine identity. Yet, in a way, Spinoza's God and ethics were still Jewish, except that his was Jewish monotheism carried to its logical conclusion and the Jewish universal God thought out to the end; and once thought out to the end, that God ceased to be Jewish.

Heine wrestled with Jewry all his life; his attitude towards it was characteristically ambivalent, full of love-hate or hate-love. He was in this respect inferior to Spinoza, who, excommunicated by the Jews, did not become a Christian. Heine did not have Spinoza's strength of mind and character; and he lived in a society which even in the first decades of the nineteenth century was still more backward than Dutch society had been in the seventeenth. At first he pinned his hopes on that pseudo-emancipation of Jews, the ideal which Moses Mendelsohn had expressed in the words: 'be a Jew inside your home and a man outside.' The timidity of that German-Jewish ideal was of a piece with the paltry liberalism of the gentile German bourgeoisie: the German Liberal was a 'free man' inside his home and an *allertreuester Untertane* ('the most faithful subject') outside. This could not satisfy Heine for long. He abandoned Jewry and surrendered to Christianity. At heart he was never reconciled to the abandonment and the conversion. His rejection of Jewish orthodoxy runs through the whole of his work. His Don Isaac says to the Rabbi von Bachrach: 'I could not be one of you. I like your cooking much better than I like your religion. No, I could not be one of you; and I suspect that even at the best of times, under the rule of your King David, in the best of your times, I would have run away from you and gone to the temples of Assyria and Babylon which were full of love and the joy of life.' Yet, it was a fiery and resentful Jew who had, in *An Edom*, '*gewaltig beschworen den tausendjährigen Schmerz*.'

Marx, about twenty years younger, surmounted the problem which tormented Heine. Only once did he come to grips with it, in his youthful and famous *Zur Judenfrage*. This was his unreserved rejection of Jewry. Apologists of

Jewish orthodoxy and Jewish nationalism have because of it violently attacked Marx as an 'anti-Semite'. Yet, I think that Marx went to the very heart of the matter when he said that Jewry had survived 'not in spite of history but in history and through history', that it owed its survival to the distinctive role that the Jews had played as agents of a money economy in environments which lived in a natural economy; that Judaism was essentially a theoretical epitome of market relationships and the faith of the merchant; and that Christian Europe, as it developed from feudalism to capitalism, became Jewish in a sense. Marx saw Christ as the 'theorizing Jew', the Jew as a 'practical Christian' and, therefore, the 'practical' bourgeois Christian as a 'Jew'. Since he treated Judaism as the religious reflection of the bourgeois way of thought, he saw bourgeois Europe as becoming assimilated to Jewry. His ideal was not the equality of Jew and Gentile in a 'Judaized' capitalist society, but the emancipation of Jew and non-Jew alike from the bourgeois way of life, or, as he put it provocatively in his somewhat over-paradoxical Young Hegelian idiom, in the 'emancipation of society from Jewry'. His idea was as universal as Spinoza's, yet advanced in time by two hundred years—it was the idea of socialism and of the classless and stateless society.

Among Marx's many disciples and followers hardly any were, in spirit and temperament, as close to him as Rosa Luxemburg and Leon Trotsky. Their affinity with him shows itself in their dialectically dramatic vision of the world and of its class struggles, and in that exceptional concord of thought, passion, and imagination which gives to their language and style a peculiar clarity, density, and richness. (Bernard Shaw had probably these qualities in mind when he spoke of Marx's 'peculiarly Jewish literary

gifts'.) Like Marx, Rosa Luxemburg and Trotsky strove, together with their non-Jewish comrades, for the universal, as against the particularist, and for the internationalist, as against the nationalist, solutions to the problems of their time. Rosa Luxemburg sought to transcend the contradiction between German reformist socialism and Russian revolutionary Marxism. She sought to inject into German socialism something of the Russian and Polish revolutionary *élan* and idealism, something of that 'revolutionary romanticism' which so great a realist as Lenin unabashingly extolled; and occasionally she tried to transplant the Western European democratic spirit and tradition into the socialist underground movements of Eastern Europe. She failed in her main purpose and paid with her life. But it was not only she who paid. In her assassination Hohenzollern Germany celebrated its last triumph and Nazi Germany—its first.

Trotsky, the author of permanent revolution, had before him the vision of a global upheaval transforming mankind. The leader, together with Lenin, of the Russian revolution and the founder of the Red Army, he came in conflict with the State he had helped to create when that State and its leaders put up the banner of Socialism in One Country. Not for him was the limitation of the vision of socialism to the boundaries of one country.

All these great revolutionaries were extremely vulnerable. They were, as Jews, rootless, in a sense; but they were so only in some respects, for they had the deepest roots in intellectual tradition and in the noblest aspirations of their times. Yet whenever religious intolerance or nationalist emotion was on the ascendant, whenever dogmatic narrow-mindedness and fanaticism triumphed, they were the first

victims. They were excommunicated by Jewish rabbis; they were persecuted by Christian priests; they were hunted down by the gendarmes of absolute rulers and by the *soldateska*; they were hated by pseudo-democratic philistines; and they were expelled by their own parties. Nearly all of them were exiled from their countries; and the writings of all were burned at the stake at one time or another. Spinoza's name could not be mentioned for over a century after his death—even Leibnitz, who was indebted to Spinoza for so much of his thought, did not dare to mention it. Trotsky is still under anathema in Russia today. The names of Marx, Heine, Freud, and Rosa Luxemburg were forbidden in Germany quite recently. But theirs is the ultimate victory. After a century during which Spinoza's name was covered with oblivion, they put up monuments to him and acknowledged him as the greatest fructifier of the human mind. Herder once said about Goethe: 'I wish Goethe read some Latin books apart from Spinoza's *Ethics*.' Goethe was indeed steeped in Spinoza's thought; and Heine rightly describes him as 'Spinoza who has thrown off the cloak of his geometrical-mathematical formulae and stands before us as a lyrical poet.' Heine himself has triumphed over Hitler and Goebbels. The other revolutionaries of this line will also survive and sooner or later triumph over those who have worked hard to efface their memory.

It is very obvious why Freud belongs to the same intellectual line. In his teachings, whatever their merits and demerits, he transcends the limitations of earlier psychological schools. The man whom he analyses is not a German, or an Englishman, a Russian, or a Jew—he is the universal man in whom the subconscious and the conscious struggle, the man who is part of nature and part of society, the man

whose desires and cravings, scruples and inhibitions, anxieties and predicaments are essentially the same no matter to what race, religion, or nation he belongs. From their viewpoint the Nazis were right when they coupled Freud's name with that of Marx and burned the books of both.

All these thinkers and revolutionaries have had certain philosophical principles in common. Although their philosophies vary, of course, from century to century and from generation to generation, they are all, from Spinoza to Freud, determinists, they all hold that the universe is ruled by laws inherent in it and governed by *Gesetzmässigkeiten*. They do not see reality as a jumble of accidents or history as an assemblage of caprices and whims of rulers. There is nothing fortuitous, so Freud tells us, in our dreams, follies, or even in our slips of the tongue. The laws of development, Trotsky says, 'refract' themselves through accidents; and in saying this he is very close to Spinoza.

They are all determinists because having watched many societies and studied many 'ways of life' at close quarters, they grasp the basic regularities of life. Their manner of thinking is dialectical, because, living on borderlines of nations and religions, they see society in a state of flux. They conceive reality as being dynamic, not static. Those who are shut in within one society, one nation, or one religion, tend to imagine that their way of life and their way of thought have absolute and unchangeable validity and that all that contradicts their standards is somehow 'unnatural', inferior, or evil. Those, on the other hand, who live on the borderlines of various civilizations comprehend more clearly the great movement and the great contradictoriness of nature and society.

All these thinkers agree on the relativity of moral standards. None of them believes in absolute good or absolute evil. They all observed communities adhering to different moral standards and different ethical values. What was good to the Roman Catholic Inquisition under which Spinoza's grandparents had lived, was evil to the Jews; and what was good to the rabbis and Jewish elders of Amsterdam was evil to Spinoza himself. Heine and Marx experienced in their youth the tremendous clash between the morality of the French revolution and that of feudal Germany.

Nearly all these thinkers have yet another great philosophical idea in common—the idea that knowledge to be real must be active. This incidentally has a bearing on their views on ethics, for if knowledge is inseparable from action or *Praxis*, which is by its nature relative and self-contradictory, then morality, the knowledge of what is good and what is evil, is also inseparable from *Praxis* and is also relative and self-contradictory. It was Spinoza who said that 'to be is to do and to know is to do'. It was only one step from this to Marx's saying that 'hitherto the philosophers have interpreted the world; henceforth the task is to change it'.

Finally, all these men, from Spinoza to Freud, believed in the ultimate solidarity of man; and this was implicit in their attitudes towards Jewry. We are now looking back on these believers in humanity through the bloody fog of our times. We are looking back at them through the smoke of the gas chambers, the smoke which no wind can disperse from our sight. These 'non-Jewish Jews' were essentially optimists; and their optimism reached heights which it is not easy to ascend in our times. They did not imagine that it would be

possible for 'civilized' Europe in the twentieth century to sink to a depth of barbarity at which the mere words 'solidarity of man' would sound as a perverse mockery to Jewish ears. Alone among them Heine had the poet's intuitive premonition of this when he warned Europe to beware of the coming onslaught of the old Germanic gods emerging '*aus dem teutschem Urwalde*', and when he complained that the destiny of the modern Jew is tragic beyond expression and comprehension—so tragic that 'they laugh at you when you speak of it, and this is the greatest tragedy of all.'

We do not find this premonition in Spinoza or Marx. Freud in his old age reeled mentally under the blow of Nazism. To Trotsky it came as a shock that Stalin used against him the anti-semitic innuendo. As a young man Trotsky had, in most categorical terms, repudiated the demand for Jewish 'cultural autonomy', which the *Bund*, the Jewish Socialist Party, raised in 1903. He did it in the name of the solidarity of Jew and non-Jew in the socialist camp. Nearly a quarter of a century later, while he was engaged in an unequal struggle with Stalin and went to the party cells in Moscow to expound his views, he was met with vicious allusions to his Jewishness and even with plain anti-semitic insults. The allusions and insults came from members of the party which he had, together with Lenin, led in the revolution and civil war. After another quarter of a century, and after Auschwitz and Majdanek and Belsen, once again, this time much more openly and menacingly, Stalin resorted to anti-semitic innuendo and insult.

It is an indubitable fact that the Nazi massacre of six million European Jews has not made any deep impression on the nations of Europe. It has not truly shocked their conscience. It has left them almost cold. Was then the

optimistic belief in humanity voiced by the great Jewish revolutionaries justified? Can we still share their faith in the future of civilization?

I admit that if one were to try and answer these questions from an exclusively Jewish standpoint, it would be hard, perhaps impossible, to give a positive answer. As for myself, I cannot approach the issue from an exclusively Jewish standpoint; and my answer is: Yes, their faith was justified. It was justified at any rate, in so far as the belief in the ultimate solidarity of mankind is itself one of the conditions necessary for the preservation of humanity and for the cleansing of our civilization of the dregs of barbarity that are still present in it and still poison it.

Why then has the fate of the European Jews left the nations of Europe, or the gentile world at large, almost cold? Unfortunately, Marx was far more right about the place of the Jews in European society than we could have realized some time ago. The major part of the Jewish tragedy has consisted in this, that as the result of a long historic development, the masses of Europe have become accustomed to identify the Jew primarily with trade and jobbing, money-lending and money-making. Of these the Jew had become the synonym and symbol to the popular mind. Look up the Oxford English Dictionary and see how it gives the accepted meaning of the term 'Jew': firstly, it is a 'person of the Hebrew race'; secondly—this is the colloquial use—an 'extortionate usurer, driver of hard bargains.' 'Rich as a Jew' says the proverb. Colloquially the word is also used as a transitive verb: to jew, the Oxford Dictionary tells us, means to 'cheat, overreach'. This is the vulgar image of the Jew and the vulgar prejudice against him, fixed in many languages, not only in English,

and in many works of art, not only in *The Merchant of Venice*.

However, this is not only the vulgar image. Remember what was the occasion on which Macaulay pleaded, and the manner in which he pleaded, for political equality of Jew and gentile and for the Jew's right to sit in the House of Commons. The occasion was the admission to the House of a Rothschild, the first Jew to sit in the House, the Jew elected as Member for the City of London. And Macaulay's argument was this: if we allow the Jew to manage our financial affairs for us, why should we not allow him to sit among us here, in Parliament, and have a say in the management of all our public affairs? This was the voice of the bourgeois Christian who took a fresh look at Shylock and hailed him as brother.

I suggest that what had enabled the Jews to survive as a separate community, the fact that they had represented the market economy amidst people living in a natural economy—that this fact and its popular memories have also been responsible, at least in part, for the *Schadenfreude* or the indifference with which the populace of Europe has witnessed the holocaust of the Jews. It has been the misfortune of the Jews that, when the nations of Europe turned against capitalism, they did so only very superficially, at any rate in the first half of this century. They attacked not the core of capitalism, not its productive relationship, not its organization of property and labour, but its externals and its largely archaic trappings which so often were indeed Jewish. This is the crux of the Jewish tragedy. Decaying capitalism has overstayed its day and has morally dragged down mankind; and we, the Jews, have paid for it and may yet have to pay for it.

All this has driven the Jews to see their own State as *the* way out. Most of the great revolutionaries, whose heritage I am discussing, have seen the ultimate solution to the problems of their and our times not in nation-states but in international society. As Jews they were the natural pioneers of this idea, for who was as well qualified to preach the international society of equals as were the Jews free from all Jewish and non-Jewish orthodoxy and nationalism?

However, the decay of bourgeois Europe has compelled the Jew to embrace the nation state. This is the paradoxical consummation of the Jewish tragedy. It is paradoxical, because we live in an age when the nation-state is fast becoming an anachronism, and an archaism—not only the nation-state of Israel but the nation-states of Russia, the United States, Great Britain, France, Germany, and others. They are all anachronisms. Do you not see this yet? Is it not clear that at a time when atomic energy daily reduces the globe in size, when man has started out on his interplanetary journey, when a sputnik flies over the territory of a great nation-state in a minute or in seconds, that at such a time technology renders the nation-state as ridiculous and outlived as little medieval princedoms were in the age of the steam-engine?

Even those young nation-states that have come into being as the result of a necessary and progressive struggle waged by colonial and semi-colonial peoples for emancipation—India, Burma, Ghana, Algeria, and others—cannot preserve their progressive character for long. They form a necessary stage in the history of some peoples; but it is a stage that those peoples too will have to overcome in order to find wider frameworks for their existence. In our epoch any new nation-state, soon after its constitution, begins to

be affected by the general decline of this form of political organization; and this is already showing itself in the short experience of India, Ghana, and Israel.

The world has compelled the Jew to embrace the nation-state and to make of it his pride and hope just at a time when there is little or no hope left in it. You cannot blame the Jews for this; you must blame the world. But Jews should at least be aware of the paradox and realize that their intense enthusiasm for 'national sovereignty' is historically belated. They did not benefit from the advantages of the nation-state in those centuries when it was a medium of mankind's advance and a great revolutionary and unifying factor in history. They have taken possession of it only after it had become a factor of disunity and social disintegration.

I hope, therefore, that, together with other nations, the Jews will ultimately become aware—or regain the awareness—of the inadequacy of the nation-state and that they will find their way back to the moral and political heritage that the genius of the Jews who have gone beyond Jewry has left us—the message of universal human emancipation.