Reviving Enlightenment in the Age of Nationalism: The Historical and Political Thought of Hans Kohn in America

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Reviving Enlightenment in the Age of Nationalism: 
The Historical and Political Thought of Hans Kohn in America

BY

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Abstract

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By
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Advisor: Robert M. Seltzer

This dissertation critically engages the thought of Hans Kohn (1891-1971). One of the most prominent theorists of nationalism in the twentieth century, Kohn has primarily been studied as an anti-statist Zionist thinker and as the originator of a Western-Civic/Eastern-Ethnic dichotomy of national development. This work takes a different approach by analyzing the matrix of tension between particularism and universalism in his mature, American thought. I argue that Kohn, especially in response to the crisis of fascism, used history to search for a balance within this perennial tension. His historical analyses, very much tied to his time and context, led him to believe that an ideal balance could be found in the spirit and values of the eighteenth-century Enlightenment. Kohn thus used his idea of Enlightenment as an Archimedean point, upon which he tried to build a humanistic vision for a peaceful future in the context of a global age of nationalism.
Acknowledgements

The personal and professional debts that I have accrued over a decade and a half of undergraduate and graduate study are many. I can only begin to address them in these acknowledgements.

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For the past seven years, Professor Jane Gerber gave selflessly of her knowledge, time and advice. She read every draft at every stage of the process. She has been my tireless advocate and a constant source of wisdom and support in the best and worst of times. I am honored to call her my friend, and now my colleague.

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My late friend, Matthew Phillips, took a great deal of interest in my work on Kohn. He has left an indelible imprint on my thinking, and I often thought of our discussions as I wrote. I think he would have (critically) enjoyed the finished product.
The Morris and Alma Schapiro Fellowship at the Center for Jewish History allowed me the time and resources to do much of the research and writing necessary for this dissertation. I must thank Judy Siegel who took a special interest in my work and offered valuable professional advice. The David and Goldie Blanksteen fellowship from the Center for Jewish Studies at the Graduate Center took away many financial worries and allowed me to focus on my coursework and research.

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I wish to single out my parents, David and Eileen Smollett for special thanks. They have given of themselves emotionally and financially for many years. They never questioned my decision to pursue a Ph.D. and did everything in their power to help me along the way. It is to them that I dedicate this dissertation.
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Introduction

One of the twin founding fathers of the historical study of nationalism, Hans Kohn (1891–1971) believed that the twentieth century was a global age in which human civilization was defined by nationalism. As a scholar and teacher in a number of different contexts, he sought to uncover and explicate the historical formation of nationalism in the past, to critique and challenge the often dangerous manifestations of the phenomenon in the present, and to offer a vision that would, he hoped, mitigate the destructive elements of highly particularistic national ideologies in the future.

This dissertation is an exploration of the relationship of Hans Kohn’s historiographical output and political writings to the critical decades during which he lived, wrote and taught. My central concern is to explicate the dominant themes in Kohn’s writings, especially during his American phase, and to understand how Kohn, through his studies of nationalism, understood himself as activist, historian, and teacher of his fellow men.

I will argue that the development of Kohn’s view of history and politics ought to be understood not, as has usually been the case, in the light of the overly simplistic dichotomies of Western-Civic or Eastern-Ethnic nationalisms, but in terms of the tension between universalistic and particularistic poles of identification. This tension, as we will see, was the central motif in his magnum opus, The Idea of Nationalism. I will argue that Kohn’s search for the proper balance within this perennial tension led him to advocate a new Enlightenment, which would be an extension of what he considered the essence of the eighteenth-century

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**The Life of Hans Kohn: A Brief Sketch**

Hans Kohn was a historian, philosopher of history, and public intellectual with a global vision. His highly influential books and articles explored the foundations and development of nationalism in Europe, the United States, the Near East, and beyond. Few scholars have been both so prolific and wide-ranging as Kohn in exploring the roots and growth of nationalist movements and their accompanying ideologies.

Unlike the typical historian of the present day, Hans Kohn was intimately involved with his subject prior to his academic career and specialization. His life experiences and extensive peregrinations from Prague to Russia, to Western Europe, then to Palestine and, eventually, the United States became central to the questions that drove his scholarly and polemical output. Before he became a scholar of the history of nationalism, Kohn was himself a fervent nationalist. Born into an acculturated, largely secularized German-speaking Jewish family in Hapsburg Prague, he was attracted to cultural Zionism when he was a student in that city’s Charles University, and was strongly influenced both personally and intellectually by Martin Buber and the writings of the “spiritual Zionists” Ahad Ha-Am and Aaron David Gordon. Buber’s Lectures on Judaism, delivered in Prague during the years 1909 and 1910, exerted a particularly profound influence on the young Kohn. His subsequent experiences as an officer in the First World War and later a prisoner of war in Russia, led him to espouse a qualified pacifism
and to evince a strong distrust of ethnic and national chauvinism. From that point forward, in his scholarly treatments of nationalism as well as his own nationalist activities, Kohn increasingly had recourse to Immanuel Kant’s ideal of the “Kingdom of Ends,” which he considered the normative principle of the spirit of the Enlightenment, as a standard by which to judge the moral and political standing of the contemporary national movements that he analyzed.²

Upon his return from Russia, following World War I, Kohn worked for the Zionist Organization, and as a journalist, in London and Paris. He moved to Palestine in 1925 where, along with a group of Central-European Jewish intellectuals, many of them also influenced by Buber, he helped to found Brit Shalom, an organization devoted to an effective and peaceful Arab-Jewish rapprochement.

The Zionist phase that began in Hapsburg Prague came to an abrupt end in 1929, when Arab riots and the response of the Zionists and British convinced him that a Jewish state could only be established and maintained through force of arms. Kohn resigned from the Zionist Organization, and by 1934, he had moved with his family to the United States where he served as Professor of Modern History at Smith College, and later, from 1948 to 1961, as a popular professor at New York’s City College.

While the majority of Kohn’s earlier works dealt with the history and theory of Jewish nationalism and emerging national movements in the Near East, the rise of radical nationalist movements in Europe, and the emergence of Nazi Germany shifted his focus to the European scene. It is on the work devoted to these matters that he built his world-wide reputation. Having

² See Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, trans. Mary Gregor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 28. The concept of the “kingdom of ends” is a rational, albeit ideal, extension of Kant’s categorical imperative which, as opposed to a hypothetical imperative, does not operate with regard to the use or end of an action. Thus, the categorical imperative as formulated by Kant demanded that each individual be treated as an end in him or herself.
embraced the American community and its liberal-democratic ideals, Kohn wrote and lectured widely on the threat posed by the rise of Nazi totalitarianism. During the war years, he minimized the threat of communism. Although after the Allied victory he collaborated with "cold warriors" such as Robert Strausz-Hupé, Kohn did not become primarily a Cold-War anti-Soviet intellectual during this last phase of scholarship and public activism. Rather, he concentrated his efforts on the positive alliance of liberal, Western nations through the North Atlantic Treaty Organization based on what he conceived as their spiritual unity.

Survey of Previous and Current Scholarship

Among the first to assess Kohn’s work was the well-known historian of nationalism, Louis L. Snyder. As a colleague and admirer, it was Snyder who coined the phrase "Kohn dichotomy," to refer to Kohn’s bifurcation of nationalist movements into civic and ethnic varieties. For Snyder, this constituted an advance beyond across-the-board characterizations of nationalism as an inherently beneficent or degenerative approach to socio-political organization.

The first sustained study of Hans Kohn, and the only substantial one for many years following his death, was the dissertation of Kenneth H. Wolf, written in 1972. Wolf’s subsequent article based on this dissertation, "Hans Kohn: Liberal Nationalism: The Historian as Prophet," provides an overview of Kohn’s thought, from his early involvement with cultural

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3 Robert Strausz-Hupé (1904–2002) was an émigré from Vienna, who founded the Foreign Policy Research Institute at the University of Pennsylvania where he was a professor of Political Science. During the 70s and 80s, he served as Ambassador to a variety of countries, including Sri Lanka, Belgium and Turkey. Kohn became involved more involved with Strausz-Hupé and the institute during the last decade of his life, following his retirement from City College in 1961.


Zionism through his later years in America. He agrees with, and expands upon, Snyder’s view that Kohn’s work is best understood through the civic-western/ethnic-eastern dichotomy. For Wolf, the question of Kohn’s utility as a scholar and theorist was a pressing one. He correctly points out that Kohn’s approach is difficult to categorize. Was Kohn writing as an historian or as a “prophet”? According to Wolf, Kohn lacked the necessary detachment necessary to the historian’s craft, but he also lacked the consistency of a true “prophet” due to his greater tolerance for the failures of the West then for those of the East. "In the end," Wolf concluded, "Kohn failed as both a historian and prophet yet succeeded magnificently as a mirror of his age. Both his failure and success deserve the careful attention of prospective historians and prophets."

During the quarter century that followed Kohn’s death, he did not receive this kind of attention. Most of Kohn’s books went out of print and scholars paid little heed to him. Over the past decade, however, interest in Kohn has revived and a number of recent studies have sought to contextualize his historiographical contribution and to engage his ideas.

These more recent works tend to fall into two different categories. Some, such as those of Taras Kuzio and André Liebich, have engaged Kohn’s work in order to critique what they see as the continued impact of Kohn’s dichotomous model on contemporary analyses of nationalism. Taras Kuzio has critiqued not only the influence of Kohn’s approach on other scholars but also its contribution to the contemporary understanding of nationalism reflected in the media. André Liebich has recently gone so far as to declare “a ghost is stalking studies of

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nationalism, it is the ghost of Hans Kohn. And the chains it is rattling are those of Kohn’s paradigm⁸

While Liebich has sought to exorcize Kohn, Noam Pianko has sought to resurrect him. In his recent book *Zionism and the Roads Not Taken*, Pianko reads Kohn alongside Jewish thinkers such as Mordecai Kaplan and Simon Rawidowicz, who came of age during the inter-war period and sought to reconcile American democracy with Jewish particularity.⁹ Focusing mainly on Kohn’s Jewish activities and thematic continuities in his later work devoted to matters other than Zionism, Pianko has argued that Kohn replaced his earlier quest for Zion with his acclamation of American nationalism. Yet Pianko also argues for a larger degree of consistency in Kohn’s worldview than might be assumed.¹⁰ Although Pianko recognizes Kohn’s transformation to a “global humanism,” he understands him as part of the broader Jewish context of the search for “nation beyond state.”

Pianko, and others such as Hagit Lavsky, Yfaat Weiss, Christian Wiese, Dimitry Shumsky and Adi Gordon have focused on Kohn’s involvement in the Zionist movement.¹¹

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Additionally, both Pianko and Gordon have given a great deal of attention to Kohn’s break with Zionism and the subsequent evolution of his thought in the United States.

In contrast to Pianko’s approach is that of Adi Gordon. In his dissertation and a series of intellectual-biographical studies that have emerged from it, Gordon cautions against the artificial imposition or assumption of consistency in Kohn’s life and thought. Rather, Gordon argues that we ought to understand Kohn as a serial convert, to different ideologies from cultural Zionism, pacifism, and socialism to Anglo-American liberalism. In his later years, Gordon argues, Kohn became an establishment cold warrior. Further, while still acknowledging the importance of East and West in Kohn’s various formulations of national figures and movements, Gordon has sought to reorient these motifs by asserting that, for Kohn, they are states of mind, not geographical realities. Adi Gordon’s current work, still in progress, is also the first attempt at a full biographical study.

While these studies have enriched our understanding of Kohn, most tend to give disproportionate attention to Kohn’s Zionist phase at the expense of his American activities, which constitute the main basis of his reputation. Further, those studies that do engage Kohn’s mature writings and American polemical activities do not give sufficient attention to the

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12 See Adi Gordon, *New Politics in an Old Key: Arnold Zweig, Hans Kohn and the Central European Jewish ‘Generation of 1914’* (PhD Diss, Hebrew University, 2008). Gordon’s dissertation traces the different intellectual paths along with the political ideals and affiliations of Kohn and Zweig—the former towards liberalism, the latter towards communism.


immense historical crisis that framed his work, drove his polemics, and forged his convictions regarding the role and obligations of a historian in society.

**Methodology and Structure**

My dissertation considers, engages, and builds upon the scholarly literature mentioned above, but takes a different approach. Like Wolf's dissertation, I emphasize the close reading of texts. However, unlike Wolf, I treat Kohn’s oeuvre more selectively and place his writings within more defined time frames. As noted, because Wolf’s studies were begun during Kohn’s lifetime and completed soon after his death, Wolf paid special attention to Kohn’s contemporary relevance in the 1970s, assessing his “success” or “failure” as a scholar and as a “prophet” addressing the issues of his day. In this dissertation, I do not seek to judge Kohn’s past or present utility, but to connect various phases of his thought to the distinctive contexts in which he articulated his ideas. Further, because it draws on significant archival material unavailable to Wolf, this study includes more of a biographical context than was possible during the 1970s.

Particularly useful in understanding Kohn is Gordon’s characterization of him as a “serial convert,” who attached himself to a series of ideologies in his search for the deep meaning of his time. I would contend, however, that Kohn’s humanistic sensibilities and search for a viable balance in the context of changing times were more consistent than Gordon considers them to have been. On the other hand, I do not see as much consistency between Kohn’s pre-and post-Zionist Jewish phases as Pianko does. In my opinion, Kohn’s departure from Zionism constituted a very significant intellectual and existential rupture, and I understand Kohn’s later
American Jewish involvements as largely self-contained and analyze them in the larger context of his immediate political and intellectual concerns at those stages of his life.

As we will see, the question of the proper balance of the universal and particular was with Kohn from very early on and became more forcefully articulated in his mature work. Kohn would have agreed with the scholar of nationalism Liah Greenfield that “nationalism is the most common and salient form of particularism in the modern world.” Further, one cannot overstate the preoccupation with questions of universalism and particularism in modern Jewish thought, and it was as a modern Jewish thinker that Kohn initially confronted this tension. It appears in theological, secular, philosophical and political discussions from Spinoza to Mendelssohn until the present day. During the twentieth century, philosophers such as Franz Rosenzweig and Martin Buber, as well as cultural and nationalist thinkers such as Ahad Ha-am, Simon Dubnow, and Horace Kallen, engaged the question of the particular physical and spiritual state of the Jews within the context of universal concerns. Indeed, it was often a preoccupation. Almost all struggled, to differing degrees, to create what Paul Mendes-Flohr has called a “bivalent integrity.” In other words, their systems needed to register on a non-Jewish, universal, level while maintaining an indispensable, essential Jewish element. For thinkers such as Simon Dubnow and Ahad Ha-am, this “bivalence” was reflected in their appropriations of the Positivist thought of August Comte and John Stuart Mill whose universal principles they used to map out a unique role for the Jews as a “spiritual nation.” Jewish nationalist thinkers, and especially Diaspora nationalists, were concerned about whether, in adapting Jewish life to the modern world, Jews should refocus what it means to be Jewish based on Judaism universal or particular


16 Paul Mendes-Flohr, Introduction in Divided Passions: Jewish Intellectuals and the Experience of Modernity (Detroit: Wayne State University Press), 16. Mendes-Flohr, in my view rightfully, argues that there is an inherent apologetic element to his type of bivalent presentation.
traits (or both). Initially, Kohn wrote on these questions from a similar angle. However, his permanent move to the United States changed not only the context and language of his expression, but also the extent to which he saw the Jewish question as a useful or necessary lens through which to examine this modern tension.

Simon Rabinovitch has rightly emphasized that this more general debate in modern Jewish thought manifested itself, in the United States, as a choice between the "melting pot" model or the cultural-pluralist model most famously articulated and defended by Horace Kallen. In America, Kohn favored the former approach, and insofar as the mature Kohn sought to establish "bivalent integrity," it became a question of all national movements and ideologies and did not emphasize the Jewish question disproportionately.

Drawing on Kohn's published works and a variety of archival sources, the current work explores Kohn's political and intellectual contributions in five chapters. The first, entitled "A Youthsful Phase: Jewish Nationalism in Prague and Palestine," is primarily a synthesis of much

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18 Rabinovitch, *Jews in Diaspora Nationalism*, xvi. For Kallen's most enduring exposition on this concept see his essay "Democracy versus the Melting Pot: A Study of American Nationality" *The Nation*, February 25, 1915. His statement at the end of this essay that America's form is that of the Federal Republic; its substance a democracy of nationalities, cooperating voluntarily and autonomously in the enterprise of self-realization through the perfection of men according to their kind would likely have appealed to Kohn at the time it was written in 1915, but its focus on autonomous cultural groups and self-realization of nationalities bears little similarity to his writings on America in both his *American Nationalism*, his public talks, and in the *Idea of Nationalism*.

19 In order to understand Kohn's intellectual and personal priorities and development, I have drawn upon a number of archival sources. Kohn's extensive papers are located at the Leo Baeck Institute in New York (AR 259). All citations are according to the digitized papers. Essential for understanding Kohn's development in America are his correspondences with the historian of modern German and Jewish history, Koppel Shub Pinson (1904-1961), also located at Leo Baeck (AR 4310), and with Menorah Journal editor Henry Hurwitz (1886-1961), located in the Henry Hurwitz/Menorah Association collection at the American Jewish Archives in Cincinnati, OH. The faculty files in the Smith College Archives in Northampton Massachusetts contained several public talks by Hans Kohn that were especially useful in Chapter Two. Far less extensive, yet still useful were some correspondences and materials found in the Salo Baron Papers, Stanford University Archives, Palo Alto CA., the Archives of the American Jewish Committee, New York, NY, and the papers of Kohn's close friend Hugo Knoepfmacher at the Leo Baeck Institute. Of these resources, materials from Smith College, the Henry Hurwitz papers and the Salo Baron papers have not been previously used in any published studies on Kohn.
of the work that has been done on Hans Kohn as a leader of the Bar Kochba circle, a founder of Brit Shalom and a Jewish political thinker. I will also discuss his departure from the movement and attempt to understand the nature and implications of this existential rupture in both in terms of Kohn's Zionism and broader Jewish identity.

The second chapter, “America and the Crisis Abroad: 1933–1945” closely examines Kohn's writings and public activities during the 1930s and 1940s in America. It is here that I argue that Kohn's alienation from the Zionist movement, and his alarm at the rise of unprecedented mass, totalitarian movements in Europe, what he called the new barbarism, re-focused him on issues of universal concern and made him a committed defender of the legacy of the Enlightenment and the centrality of American democracy for the preservation of liberal values. I make this case by drawing on Kohn's various short books or position papers, written for educated lay audiences, as well as speeches, articles and correspondences. In these writings, Kohn eschews nuance for stark contrasts. His book, Force or Reason, for example, charts the rise of the Cult of Force in Europe and emphasizes the role of the United States, a nation, along with Great Britain, that in Kohn's view bore the torch of the Enlightenment, in combating what Jonathan Israel has recently identified as the supreme Counter-Enlightenment.20

In the third chapter, “The Idea of Nationalism between the Universal and Particular,” I engage in a close reading of Kohn's magnum opus, The Idea of Nationalism, with particular attention to Kohn's genealogy of the tension between universal values and particular identity. In this chapter I give special attention to the way in which Kohn found the ideal historical balance of these tensions in the spirit of the eighteenth-century Enlightenment.

Chapter Four analyzes post-war works by Kohn from the mid-1940s to the 1960s, particularly those that address the role of national prophets in the formation of national movements. Kohn developed his own pantheon of prophetic liberal thinkers such as John Stuart Mill and Giuseppe Mazzini and anti-pantheon of false prophets such as Heinrich von Treitschke and Fyodor Dostoevsky. Though it was Kohn's own colleague and admirer, Louis Snyder, who identified these types of bifurcations in his writing as the Kohn Dichotomy, in reality national movements and intellectuals exist on a spectrum in Kohn's thought. This spectrum is based upon the extent to which thinkers and movements reflected the ideals of the eighteenth-century Enlightenment. Thus, while others who have written on Kohn assume that these figures confirm Kohn's naïve division between Good Western civic nationalism and Bad Eastern, ethnic nationalism, I attempt to use these writings to complicate the picture by focusing on transitional figures who do not fit into either category neatly, such as the Odessa-based Zionist, Ahad Ha-am and the Czech nationalists Thomas Masaryk and František Palacký, who looked to the Hussite movement of the fourteenth century and interpreted it as the foundation of a liberal humanism that the Czech peoples needed to live up to.

While in America, Kohn continued to engage Jewish issues, albeit to a far lesser degree. In the fifth chapter, The Waning of a Jewish Intellectual I question the extent to which Kohn still concerned himself deeply with Jewish questions by analyzing his writings and correspondence on Jewish issues following his departure from Palestine. I also argue that Kohn's relationship to the Jewish community and its various organizations was characterized by alienations and resignations, and that Kohn, though he attempted to do so, never successfully embedded himself in a Jewish context. This precluded him, in my view, from becoming any sort of effective public intellectual for the American Jewish community.
The dissertation concludes by suggesting a new way of understanding Kohn's intellectual and his historiographical legacy, based on the sources and analysis presented.
Chapter One
A Youthful Phase: Jewish Nationalism in Prague and Palestine

Kohn’s upbringing in multi-ethnic, Habsburg Prague, as part of the city’s German-Jewish minority, set the stage for his initial immersion in the nationalist ideologies of Central Europe. Though his formative years in Prague were not necessarily times of personal crisis, they in many ways laid the foundations for his later ideals. Most importantly, it was as a student in Prague that Kohn first became involved in a national movement, Zionism. His varied involvements with the Zionist movement began while he was still a gymnasium student, and lasted until his hasty departure from Palestine in 1929.

This chapter is intended to be a synthetic presentation of Kohn’s Zionist phase. After examining the broader Central-European context that Kohn shared with several other Jewish peers, we will turn to the more specific Prague milieu that exercised a tremendous impact on the nature of Kohn’s Zionist ideas. As we will see, following Kohn’s long stay in Russia during the First World War, he left Prague permanently and soon settled in Palestine. The second half of this chapter is devoted to an analysis of Kohn’s Zionist thought and activities during the 1920s. It will be argued that Kohn’s time as a Jewish intellectual was defined by the search for a redemptive balance of East and West, which was complemented by a particular ideology of a

1 Yfaat Weiss, ‘Central European Ethnonationalism and Zionist Binationalism,’ *Jewish Social Studies* 11, no. 1 (Fall, 2004): 103. Weiss suggests that these years likely formed the basis for his attraction to the idea of Binationalism and further, that Kohn tried to solve the German-Czech problem in Palestine. In my view, Weiss does not present sufficient evidence for this claim, but she is right to emphasize the influence of Kohn’s formative years in Prague which had a different yet distinct binational character.

2 Kohn joined the Prague Zionist group *Bar Kochba* which means son of the star. The group was named after the second century Jewish military leader who sought to liberate the Jews from Roman rule. The Bar Kochba revolt was crushed in 135 CE.
humanistic Jewish nationalism that, Kohn believed, would lead to the fulfillment of the Jewish tradition’s moral and ethical potentiality.

**Generational Upheaval in Central Europe and Prague Zionism**

Hans Kohn was born in 1891, the first child of Salomon E. Kohn, a moderately successful salesman and Berta (née Fischer), a highly cultured housewife.⁴ His upbringing was primarily secular, like that of many of his peers from Central-European, middle-class Jewish families. In his memoirs, he recalls “only very few Prague Jews were members of the Orthodox faith. My father went to synagogue only on the high holidays, my mother almost never. None of the ceremonial laws were observed in our home.”⁵

During the half-century prior to Kohn’s birth, the city of Prague, as well as its Jewish community, had undergone several changes and major demographic shifts. Habsburg Jewry had been granted full civic emancipation in 1867. Yet even prior to that time, in 1852, the Jews of Prague had secured freedom of settlement within the entire city. This led to a quick exodus from the crowded conditions of Josefov, the historical Jewish quarter in the mid-nineteenth century. Significantly, by the late 1880s when the city underwent a massive overhaul, barely 10 percent of the Old Jewish quarter was still Jewish.⁵

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³ Hans Kohn, *Living in a World Revolution: My Encounters with History* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1964), 33–35. He had three younger siblings, Fritz, Franz and Grete. Kohn notes that his mother was more formally educated than his father. She ensured that Kohn and his siblings attained fluency in French at a young age by hiring a private tutor. German was the primary language of the home, though both parents were fully fluent in Czech, as was Kohn himself.

⁴ Kohn, Living in a World Revolution, 37.

⁵ Peter Demetz, *Prague in Black and Gold: Scenes in the Life of a European City* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1997), 315. Notably, the family of Franz Kafka was among this 10 percent.
Economic opportunity in the renovated city of Prague also brought many ethnic Czechs from the countryside, further shifting the balance of nationalities. In the twenty years between 1880 and 1900, the proportion of native German speakers fell by more than half – from 15.5 percent to 7.5 percent.\(^6\) Largely as a result of these shifts, at the time of Kohn's birth the Jews, from a social-cultural point of view, occupied a middle position between the Czech majority and the ethnically German minority. As Peter Demetz explains, Matters were complicated even more by the social transformations of Prague's Jewish community, which demographically held its own, though its members were now dispersed.\(^6\) An increasing number of families, though continuing to send their sons to German schools and the German university, preferred to declare during statistical inquiries that their language was Czech.\(^7\) While some scholars have placed a great deal of weight on this form of Jewish, Czech-German, bilingual identity, the extent to which Jews, especially in Prague, absorbed Czech culture is questionable.\(^8\) Jewish children, as Hillel Kieval has pointed out, were educated in the spirit of the German Enlightenment, and channeled through the non-Jewish, German system of secondary and higher education.\(^9\) Kohn was one of these young people. He attended a Catholic primary school run by a certain Father Hesky of the Piarist order.\(^10\) He then went on to receive a classical education at the Altstädtter

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\(^6\) Demetz, Prague in Black and Gold, 317.

\(^7\) Demetz, Prague in Black and Gold, 317.


\(^9\) Hillel Kieval, Languages of Community: The Jewish Experience in the Czech Lands (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press, 2000), 142. By the turn of the twentieth century this was beginning to change at the primary school level, but Jews pursuing secondary and higher education still overwhelmingly chose German speaking institutions.

\(^10\) See Memoirs of Hans Kohn recorded by Anita (Steiber) Vogel Sklarsky in Smith College Archives, Northampton, Massachusetts. Elizabeth A Nichols File, Box 8C.
Gymnasium where he graduated first in his class.\textsuperscript{11} Later, he attended the German section of Charles University where almost a third of the students were Jews.\textsuperscript{12}

Aside from some unique elements of ethnic struggle which were more characteristic of Habsburg Prague than of other urban, German-speaking centers of Central Europe, the social and cultural backdrop and the worldview that marked Kohn's middle-class Jewish upbringing bore significant similarities to that of the Jews of other pre-WWI cosmopolitan centers such as Berlin, Vienna and even Budapest. As Steven Aschheim emphasizes, \textit{Despite all their differences, these men were shaped within a recognizably similar cultural universe; in many ways they shared a common worldview and outlook. If they cannot be said to emerge from a generalized \textquoteall their differences, \textit{common ideals and sensitivities,} which characterized their parents' generation, that many intellectually inclined young men of Kohn's generation rebelled. Most of these young Jewish thinkers of the generation of 1914 came from highly acculturated Jewish backgrounds to which they were often indebted for financial support and certainly for their opportunities in higher education. In her analysis of Georg Lukács and his generation, Mary Gluck points to a similar tension among young Jewish intellectuals in Budapest. Her observations are also highly relevant to Kohn's context. The generation of Jews that came of age between the turn of the century and World War One often could not absorb the

\textsuperscript{11} Kohn, Living in a World Revolution, 40.


post-emancipation Jewish formalities of their parents, for whom the, albeit limited, Jewish rituals still evoked memories of a living Jewish community to which, if not they, certainly their fathers had belonged.\textsuperscript{14} Yet, the at times ultra-nationalist (in this case German and Magyar) atmosphere made it difficult for those of Georg Lukács\textsuperscript{\textdegree} generation to renounce their Jewishness. Thus, not unlike the Prague circle the children\textsuperscript{\textdegree} generation began to show an unmistakable tendency to dissimilate and to assume, or search out, some form of Jewish identification that would prove more meaningful than the ritual-bound inheritance of the parents.\textsuperscript{15} Not unlike Kohn and his peers, Lukács was drawn to Hasidism and was, for a time, attracted to the thought of Martin Buber.

As in Budapest, many young Jewish intellectuals in Prague and other Central-European centers were also highly resentful of, what they considered to be, the farcical Jewish existence of their parents. Kohn\textsuperscript{\textdegree} fellow Bar Kochba member Franz Kafka\textsuperscript{\textdegree} famous 1919 Letter to his Father\textsuperscript{\textdegree} is a more extreme case in point, yet reveals the generational struggle. On the Judaism of his upbringing, Kafka wrote to his father: \textquote{\textquote{As a young man, I could not understand how, with the insignificant scrap of Judaism you yourself possessed, you could reproach me for not\textsuperscript{\textdegree} making an effort to cling to a similar insignificant scrap. It was really, so far as I could see, a mere scrap, a joke, not even a joke.}}\textsuperscript{16} Gershom Scholem, who grew up in Berlin and later collaborated with Kohn in Palestine, described the life of his parents\textsuperscript{\textdegree} generation as \textquote{confused jumble.} He recalled, for instance, that as a young Zionist, he received his first framed picture of Theodore

\textsuperscript{14} Mary Gluck, Georg Lukács and His Generation: 1900\textsuperscript{\textdegree} 1918 (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 1985), 69.

\textsuperscript{15} Gluck, Georg Lukács and His Generation, 70.

\textsuperscript{16} I am quoting this excerpt from Paul Mendes-Flohr and Jehuda Reinharz eds., The Jew in the Modern World: A Documentary History (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 254\textsuperscript{\textdegree} 255. For a recent treatment of Kafka\textsuperscript{\textdegree} life that pays special attention to his struggles with Jewishness and attempts to demystify the writer, see Saul Friedländer, Franz Kafka: The Poet of Shame and Guilt (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013).
Herzl for Christmas, which his parents considered a “German” holiday, under the tree in their home. As we will see, Kohn also tried to break free from this confusion by heeding, what he saw as, the call of his generation.

Still, what is not completely clear from this general background is why, in 1908, Kohn intellectually repudiated part of his assimilated Jewish background and became a Zionist. In his autobiography he simply states, “In the summer of 1908, when I was seventeen years old, I became a Zionist.” He remembered this as a sudden decision and one made “without much soul searching.” While there may not have been a single incident or concern that prompted Kohn’s conversion to Zionism, the generational background that we have discussed and his coming of age soon after the turn of the century in the Habsburg laboratory of nationalism, and in Prague, which was particularly fertile ground for nationalist movements, makes the decision an unsurprising one.

While socially, culturally and economically, the Jews of Prague may not have shared much with their Czech neighbors, Hillel Kieval has emphasized the influence of Czech nationalism on the development of Jewish nationalism in Prague, and its many affinities with Bar Kochba’s particular brand of cultural nationalism. Czech nationalist leader, Thomas Masaryk, who affirmed the legitimacy of Jewish national identity and who stressed the spiritual-cultural elements of Czech nationalism, served as a particularly influential model. Further, Kieval suggests, the proximity of Bar Kochba’s headquarters to the hotel where Masaryk

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18 Kohn, Living in a World Revolution, 47.
19 Kohn, Living in a World Revolution, 47.
21 As we will see, Kohn continued to admire Masaryk in his later writings.
delivered several of his influential speeches, and the fact that *Bar Kochba* members sat in on some of them, may even suggest some mutual influence. The fact that Masaryk later wrote quite admiringly of Ahad Ha-am and acknowledged that he was indebted to several Jews, who brought the agnostic Rabbi to his attention is, for Kieval, very suggestive evidence. Whatever the central contexts or influences may have been, Kohn’s conversion to Zionism constituted his first active involvement with a national movement and, the following year, his first encounter with a national prophet.

**Encountering Buber**

In January of 1909, Hans Kohn sat among a group of enraptured Jewish students at Charles University. Before them stood Martin Buber, who spoke to them of Jewish renewal. In a philosophical age largely dominated by Nietzsche, Buber provided these members of Prague’s *Bar Kokhba* Zionist group with an inspiring, Jewish twist on the neo-romantic thought of the time. Further, he helped invigorate, or we may go so far as to say, establish the Jewish identities for which their generation seemed to thirst, previously latent amidst the Central-European bourgeois malaise. Rodger Kamenetz, in his introduction to Buber’s addresses, further emphasizes the generational disconnect that we have explored, the assimilated Jews of Berlin and Prague, he points out, were embarrassed by their brethren to the East, the so-called Ostjuden, with their long beards, fur streimels, and fanatical devotion to prayer, God and

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23 Buber’s Prague speeches, which would eventually be published as *Drei Reden über Das Judentum*, were also an important moment in Buber’s own biography. He had been absent from Zionist politics for several years, and was only invited, by Leo Hermann, after a number of other choices fell through. Buber returned twice again the following year. See Kieval, *The Making of Czech Jewry*, 129.
snuff.\textsuperscript{24} Though Buber was barely a decade older than many of these students, he functioned as an elder, and in the case of the Prague Bar Kokhba circle, a patron saint of sorts. Paul Mendes-Flohr has rightly emphasized Buber’s important role as a transmitter: Buber’s novel interpretation of Jewish spirituality enjoyed unique authority among Central European intellectuals, especially those attuned to the mystical inflections of the new romanticism.\textsuperscript{25} Indeed, Buber’s early Erlebnis mysticism drew in many young Jews throughout Central-Europe who shared in the general desire to return to roots, but were largely excluded from the predominantly Teutonic, volkish neo-romantic ideologies.\textsuperscript{26} As he was for many prominent Jewish intellectuals, including Gershom Scholem, Robert Weltsch and Hugo Bergmann, Martin Buber was, without a doubt, the most important influence on Hans Kohn’s youthful thinking. Twenty years later he would write to Buber, 1909 was the first year of my becoming a human being.\textsuperscript{27}

Buber, for his part, viewed his discovery and presentation of Hasidism as a call to proclaim its spiritual message to the world.\textsuperscript{28} He was also in a unique position to answer this call. Martin Buber was raised primarily in the home of his grandfather, Salomon Buber who was a distinguished scholar and editor of rabbinic texts. He was also thoroughly engaged in the major circles of neo-romantic writers of the time. Thus, Buber served as a very natural and, for

\textsuperscript{24} Martin Buber, \textit{On Judaism}, ed. Nahum N. Glatzer, intro. Rodger Kamenetz (New York: Schocken, 1995), vii. It is from this volume that we will cite Buber’s \textit{Three Addresses}. Also see Steven Aschheim’s classic study, \textit{Brothers and Strangers: The East-European Jew in German and German-Jewish Consciousness 1800–1923} (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1983), especially Chapter Six: Martin Buber and the Reception of Hasidism.


\textsuperscript{26} Michael Löwy, \textit{Jewish Messianism and Libertarian Utopia in Central Europe (1900-1933)}, \textit{New German Critique} 20 (Spring–Summer, 1980): 111.

\textsuperscript{27} Nahum N. Glatzer and Paul Mendes-Flohr eds., \textit{The Letters of Martin Buber} (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1996), 372.

\textsuperscript{28} Mendes-Flohr, \textit{Divided Passions}, 95.
his largely assimilated listeners, necessary bridge between East and West, which was also a central leitmotif of his pre-War thought.

In emphasizing renewal (Erneurung) Buber stressed to his audience the need for a revolutionary upheaval within current Jewish life. This revolution or renewal would be achieved, eventually, by the resettlement of the Jews in the land of their initial development, Palestine. Buber believed that almost two millennia in the Diaspora had left the Jewish volksgeist stagnant if not moribund.\textsuperscript{29} Since the Jews were no longer attached to their agrarian tradition, they had lost the dynamism and creativity of their biblical, oriental origins and instead followed rabbinic laws that stultified their national life. In calling for Jewish renewal, Buber hoped that a return to the soil which had nurtured the Jewish spirit in its nascent stages, would allow the Jews to re-enter history as a creative force.

In his autobiography, Kohn explains the impact that Buber's speeches had on him and the students of Bar Kokhba. Unlike Theodore Herzl's politically-centered Zionism which was based upon the premise that the Jews required a homeland to save themselves from anti-Semitism, Kohn recalls Our Zionism was not a reaction to persecution but, under the influence of the German thought of the period, a search for roots a turning inward toward the supposed center of our true self, which dated back, so we believed, over two thousand years to biblical times.\textsuperscript{30}

Two years after Buber's addresses in Prague, Kohn wrote a letter expressing his intellectual debt to him: You know sir what your addresses meant to us in Bar Kokhba. But I think I may

\textsuperscript{29} Martin Buber, The Spirit of the Orient and Judaism, in On Judaism, 73.

\textsuperscript{30} Kohn, Living in a World Revolution, 67. Hillel Kieval points out that Bar Kochba, largely due to the leadership of Hugo Bergmann, was a purely cultural and spiritual organization. Prague's other major Zionist group, Barissia, was a break-off organization that was more political and became a particularly fierce rival. At one point, Barissia's head, Heinrich Wittman challenged Bar Kochba leader Leo Hermann to a pistol duel, which took place outside of the city and did not result in any injury. Eventually, the two organizations were able to co-exist, but Bar Kochba became far more important and influential. See Kieval, The Making of Czech Jewry, 116\textendash125.
say that they meant more to me than to any of the others, for in many respects they constituted a turning point in all my views.\textsuperscript{31}

Under the aegis of Bar Kochba, Kohn edited and published, in 1914, \textit{Vom Judentum: Ein Sammelbuch}, which included essays by, among others, Martin Buber, Max Brod, Nathan Birnbaum, Robert Weltsch and Hugo Bergmann.\textsuperscript{32} In his essay on \textquotedblleft Der Geist des Orients,\textquotedblright Kohn sought to establish a largely deterministic and even racial distinction between the oriental and occidental mind.\textsuperscript{33} As we will see, Kohn would return to this distinction in later writings on ancient Athens and Jerusalem. Yet, the young Kohn understood his juxtaposition not primarily as a historical insight, but as a call to action.

Kohn\textquotesingle s introduction to this work reveals the spirit of the \textit{Bar Kochba} organization and his own convictions. The book represented, according to Kohn, the consciousness among his peers that they were members of a decisive generation. Not merely an academic exercise, the essays cried out for actions and solutions\textsuperscript{34} reflecting a longing for true spiritual regeneration. For them, Kohn asserted, Zionism was nothing less than a battle\textsuperscript{\textasciitilde}the struggle of youth, who wish for more (\textit{die höher will}), than the old, the idle, the weary\textsuperscript{\textendash}\textsuperscript{35} Kohn acknowledges the vital role of Martin Buber in showing them a path away from the \textit{Herzensträgheit} (\textit{Herzengeständnisse}) of their parent\textsuperscript{\textendash}generation toward true renewal. Yet he also attributes an

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\textsuperscript{31} Glatzer and Mendes-Flohr, eds. \textit{The Letters of Martin Buber}, 130.


\textsuperscript{33} \textit{Der Geist des Orients}, in Kohn, ed. \textit{Vom Judentum}, 10: Here Kohn introduces, very much in line with the distinctions made by Buber in his Prague speeches, the juxtaposition of the Greek and Jews (Oriental) in terms of time and space. The Greeks conquered space through \textit{the domination of the eye (die Herrschaft des Auges)} while the Oriental mind functioned through time and \textit{the domination of the ear (die Herrschaft des Ohres)}. He later notes this preoccupation with time developed among contemporary Jewish thinkers such as Henri Bergson and Martin Buber completely independently of one another (12).

\textsuperscript{34} See Kohn, \textit{Geleitwort} in \textit{Vom Judentum}, v.

\textsuperscript{35} Kohn, \textit{Geleitwort}, viii.
important role to Ahad Ha-am, who taught them that before outward emancipation could ever be truly achieved, the Jewish people would need to overcome their inner exile (Galut).36

Kohn and his peers were exposed, through Martin Buber, to Ahad Ha-am and to several other influential Jewish thinkers. Buber’s close friend, Gustav Landauer, a socialist who rejected Marxism and embraced humanism, complemented Buber’s influence and encouraged pacifistic tendencies among the Bar Kokhba students.37 They were also strongly attracted to the humanistic socialism of Aaron David Gordon who taught, as Kohn put it, that redemption of a people does not come through political or military means, but only by the spiritual and moral re-birth of its individuals.38 Yet the cultural Zionist Ahad Ha-am continued to factor into Kohn’s thought even well after his Zionist phase.

Unlike Buber who was a university-trained, Central-European Jew from an acculturated family, Ahad Ha-am, born Asher Ginzberg, spent his formative years in the Sadagora Hasidic community of Gopchitse. A descendent of the Hasidic master, Dov Baer of Mezhirech, his father, Isaiah, demanded the highest standards and commitment to Torah study from his son. Soon, Asher Ginzberg would be known as a promising young Talmudist. However, his interest in the forbidden outside world overwhelmed his commitments to rabbinics. Asher would come to reject Hasidic life, but often felt alienated in other Jewish communities. Not fully comfortable as a mitnagid (non-Hasidic Orthodox Jew) or, later, as a maskil (Jewish Enlightener), Ginzberg would simply label himself as ohev yisrael (lover of Israel).39

36 Kohn, Geleitwort, viii.
37 Kohn, Living in a World Revolution, 69.
38 Kohn, Living in a World Revolution, 48.
At the age of thirty, Ahad Ha-am moved with his family to Odessa, the new cosmopolitan Russian city on the Black Sea. It was here that Ahad Ha-am’s career took shape. He became a member of Hovevei Zion (lovers of Zion), a group initially led by Leo Pinsky (Autoemancipation). Soon, Ahad Ha-am formed a smaller, more intimate group within the organization, reserved only for its most intellectually gifted members. This secret society of sorts was called Bnei Moshe and Ahad Ha-am was, on all accounts, its most influential and powerful intellect.

From Odessa, and later, from London and Palestine, Ahad Ha-am propagated his ideal of a “spiritual center” in Palestine. This center, he believed, would facilitate the renaissance of Jewish culture amidst an (at least, initially) small group whose Jewish renewal would provide inspiration to the Diaspora. Ahad Ha-am opposed this “spiritual center” to the hasty goals of the political Zionists who wished to see an actual Jewish state in Palestine and believed that only an evacuation of the Diaspora and a radical transformation, from above and on political grounds, would solve the “Jewish problem.” Herzl and others who believed in political Zionism as a quick, revolutionary response to persecution were the primary targets of Ahad Ha-am’s attacks.

Kohn’s admiration for Ahad Ha-am grew continually, even in later years; yet he initially seemed to share in some of Martin Buber’s dissatisfaction with the extent of Ahad Ha-am’s program. In his lecture on Jewish renewal, Buber explicitly addressed the thought of Ahad Ha-am. According to Buber, as opposed to German-Jewish ethical thinkers such as Moritz Lazarus, a:

More profound and more authentic world is known to us in the thinking of Ahad Ha-am. Something of the spirit of prophetic Judaism does truly reside in this world. It lacks this spirit’s original fire and is steeped, instead in Talmudic problematics and Maimonidean abstractions. But, in the trueness of its inner vision and the
relentlessness of its demand, it is reminiscent of our prophetic heritage. Still, the idea of absolute renewal is not to be found here either.⁴⁰

Kohn’s later critique of Ahad ha-Am in *Nationalismus* (1922) began by praising him for the extent of his love of the Jewish people. As in *Vom Judentum*, he pointed to his insistence on the regenerative value of community (*Gemeinschaft*) as his great contribution to Zionism.⁴¹ Yet, in *Nationalismus*, Kohn also criticized Ahad Ha-am for neglecting the process of internal “becoming” that Judaism requires.⁴² In this sense, he echoes Buber’s criticisms by pointing to a narrowness of vision that Ahad Ha-am was not able to overcome. Here Kohn was likely referring to, what were in his opinion, the limitations that rabbinic tradition still part of Ahad Ha-am’s system imposed on true spiritual revival. This or any other substantial critique, is absent from Kohn’s subsequent treatments.

**The Great War**

It is somewhat surprising, even given the background we have discussed, that Hans Kohn joined Martin Buber in greeting the First World War with such enthusiasm. In a letter written to Kohn on September 30 1914, Buber expressed regret that he was physically unfit to serve the German cause. Buber saw profound metaphysical possibilities in the great conflict and praised the ever-growing sense of national-spiritual unity in Germany and Austria. His metaphysical hopes were that the rise of national conceptions of “peoplehood” in Central Europe would lead to

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the actualization of those societies' potentiality. Buber also saw in the war an opportunity for the Jewish people to reconcile their own inner duality. Through the conflict, Jews, even though they would in some cases fight against one another, could render the phrase יִנְחָר by might, but by spirit יִבְלָשָׁה obsolete after the two would be fused through a mystical inner actualization.43

Hans Kohn and Robert Weltsch, his closest friend from Bar Kokhba, enlisted in the Austro-Hungarian army in 1914. They joined a Prague regiment which was mostly Czech. Since Kohn and Weltsch were university-educated, they were sent directly to Salzburg for training as officers. Soon after, Kohn's company was sent to the forested foothills of the Carpathian Mountains to thwart the advance of the Russian forces.44

The night of March 21, 1915, marked the first point of personal and intellectual crisis in Hans Kohn’s life. During that night, his unit suffered a surprise attack. He was captured by the Russians and would remain a prisoner of war for almost five years.45 He was taken briefly to Kiev and then to Samarkand (in modern day Uzbekistan) where he first encountered יִתְפְּלָשֶׂה, the dehumanizing effects of colonialism, and the יִפְלְחָר–יקָעָב relationship between the Russian rulers and the native population. Though he was born in the Hapsburg Empire, which contained several disenchanted ethnic minorities, Kohn realized that Russian imperialism was of a very different character:

The realities of colonialism, which I saw in Samarkand for the first time, were unknown in Prague. (The Hapsburg empire was the only great power in 1914 which had no colonies.) They made me sensitive to the difficulties that arise when a people try to govern other peoples of another race and culture. In Prague there had been a

43 Glatzer and Mendes-Flohr, eds. The Letters of Martin Buber, 160: Buber felt that the war would function much like a ploughshare. The upheaval would render יִנְחָר fertile for planting the seeds of national renewal.
45 Kohn, Living in a World Revolution, 89.
bitter enmity, but it was one between nationalities that shared a similar racial and cultural background. Now in Samarkand I witnessed the clash of two different civilizations, a relationship not of rival peers but of master and subject, which expressed itself in countless ways. 

In 1916, Kohn attempted to escape Samarkand. He fled to the desert and tried to reach Afghanistan, but was captured and sent first to Gultcha (Chinese Turkistan) and then to Khabarovsk and Irkutsk in Siberia. Though the treatment of prisoners in Siberia was not cruel, Kohn’s group of prisoners was forbidden to interact with other captives. This changed in 1917 with the March Revolution. Now allowed to interact with other groups of prisoners, Kohn and others organized a virtual adult education program that included academic lectures and literary periodicals and which were widely attended and read throughout the camp.

In a fascinating retrospective, Kohn’s life-long friend and fellow prisoner in Siberia, Hugo Knoepfmacher, who had encountered Kohn briefly during his Bar Kochba days, recalls Hans Kohn as an enthusiastic proponent of Buberian Zionism in Siberian captivity. He, Kohn, and other like-minded Jewish prisoners studied Hebrew literature voraciously. They also took the time, as Kohn mentions in his memoirs, to study European literature and to learn Russian. Prior to his departure from Irkutsk, he seems to have attained significant mastery of the

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46 Kohn, *Living in a World Revolution*, 95: Kohn does not give us much information as to how he escaped or how he was treated and felt during this time. Instead, he focuses on how his capture and imprisonment in different places influenced his views.


48 Hugo Knoepfmacher, “Some Recollections of My Encounter with Hans Kohn in Siberia (1917–1919)” Undated in the Archives of the Leo Baeck Institute, New York, New York. The Hugo Knoepfmacher Collection; AR 7172; Box 2, Folder 18. According to Knoepfmacher (a native of Vienna): ÒIn December 1919 Kohn’s Russian friends gave a farewell party at which according to Russian custom each participant spoke up and said a few words to the departing friend. One man speaking with a Ukrainian accent praised Kohn’s Hassidic fire. Kohn answered them with an address in Russian language.Ó
Knoepfmacher remembered that in Siberia, the majority of Jewish prisoners from Hungary rejected Jewish nationalism. Instead, they felt strong affinities to Magyar nationalist movements. With seemingly missionary zeal, Kohn advocated his brand of Zionism and, according to Knoepfmacher, “most of the Hungarians were won over and sympathized with Kohn and Zionism for at least for that time.” Kohn won also the sympathy of many of the non-Jewish fellow prisoners. When in 1917, the Balfour Declaration on Palestine became known, a high Austrian officer said to him: you should get Palestine from us, not from the British.  

Kohn remembered the hope with which most Russians greeted the March Revolution. He later recalled the people of Khabarovsk taking to the streets and embracing one another in utopian, if short lived hope: “By the end of March, Russia for the first (and last) time in its long history was a free country. The police state was ended, the equality of all citizens and their political and civil liberties were proclaimed. But this free Russia, about to take its place at long last among modern European nations, lasted only a few months.” Kohn points out that there were competing ideals at this time for the future of a new Russia. While the masses, as he recalled, largely yearned for peace, the educated classes wished to find a more effective way of waging the war. This discrepancy, along with the experience of losing the war, created a vacuum of power and vision that allowed Lenin to return from exile and ascend to power.

The general chaos of the Bolshevik Revolution in early November (still October by the traditional Russian calendar) allowed Kohn and other former prisoners to travel eastward by train. Kohn’s journey home took two years due to both political and geographic circumstances.

49 Knoepfmacher, Some Reflections, 12.
50 Knoepfmacher, Some Reflections, 2.
52 Kohn, Living in a World Revolution, 101.
After having stayed for a year in Irkutsk, he traveled through parts of China and then to Japan where he boarded a ship that brought him to Marseilles in March of 1920.53

While in Irkutsk, Kohn authored an important statement on The Arab Question.54 This essay, published in Der Jude, demonstrates Kohn’s vision for Palestine and his moral commitments prior to settling there. It also reflects a more sober tone for Kohn, who seems to have considered the question of Palestine in light of his intense Russian experiences.

Kohn’s short essay commences with an observation that for Zionists, the recognition of the Arab problem was akin to moving from a childish imaging of Palestine to a mature recognition of its realities and problems. A truthful approach to the Arab question had to begin, in Kohn’s view, with the recognition that over 80 percent of the population of Palestine was Arab and that Geographically Palestine is self-contained, but it belongs orographically and geologically to Syria, an Arab nation. Thus, today Palestine is rightly and in fact an Arab country.55

Kohn goes on to reject the concept of Jewish historical rights to Palestine, noting that the Arabs had not displaced Jews nor done them harm in the past. Yet, he points out, all through history there had been a Jewish minority in Palestine. Therefore, Kohn believed, it was reasonable to continue the tradition of Palestine as a land of Arabs and Jews; especially considering how sparsely populated it was by the Arabs.56 The Jews, he believed, would bring modern advancement to Palestine; they would give the country necessary intelligence and

53 Kohn, Living in a World Revolution, 118.
55 Iggers, ed. The Jews of Bohemia and Moravia, 239.
56 Iggers, ed. The Jews of Bohemia and Moravia, 240.
economic force. Yet, he is quick to add “This does not, of course, give the Jews the right to take the country from the Arabs, but to settle beside the Arabs on uninhabited land.” Kohn believed that Jews should also be certain to learn Arabic which would affirm the multi-national character of Palestine.

Peace with the Arabs was essential to Kohn on a number of levels. Among the three primary reasons that he cites in this essay, the first two have to do with the nature of Jewish existence and history. To deny justice to anyone, he argues, undermines a core value of Judaism and thus also the spiritual validity of the Jewish community that would settle the land. Further, if the Zionists engaged in “chauvinist-imperialist” actions and would approach the Arabs as a “nation state,” it would make the Zionist pathos towards our oppressors become ridiculous, if we deprived the Arabs of their rights and took away their national identity.

In closing his essay, Kohn reiterates the inseparable nature of the Jewish question and the question of mankind. The answers to this question would not be attained, he argued, through the imperial powers, the international community or though the Jews alone. Rather, it was vital that Jews and Arabs collaborate and create a just society together. The alternative, Kohn believed, would lead to the moral degradation of the Jewish people: “Let us, the slaves of yesterday, not become tomorrow’s imperialists.”

What impact did war and captivity in Russia, his first historical and personal crisis point, have on Kohn’s subsequent life and work? At the age of 72, Kohn viewed his experience in World War I, and particularly his time in Russia as “the decisive years of my life. They changed

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57 Iggers, ed. The Jews of Bohemia and Moravia, 240.
58 Iggers, ed. The Jews of Bohemia and Moravia, 241.
60 Iggers, ed. The Jews of Bohemia and Moravia, 242.
my outlook and redirected my life into paths I could hardly have foreseen in 1914.\(^{61}\) Kohn’s direct contact with the horrors of war and imperialism also resulted in a conversion from his prior neo-romanticism to a Kantian based pacifism: "The World Events of 1917–1920, which focused my attention on history also made me a pacifist. From the First World War on, I distrusted power, officialdoms and brass, and I abhorred the excesses of national pride and self-righteousness. He became convinced that the state of war represents the extreme case in which Kant’s maxim to treat each man as an end in himself cannot even be posited.\(^{62}\) Indeed, while in Russia, Kohn was increasingly drawn to the thought of the Enlightenment, and particularly to Kant. In his recollections, Knoepfmacher notes Kohn’s increased interest in the moral clarity of the Enlightenment philosophers.\(^{63}\) Kohn also recalled this move toward the rationalism of the eighteenth century, "It was at the prison camp, too, that I found out I could teach. I had begun to delve into the philosophy of Immanuel Kant. The life of Kant is not very interesting; it is his ideas that are exciting. They stimulated my thinking in terms of man’s development as a rational being with ethical values, struggling toward freedom.\(^{64}\)

As we will see, Kohn did not give the type of attention to the life and context of Kant that he would to other thinkers such as Mill, Dostoevsky, or even Ahad Ha-am. Yet the influence of Kant’s vision, as Kohn saw it, became increasingly decisive. He would increasingly use the spirit of Kant’s Kingdom of Ends as a standard by which to judge the moral and political

\(^{61}\) Kohn, Living in a World Revolution, 90.

\(^{62}\) Kohn, Living in a World Revolution, 106.

\(^{63}\) Knoepfmacher, Recollections, 14.

\(^{64}\) Kohn, Memoirs of Hans Kohn, Smith Archives, Northhampton, MA. 6.
standing of national movements. When his son was born in 1926, Kohn named him Immanuel after the philosopher from Konigsberg.⁶⁵

**Thought and Activism in Palestine**

Following his return from Russia, Kohn remained briefly at home in Prague but felt alienated as a culturally German Jew in the new ethnically centered Czech state.⁶⁶ Knoepfmacher recalled the letters he received from Kohn upon his return: "The first letter I got from Kohn from Prague was full of bitter disappointment. National fanaticism was rampant everywhere. The new countries suppressed their minorities, new local wars seemed imminent."⁶⁷ Thus, Kohn left Prague and began working for the newly established financial wing of the Zionist Organization, Keren Ha-yesod. He lived in both Paris and London (where he felt particularly at home) and also reconnected with Martin Buber during this time. Buber had experienced his own transformation after World War I, and largely abandoned his previous philosophy of mystical upheaval for a philosophy of dialogue that characterizes his most well-known work, *I and Thou*.

Buber had also become increasingly concerned about the direction of the Zionist movement. Unlike most prominent Zionists in Central and Western Europe, he did not build his Zionism around political sovereignty. According to Paul Mendes-Flohr, Buber feared that the goal of political sovereignty "would encourage the development of the type of arrogant, narrow

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⁶⁶ As we will see, this discomfort did not diminish Kohn's respect for many aspects of Czech nationalism in later writings.

nationalism which came to the fore during the First World War. Buber attributed the madness of the war he had once supported to the myopia of unbounded national pride and sacro egoismo, the attitude of regarding one's nation's interests as sacred and morally absolute. By the early 1920s, he felt compelled to make a statement against such trends in the Zionist movement.

In 1921, Buber delivered an address to the Twelfth Zionist Congress in Carlsbad, Czechoslovakia. In this speech, given at the first such Zionist assemblage since the beginning of World War I, and since the issuance of the Balfour Declaration, Buber warned of the dangers nationalism could present. Now that the Congress was busy with pragmatic concerns for their national home, he wished for its representatives to understand the paths before them. He expressed deep concern over the direction of the movement and presented a philosophical-sociological analysis of nationalism in an attempt to guide the movement in the right direction. Buber's primary goal was to demarcate a degenerate kind of nationalism which, at the time of his speech, he feared was tarnishing Jewish nationalism. The First World War, according to Buber, had complicated nationalism by creating a period of inner confusion. Buber believed that a nation came into existence as a result of its self-awareness as an entity or group separate from other surrounding groups. This usually consisted of differences in communal structure and political organization. Nationalism, however, only emerges as a result of national deficiencies:

At certain moments in national life a new phenomenon makes its appearance. We call it nationalism. Its function is to indicate disease. Bodily organs do not draw

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69 Mendes-Flohr, ed. A Land of Two Peoples, 35.


71 Buber, Israel and the World, 214.
attention to themselves until they are attacked by disease. Similarly, nationalism is at bottom the awareness of some lack, some disease or ailment. The contradiction between the immanent task of the nation and its outer and inner condition has developed or been elaborated and this contradiction affects the feeling of the people. What we term nationalism is their spiritual reaction to it.\(^72\)

Zionism was no exception to this rule. Both the cultural and political Zionists realized that the "body" of the Jewish people suffered great ailments. Buber, Ahad Ha-am and other cultural Zionists wished to "cure" the "diseased" Jewish people from within by means of a spiritual rejuvenation on a national level. Nationalist programs which attempt to address the ailing "national body" can, according to Buber, have two possible results:

*Either* a healthy reaction will set in that will overcome the danger heralded by nationalism, and also nationalism itself which has now fulfilled its purpose; *or* nationalism will establish itself as *the* permanent principle; in other words, it will exceed its function, pass beyond its proper bounds, and with overemphasized consciousness displace the spontaneous life of the nation. Unless some force arises to oppose this process, it may well be the beginning of the downfall of the people, a downfall dyed in the colors of nationalism.\(^73\)

Ideally, for Buber, nationalism is a solution that is sometimes necessary to ensure the continuance of the nation but should always exist temporarily. Once nationalism's end is fulfilled, it should cease to exist. Once nationalism ceases to be a provisional, once it no longer serves as a cure to a national disease, but as the *raison d'être* of the state, it can begin to function

\(^72\) Buber, Israel and the World, 218.

\(^73\) Buber, *Israel and the World*, 219: (emphasis is mine).
dialectically. The result of this later scenario, according to Buber, is the spiritual destruction of the nation itself.

Not only did Buber find this problematic form of nationalism within the Zionist movement itself, but he believed that his own era was one in which this dangerous form of nationalism predominated. Therefore, he spoke at a time when the life of mankind, pulsing in its stock of peoples, is very sick indeed.\(^{74}\)

How, according to Buber, could a nation prevent itself from succumbing to this dangerous and arbitrary form of nationalism? It was important that the people of every nation recognize their responsibility to make the distinction between legitimate and arbitrary nationalism. This would, by default, require an educated populace which would be aware of dangers to its own fate. National leaders would also play a vital role. Buber believed that it was incumbent upon the leaders of nations to search their consciences and understand the nature of their nationalist programs. These leaders’ awareness of the true nature of their nationalist aspirations was, to Buber, not only a moral imperative, but a question of life and death for a people.\(^{75}\)

Hans Kohn was in attendance at the Twelfth Zionist Congress, where he and Robert Weltsch put their support behind a resolution that Buber proposed to acknowledge the rights of the Arab population in Palestine.\(^{76}\) The following year, he published an essay entitled *Nationalismus* in Martin Buber’s journal, *Der Jude*. Kohn dedicated this essay to Buber, and its contents echo the dichotomy we find in Buber’s speech to the Carlsbad Zionist Congress. Kohn’s article is also transitional. It reflects elements of his post-war Enlightenment turn.\(^{76}\)

\(^{74}\) Buber, *Israel and the World*, 220.

\(^{75}\) Buber, *Israel and the World*, 220.

many ways, it is an essay that embodied the spirit of Enlightenment thought in neo-romantic language. Most importantly, it is Kohn’s first comprehensive statement on the idea and character of nationalism.

Kohn begins by applying Georg Simmel’s observations on how existentially meaningful content is drawn from the materials of the spirit and shaped into a closed world subject, to the most comprehensive area of all, the sphere that controls the mass behavior of people of a specific age. Its lower manifestation we call politics. Its higher manifestation we call the mysticism or faith of an era.\(^\text{77}\) According to Kohn, this higher manifestation or faith of the nineteenth century was state nationalism which he defines as the attachment of a sovereign people to a specific territory that it owned and possessed.\(^\text{78}\) This nationalism, he argues, was born in the crucible of the French Revolution and remained the dominant form until the (First) World War.

Nationalism, in Kohn’s formulation, had succeeded the previous higher manifestation of religion. The supremacy of the religious spirit was broken by the Thirty Years War just as, Kohn believed, nationalism, or at least state-nationalism, was broken by the World War that had just concluded. Unlike the internal spirit of the nation which manifested itself in the souls of individuals and attained organic expression through customs and a sense of common destiny, state nationalism (as with religion in pre-modern times) became bound to the external principle of territory by politics and government.\(^\text{79}\) Thus, we are not presented with a condemnation of nationalism, but rather, the unhealthy wedding of higher and lower, political and spiritual


\(^{78}\) Kohn, “Nationalism,” 21.

\(^{79}\) Kohn, “Nationalism,” 22.
manifestations in state-nationalism. For Kohn, once nationalism become inextricably and eternally bound to territory, the national state became absolute; it became an idol. Thus, Kohn turns, even at this early stage in his thought, to the relevance of the Enlightenment. Kohn asserts that the great age of the Enlightenment, to which we will have to return in our present situation, signified the full awakening of the individual conscience against mass suggestion. Yet here, the possibility of an autonomous, active choosing of return to the critical consciousness of the Enlightenment would exist only to a limited degree. Kohn believed that Enlightenment was only possible in times of transition, when the faith or myth that casts its spell over individuality is either already senescent or else still indefinite.

Despite deep concerns for the future, Kohn found room for optimism. There is a conscious seeking for an ethical anchoring of nationalism," he observes; "People are going back to its idealistic beginnings, to Fichte and the French Revolution. They are lifting it from its narrow confined into worldwide light, trying to shift it from its involvement in the realm of being to the moral level of duty, from the present to the future.

There is a very clear similarity between Buber's speech and Kohn's essay. Kohn, like Buber, was concerned about the political goals of Zionism, especially as the movement related to the question of the Arabs in Palestine. In response to this impending crisis, Kohn presented an early formulation of what would later be called the Kohn Dichotomy. In this version, nationalism as a spiritual force for individual liberation is contrasted with rigid, uncompromising

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80 Kohn, Nationalism, 25.
81 Kohn, Nationalism, 23.
82 Kohn, Nationalism, 23.
83 Kohn, Nationalism, 27.
state-nationalism, which found its catharsis in World War I. This dichotomy also echoes Buber’s belief that nationalism, as a material state of being, is undesirable as a permanent condition.

During the early 1920s, Kohn wrote prolifically on the nature of Jewish nationalism. Highly significant among these writings are Nationalismus: Über die Bedeutung des Nationalismus in Judentum und in der Gegenwart (1922), which was an expansive version of the essay he published in Der Jude, along with other writings. He also published, in 1924, a short book entitled Die Politische Idee des Judentums.\(^{84}\) Noam Pianko has made the important observation that this book "reflects the great sense of optimism characterizing the early interwar period. Kohn envisioned a future governed by multi-national empires that would wipe out the belligerent nationalism he viewed as the cause of the Great War. A federated Palestine, with social, cultural and some degree of political autonomy for Arab and Jewish populations promised to usher in this age of depoliticized nationalism divorced from intractable territorial claims, exclusivist assertions and military might.\(^{85}\)

As we have seen, Kohn had already begun writing on the Arab Question while a prisoner in Siberia. He continued his explorations into Near Eastern nationalisms during his time in London and later in Palestine. These studies, unlike his work on Jewish nationalism and the majority of his later contributions, do not focus as much on the history of ideas as they seek to identify global changes as reflected in the development of Near Eastern nations. Kohn gives significant attention, for example, to the role of transportation and communication in the transformation of the Near East. The last of these works, a short book entitled Orient and Occident, served as Kohn’s statement on the history and future of the interaction of the Near and

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\(^{84}\) Hans Kohn, Die Politische Idee des Judentums (Munich: Meyer and Jessen, 1924).

Far East with the West. While these writings lacked the sophistication, both in research and style, of his later American contributions, certain themes are already pronounced in these early works. In *Orient and Occident*, for example, Kohn posits two Oriental spheres, those of the Near and Far East, which he believed intersected in the Indian subcontinent. Both of these spheres, Kohn argued, were in the process of a rapid transformation as a result of both imperialism and the willing assimilation of various aspects of European culture. In 1934, Kohn forecasted:

> The organization of mankind in vertical sections of rigidly secluded peoples and cultures gradually loses significance in the presence of the horizontal organization in ranks, classes and mental attitudes, which is found in all peoples. The globe, only half known seventy years ago, today has become geographically and culturally known and easily observable over its whole surface. It is growing into an intellectual and moral unity, based upon similar political, social and economic forms of the common life, which will produce a common level on which the future understanding between Orient and Occident, and the interchange of their ideas and good will be effected.

While acknowledging differences of culture and sensibility that, in part, would dictate the reception of Western modes of life and thought, Kohn believed that "the transitional forces which are culminating today in the new East are exemplary of similar forces throughout the whole worldé . European civilization, as it was known in the nineteenth century, is now a universal civilization." Thus, no culture or people had been unaffected by the "Age of

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87 Kohn, Orient and Occident, 10–11.
88 Kohn, Orient and Occident, 10.
Nationalism. The process of an increasingly unified world seemed to Kohn an irreversible trend and one that had to be met with understanding and concern.

**Brit Shalom**

Kohn’s search for an ethical anchoring of nationalism caused him to look to Palestine. His father, a man of traditional, middle class sensibilities, shook his head upon hearing of his son’s plan to migrate there. But Kohn, at least at that time, lacked his father’s bourgeois good sense and felt compelled to work towards his ideal of ethical nationalism in the Yishuv. Recently married to Yetty Wahl, Kohn settled in Jerusalem in 1925 and immediately became politically active. That same year he became a founding member of Brit Shalom.

*Brit Shalom* (translated as *Covenant of Peace*, i.e. *Peace Association*) was founded in 1925, by a small circle of Zionists who wished to push the central question of Arab and Jewish coexistence in Palestine from the fringes into the center of the Zionist program. According to Statute Three of *Brit Shalom*’s founding manifesto, *the object of the Association is to arrive at an understanding between Jews and Arabs as to the form of their mutual social relations in Palestine on the basis of absolute political equality of two culturally autonomous peoples*.  

While the *Brit Shalom* circle was founded, and officially centered, in Jerusalem, its membership was drawn primarily from Central European intellectuals. Like Kohn, many of these individuals, such as Gershom Scholem and Shmuel Hugo Bergmann had moved to Palestine in the years immediately following World War I. Others, such as Robert Weltsch, still resided in Central Europe and advocated the Association’s goals there. Martin Buber, who would not permanently

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89 Mendes-Flohr, ed. *A Land of Two Peoples*, 74: Reflecting its overall aims, *Brit Shalom*’s founding document was written in Hebrew, Arabic and English.
move to Palestine until 1938, was in many ways the movement’s spiritual and intellectual father as a result of his early influence on many of the members during their university years. Ahad Ha-am, widely considered the father of Cultural Zionism, also exerted a significant influence.

*Brit Shalom* was small, with never more than a hundred members, and was almost exclusively Central European containing no Middle Eastern Jews and only a few Eastern European Jews. Most importantly, the members had very few Arabs with whom they could speak, much less translate their ideas into political reality. This, according to Walter Laqueur, was the primary cause of the failure of the movement. Their analysis was astute, their sentiments praiseworthy, but they could not point to any practical political alternatives.\(^90\)

Hagit Lavsky explained the establishment of *Brit Shalom*, and the concomitant development of the binational idea in German Zionism as a response to the extremism of the Revisionist movement under Vladimir Jabotinsky.\(^91\) In *Die Arbeit*, the organ of *Hapoel Hatzair*, Robert Weltsch combated Jabotinsky’s advocacy of an iron wall policy against Arabs following the riots of 1921.\(^92\) The formation of *Brit Shalom* and the emergence of Jabotinsky’s Revisionist movement in 1925 were both, according to Lavsky, a response to the economic prosperity in Palestine, and their political conceptions were molded in reply to the same challenge.\(^93\)

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\(^92\) Lavsky, *Before Catastrophe*, 152–153: Jabotinsky advocated a permanent Jewish military unit as part of the larger British force which controlled Mandate Palestine.

\(^93\) Lavsky, *Before Catastrophe*, 162: Vladimir (Ze’ev) Jabotinsky (1880–1940) and his revisionist party represented the polar opposite ideology of the *Brit Shalom* circle regarding, among several other issues, their respective aspirations for a Jewish state, and their approaches to emigration. The best recent treatment of Jabotinsky can be found in Michael Stanislawski, *Zionism and the Fin de Siècle: Cosmopolitanism and Nationalism from Nordau to Jabotinsky* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press, 2001), especially chapters 6–9.
Notably, at the 14th Zionist Congress (1925) in Vienna, the newly formed Revisionist party pushed its agenda that in order to safeguard against the hostility of the Arab majority, the Zionist movement needed political intervention from outside powers, that emigration must increase and that free enterprise must be encouraged. Arthur Ruppin and Chaim Weizmann were the primary voices of opposition at the conference. Soon after the conference, Ruppin formed an alliance with Robert Weltsch, Shmuel Hugo Bergman and Hans Kohn (all former members of Bar Kochba). Further, Lavsky has pointed out that the events of the 14th Zionist congress hastened Kohn’s move to Palestine in that same year. Kohn, and others in his circle were compelled to take on an educational role as public intellectuals. Thus, at least at first according to Lavsky, Brit Shalom was an ideational and pedagogical circle more than an overtly political force.

While, Kohn, Bergman and Ruppin resided in Palestine, Robert Weltsch served as the voice of Brit Shalom in Germany, where he advocated the binational idea as editor of the Jüdische Rundschau. The members also pursued a somewhat tacit alliance with Chaim Weizmann, who made a secret financial contribution to the Association’s Hebrew publication, She’ifoteinu. Lavsky attributes the lack of mass support for Brit Shalom to the Association, and especially Robert Weltsch’s opposition to the establishment of a Jewish majority. Most German Zionists, who were opposed to the Revisionists, were drawn to the more moderate anti-Revisionism of Kurt Blumenfeld, a leader in Hapoel Hatzair.
In Lavsky’s view, the eventual breakdown of Brit Shalom was the result of the Association’s response to the Arab riots of 1929. In *Jüdische Rundschau*, Weltsch blamed the Zionist leadership for not achieving or pursuing agreements with Arab leaders, and also the British, who did not do enough to maintain order and security in Palestine. But Weltsch also placed significant blame on the Revisionists, arguing that their propaganda and lack of sensitivity to Muslim religious issues helped to incite the Arabs. 98 Significantly, the views of *Brit Shalom*, as expressed by Weltsch, were at odds with the official Zionist organization. This put the Association’s relationship with Weizmann and the mainstream Zionist movement in jeopardy and eventually led to the marginalization of *Brit Shalom* and their German supporters.

Ironically, Weizmann, who was once an ally of *Brit Shalom*, eventually gained increased support from Revisionists as a result of his more established and, compared to *Brit Shalom*, centrist orientation. 99

Shalom Ratzabi emphasizes that the rise of the Revisionist party necessitated, in the view of *Brit Shalom* members, a thorough reevaluation of what Zionism was. Weltsch, according to Ratzabi, held to the principle, developed by Buber, that Zionism was a return of the Jews to their Eastern, Oriental roots. Thus, the emphasis of Jabotinsky on *realpolitik*, and his insistence on the creation of a Jewish legion was directly at odds with their goal of lowering Šthe partition between politics and morality. Š100 Like Weltsch, Hans Kohn responded to Jabotinsky’s claim, that to acquire the land of Israel he would have to make a Š pact with the devil, Š by asserting that

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in such a case, the land of Israel as an embodiment of the spirit of Judaism could not, by
definition, be built.\textsuperscript{101}

Recently, Yfaat Weiss has sought to understand the ideology of Brit Shalom by contrasting
two of its founding members: Arthur Ruppin and Hans Kohn. According to Weiss, Kohn and
Ruppin had different ideas of what binationalism meant in the context of the Yishuv. Ruppin’s
ideal was separate equality. The immediate import of this approach was forthright support for
the view of separation of populations. As a result, when Ruppin arrived there he proposed a
restricted settlement plan involving the acquisition of two small territories, Judea and the Galilee,
which would provide the basis for Jewish autonomy in the future.\textsuperscript{102} Kohn, on the other hand,
avocated a solution based on the idealized memory of the Prague of his youth, one in which
ethnic Germans and ethnic Czechs were able to live side by side and flourish.

In 1926, Kohn published his binational plan in Ha-poel Ha-tsair. In this program, he
advocated regional administrations that would be composed of Jews as well as Arab Muslims
and Christians. Additionally, he advocated for the creation of various autonomous institutions
which would work on socio-national issues. These autonomous institutions would be the
carriers of the national development of both parts of the populace, who would be able in an
autonomous fashion and without interference, side by side to discover their talents and self-
images.\textsuperscript{103}

In the extent of its concern for the Araberfrage the Brit Shalom circle was, according to
Steven Aschheim, unique. In addition to focusing on the negative models from Central Europe

\textsuperscript{101} Ratzabi, Between Zionism and Judaism, 428.

\textsuperscript{102} Yfaat Weiss, Central European Ethnonationalism and Zionist Binationalism, 93–111.

\textsuperscript{103} Weiss, Central European Ethnonationalism and Zionist Binationalism, 102: Weiss appends this selection from Ha-poel Ha-tsair, July 9, 1926.
that these intellectuals tried to avoid, Aschheim emphasizes the crucial impact of the First World War on their views. Even though some of them, including Buber and Kohn, initially greeted the conflict with enthusiasm, they were dismayed by the brutal destruction caused by the war. Thus, the course of the war and its aftermath constituted a sobering lesson for these intellectuals and, understandably, they rejected Political Zionism’s strategy of alliances with external and imperial powers.\textsuperscript{104} Essentially, most of the members of Brit Shalom did not see statehood as an end in itself. Rather, due to their alienation from European-nationalistic models, they turned to what they understood to be the humanistic legacy of Judaism and desired a moral community or commonwealth in which this mission could be authentically realized.\textsuperscript{105}

Aschheim emphasizes the role of Bildung in the Jewish renaissance project that many of these intellectuals pursued in Palestine. However, this was not really a true symbiosis.\textsuperscript{106} German cultural values did not always translate well into Hebrew. Aschheim cites, for instance, Shmuel Hugo Bergmann\textsuperscript{106} lament that so many of his students did not have a sufficient command of German. Because German was, to Bergman and others, a Jewish language and the vital source of their cultural-moral mission, Bergman regarded the common acquisition of these sources of Bildung to be a crucial component of Arab-Jewish understanding.\textsuperscript{106} This can, in some ways, also relate to the charge of elitism that many mainstream Zionists made against the members of Brit Shalom. One such critique, which Aschheim quotes from a Revisionist party propaganda poster, charges that, they are not party to what takes place below: they reside above on the heights of a moral Olympus.\textsuperscript{107}

\textsuperscript{104} Aschheim, Beyond the Border, 16.
\textsuperscript{105} Aschheim, Beyond the Border, 16.
\textsuperscript{106} Aschheim, Beyond the Border, 20.
\textsuperscript{107} Aschheim, Beyond the Border, 36.
Perhaps it was the idealistic and elite nature of the circle that led, in part, to its relatively rapid dissolution. By 1933 it fell apart due to internal disagreements, lack of funding and restrictions on Jewish activity in Central Europe.\textsuperscript{108} Aschheim shows that following the Arab riots of 1929, the two “extreme” personalities of the movement rejected either Zionism (Kohn) or Brit Shalom (Ruppin) as unrealistic. Others, such as Bergman, Weltsch and Scholem, persisted through the early 1930s, in the belief that, despite difficulty, there was no other way to achieve security against further attacks than to engage in “reconciliatory politics” with the Arabs.\textsuperscript{109} As Aschheim observes, the worsening of the situation in Nazi Germany during the 1930s caused doubts among some members, (many of whom were now part of the Ihud’î an association in many ways descended from Brit Shalom), especially Scholem. When statehood became a reality in 1948, some such as Robert Weltsch left Palestine, while others such as Scholem, Buber and Bergman remained, “accepted statehood, and adapted their critique to the new circumstances.”\textsuperscript{110} As we will see, Hans Kohn never reconciled himself to the State of Israel.

Martin Buber, who had arguably become the most prominent philosopher of Central European Jewry, still resided in Germany during this time. Yet he had been intimately involved with Brit Shalom, as a member of the German chapter and as an inspiration to its members in Palestine. Buber was also a formidable, if somewhat radical, force in the Zionist movement as a whole.

\begin{footnotes}
\item[109] Aschheim, \textit{Beyond the Border}, 40.
\item[110] Aschheim, \textit{Beyond the Border}, 41.
\end{footnotes}
While in Palestine, Kohn wrote a biography of Buber entitled *Martin Buber: sein Werk und seine Zeit.*\(^{111}\) His introduction to this work further developed the connection between nationalism and religion. Jewish nationalism, especially as expressed in the thought of Buber, was a product of the tension between religious revival (Hasidism) and Enlightenment (*Haskalah*). For his part, Buber continued to hold Kohn in great esteem and in May of 1929 he recommended to Chaim Weizmann that Kohn be appointed to the Hebrew University’s new chair in *international peace.*\(^{111}\) Buber wrote, "I am referring to Dr. Kohn who has shown an extraordinarily favorable development over the period of approximately twenty years in which I have known him."\(^{112}\) Regarding Kohn as one of the few "genuinely scholarly minds" of the movement, Buber saw the new chair as an opportunity for Kohn to contribute to the movement and develop the comprehensive book he is preparing about nations and states.\(^{113}\) Though Kohn was not appointed to the aforementioned position, an appointment of this sort may well have been to little purpose, for his stay in Palestine would last but a few more years.

Christian Wiese has analyzed the relationship between Hans Kohn and Robert Weltsch during these crucial years. Their correspondence reveals, according to Wiese, an ambivalence expressed with special eloquence in relation to the choice between preserving and relinquishing long-held ideals.\(^{114}\) They struggled with the ideas and hopes that defined their Zionism in

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\(^{111}\) Hans Kohn, *Martin Buber: sein Werk und seine Zeit* (Krln: Joseph Melzer Verlag, 1961). Kohn traced Buber’s life and thought from his early *breakthrough* (*Der Durchbruch*) to his mature thought (*Die Reife*), in which Buber’s philosophy, as developed in *I and Thou*, posited the substance of the world not as the sum of disparate, distinct entities, but as *relation* (*Beziehung*) itself. While Kohn acknowledges that Buber moved beyond the nineteenth-century idealism set in motion by Kant’s *Copernican revolution*, he is emphatic that Buber’s mature thought would be *unthinkable* (*nicht denkbar*) without Kant and the Kantians (244).

\(^{112}\) Glatzer and Mendes-Flohr, eds., *The Letters of Martin Buber*, 363.

\(^{113}\) Glatzer and Mendes-Flohr, eds., *The Letters of Martin Buber*, 363.

Prague. In his autobiography, Kohn quotes an article written in 1925 by Robert Weltsch. Weltsch pointed out, in what he would later recall as the article he was most proud of, that “The public opinion of the world cannot forget the existence of a large native population in Palestine; the growing sympathy with the aspirations toward national self-determination of native peoples will make Zionism unpopular in many circles, not out of antipathy with its essence nor out of anti-Judaism but out of consideration for the natural rights of the Arabs.” Kohn quotes Weltsch’s article because “they express so well the character of the Zionism we believed in before and immediately after World War I.”

In 1927, Kohn and Weltsch published a collection of their essays entitled Zionistische Politik. In one of Kohn’s chapters, “Bücher zur zionistischen Ideologie,” we find Kohn’s continued debt to Martin Buber’s conception of Zionism. Here, Kohn splits the Zionist movement into two camps based on “objectives” and worldviews. The first trend, that of Moses Hess and Peretz Smolenskin (here Kohn refers to him as “Smolensky”), culminated in the Hebraic thought of Ahad Ha-am, which imbued this trend with the necessary preservation of the Jewish tradition. The other trend, found in the thought of Leo Pinsker and Theodore Herzl, was based on the assumption that the Jewish people were “not distinguished” (nicht unterschieden) from others peoples in their primary objectives, and political needs. Thus, this trend was strongly rooted in the present ideologies of European nationalism.

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115 Kohn, Living in a World Revolution, 51.
116 Kohn, Living in a World Revolution, 53.
117 Hans Kohn, Zionistische Politik (Mährisch-Ostrau, Czechoslovakia: Verlag Dr. R. Färber, 1927). As we will see in Chapter Five, Kohn later published many of these essays in English translation in The Menorah Journal.
118 Kohn, Zionistische Politik, 108.
Given the mutual hostility of Brit Shalom and the Revisionist party, Kohn’s assessment of Vladimir Jabotinsky is especially pertinent. Here Kohn, in effect, puts Jabotinsky outside of these two trends. Though Kohn notes, for example, that Jabotinsky was a student of Herzl’s ideology as embodied in the *Jewish State*, he points out that there were several aspects to Herzl’s thought as expressed in *Altneuland* (1902) and other writings that went beyond his famous pamphlet. Yet Jabotinsky, Kohn asserts, lacked these dynamic elements of vision and leadership. Rather, in his elevation of strong, decisive action and his advocacy of military strength, he imitated French and Italian imperial models. The politics of Revisionism, in Kohn’s view, were a dangerous rejection of the understanding of democracy and moderation that Sir. Herbert Samuel and Chaim Weizmann sought to establish in Palestine.

Despite similar struggles, the respective paths of Kohn and Weltsch, though not their friendship, split with regard to the future of the Zionist movement and their respective places in it. Kohn, who had been writing his biography of Martin Buber, became increasingly distanced from the ideals of his teacher. He especially questioned whether they could actually be implemented within the realities of Palestine.

Indeed, the Zionist movement in Palestine and its failure to achieve a real Jewish-Arab rapprochement increasingly discouraged Kohn. On August 23, 1929 when eight days of Arab riots began, Kohn decided to leave not only Palestine but Zionism. Adi Gordon

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120 Kohn, *Zionistische Politik*, 118: In this regard, Kohn is closer to Buber than to Ahad Ha-am. Ahad Ha-am harshly criticized Herzl’s *Altneuland* in the Zionist press, see Zipperstein, *Elusive Prophet*, 194–200. Martin Buber had a far more complicated relationship with Herzl and, though not uncritical of the work and approach, found several redeeming elements of *Altneuland*, see Maurice Friedman, *Martin Buber’s Life and Work* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1988), 71.


has opened an important window onto this decisive period of Kohn’s life.\textsuperscript{123} Gordon demonstrates that while the year 1929 did indeed represent a decisive break for Kohn, his frustrations had been growing steadily since his move to Palestine in 1925. Gordon demonstrates that during the year prior to the riots Kohn already felt great frustration with the impotence of Brit Shalom, which he, in part, blamed on Arthur Ruppin. He was also deeply affected by the murder of two Arabs by Jews in front of his Jerusalem residence.\textsuperscript{124} Further, while Kohn was at the vanguard, and certainly saw himself as such, in advocating binationalism, he abandoned this idea, at least in its original form, as well prior to leaving the movement. Fearing the practical implementation of a binational model, Gordon notes that Kohn came to advocate a protected minority status for the Jews of Palestine, under the aegis of the British Empire.\textsuperscript{125} Though Kohn was not in Palestine, and thus did not personally witness the violence of 1929, his prior experiences, and correspondences, must have allowed him to fully imagine the severity of the riots.\textsuperscript{126} He wrote to Buber only days after the riots began: ‘The events in Palestine are very bad. All of us share in the blame, for we should never have let things come to such a pass.’ He further tied the violence directly to the increasing power of the Revisionists: ‘Great misfortune will flow from this revisionist victory even if they achieve their aim (\textit{legion}): years of hatred, military suppression, the moral defeat of Zionism!’ Kohn’s final words in this letter foreshadowed

\textsuperscript{123} Gordon, \textit{Prishat Hans Kohn}, 68.
\textsuperscript{124} Gordon, \textit{Prishat Hans Kohn}, 70.
\textsuperscript{125} Gordon, \textit{Prishat Hans Kohn}, 68.
\textsuperscript{126} Gordon, \textit{Prishat Hans Kohn}, 71: Kohn was in Europe at the time though followed events closely from afar.
the sense of defeat that would lead to his resignation: "with us it is as it was with the
Germans in the World War. And it will seen be too late."

Kohn’s departure from Palestine was due to what he understood to be the inability of the
Zionist movement to put its ideals into action. Instead, the riots indicated to Kohn that the
suppression of the Arabs by the Jews would lead to continued violence in the future.

Kohn’s letter of resignation reflects many of these sentiments and also focuses on the
spiritual state of Zionism and the Jews in Palestine. His letter was addressed to Berthold Feiwel
and also sent to Martin Buber. Dated November 21, 1929, it includes Kohn's explanation of
his reasons for resigning his position and leaving Palestine. Kohn noted that for him, Zionism
was a "moral-cum-spiritual" movement. The Jews in Europe could not live out the pacifistic
ideals demanded by their tradition in the context of countries that did not share their ideals.
Rather than being seen as traitors to the national causes of the societies in which they lived, the
Zionists (at least his ideal Zionists) decided to form a new society. Yet by 1929, Kohn’s ideal
had failed to move most of the Zionists in Palestine. The Arab question, for Kohn, became the
"moral touchstone" of Zionism. He emphasized that his advocacy of humanitarian treatment of
the native Arab populace was "not prompted by any particular sympathy with the Arabs." In
fact, Kohn goes on to say, he was not really concerned with the Arabs at all but with "the Jews,
their Jewishness, and the confirmation of their humane [values]."

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127 Glatzer and Mendes-Flohr, eds., Letters of Martin Buber, 370.
128 Though Feiwel was the director of Keren Ha-yesod and was thus the natural recipient of this letter, the meaning
and connection here goes deeper. Feiwel had been a presence in Kohn’s youth and development. He was an elder-
statesman of the Zionist movement, a former collaborator with Herzl and, along with Martin Buber and Chaim
Weizmann, formed the democratic faction at the Fifth Zionist Congress. He was also an influential figure among
the Bar Kochba students due to his focus on Diaspora Zionist culture.
129 Though Kohn decided to leave following the riots in August of 1929, he did not actually leave Palestine
permanently until 1933.
130 Mendes-Flohr, ed. A Land of Two Peoples, 98.
Kohn disregarded the Arabs and their rights. In the same letter he criticizes the *Yishuv* community for relying upon Great Britain’s military might to crush the Arab uprisings. Kohn regarded the Zionists as immigrants to an Arab land, and he chastises the settlers for failing to come to Palestine with constitutional proposals which "without doing serious harm to Arab rights and liberty, would also have allowed for our free cultural and social development."\(^\text{131}\)

Kohn’s complete abandonment of Zionism reflected, in Martin Buber’s view, his student’s "doctrinaire" nature.\(^\text{132}\) Paul Mendes-Flohr observes that Kohn’s letter and his overall rejection of the state of Zionism in the *Yishuv* posed serious challenges to Martin Buber’s own intellectual system:

Kohn’s resignation from the Zionist movement posed a profound challenge to Buber’s own Zionism. He regarded Kohn as one of his most talented and devoted disciples within the movement. Indeed, on the eve of his resignation, Kohn was completing a monumental biography of Buber. In this nuanced and still unsurpassed study, which traces Buber’s intellectual development through the first three decades of the twentieth century, Kohn presented Buber’s struggle to shape Zionist policy as the practical reflex of his philosophical and religious teachings. In his letters to Buber and Feiwel justifying his decision to leave Zionism, Kohn by implication suggested that this struggle was in vain and that his critique of the Zionist reality was consonant with, indeed, demanded by Buber’s own teachings.\(^\text{133}\)

Following the Arab riots and his decision to leave Palestine, Kohn still maintained a residence in Jerusalem but traveled widely, lecturing in the United States and Europe. He

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\(^{131}\) Mendes-Flohr, ed. *A Land of Two Peoples*, 99.


\(^{133}\) Mendes-Flohr, ed. *A Land of Two Peoples*, 101.
was also quite prolific. Working as a foreign correspondent for the *Frankfurter Zeitung*, he traveled to the Soviet Union in the summer of 1931 and published *Nationalism in the Soviet Union* soon after.¹³⁴

Kohn completed his biography of Martin Buber in 1930 and after two prior trips in 1931 and 1933, he moved permanently to the United States in 1934. Developments in Europe would soon shift Kohn’s focus away from Palestine and Zionism and towards the alarming developments in Europe of the mid-1930s.

While visiting the United States in 1933 under the auspices of the Institute for International Adult Education, Kohn was invited to lecture at the New School for Social Research. While there, he was discovered by the president of Smith College, William Allen Neilson who, impressed by Kohn’s skills as a teacher and thinker, quickly arranged for him to join the faculty of Smith as Professor of Modern History.¹³⁵ Though he would have preferred to secure a position in England, Kohn accepted the appointment.¹³⁶ He moved his wife and son to

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¹³⁴ Hans Kohn, *Nationalism in the Soviet Union* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1933), vii. As we will see in Chapter Five, Kohn’s initial impressions of the United States were largely negative. This was reflected in Kohn’s assertion at the beginning of this book that “Communism challenges the West, in an incomparably deeper and more spiritual way than America (xi).” Yet Kohn also realized the challenges of implementing communism’s spiritual idea in the Soviet Union when circumstances necessitated rapid industrialization by means of Stalin’s Five Year Plan (4).

¹³⁵ Journalist Edward R. Murrow, who at the time worked for the Institute for International Education, responded to a request from William Neilson for information about Hans Kohn and procedures for his appointment. Murrow responded that the policy was to give $2,000 to the institution and a matching sum would be granted by the Rockefeller Foundation. At the time, Murrow reported, Kohn was involved with roundtables for the adult education experiment in Des Moines, Iowa. Kohn would not qualify for funding through the displaced scholars fund, but his position was largely covered by the Rockefeller foundation. See E.R. Murrow to William A. Neilson, Oct 16 1933, *William A. Neilson Papers*, Box 15, Folder 28, Smith Correspondence, Smith Archives, Northhampton Mass.

¹³⁶ Kohn wrote to Judah Magnes that a teaching position in England, at the London School of Economics, was the possibility he “cherished most.” See Hans Kohn to Judah Magnes, 29 November, 1933. In HKC, Box 2, Folder 2. This fact is omitted from his memoir.
Northampton, Massachusetts and quickly felt great loyalty to his new home, the United States. He wrote decisively and proudly to Martin Buber, "My son will be an American."  

Conclusion

Though certainly not limited to Jewish issues in his writings and interests, we have seen that Hans Kohn’s life from 1908–1934 primarily revolved around his Jewish and Zionist affiliations and concerns. His major sources of income were through his Zionist connections. Through Bar Kochba and Brit Shalom, he sought to develop and advocate a humanistic, prophetic Zionism that could provide a redemptive model of moral nationalism and ethical co-existence between two peoples who lived at the intersection of East and West, Orient and Occident. By the late 1920s, Kohn was largely discouraged with regard to the outcome. Following the Arab riots, he lacked both full-time employment, and the rootedness in a cause that had defined his life for over two decades. However, as we shall see, Kohn quickly, and for him fortunately, found a new home, not only in Massachusetts, but in the spiritual cause of liberal democracy and the legacy of the Enlightenment. Despite these changes, certain motifs carried over from his earlier work. First and foremost among them was his conviction and emphasis that problems of civilization had become, in fact, global problems. How to explain this reality, in English, to American audiences, marked a very new challenge for Kohn, defining the next stage of his life and work.

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137 Kohn, Living in a World Revolution, 158.

138 Glatzer and Mendes Flohr, eds., The Letters of Martin Buber, 17.
Chapter Two

America and the Crisis Abroad: 1933–1945

Reflecting on the historian’s craft and calling in a 1958 essay, Hans Kohn wrote, “An historian is not just a scholar and to a certain extent, an artist; he should also be a teacher.” It is incumbent upon historians, he argues, not only to teach their field in the context of the academy, but also to instruct their fellow men; in a democratic age history has become the concern of everybody, and the right teaching of history may be fundamental to the moral and political wisdoms of people. This chapter explores the most crucial period of Kohn’s career as an instructor of his fellow men.

Kohn’s permanent move to the United States in 1934 coincided with the escalating seriousness of events in Europe, namely the ascent to power of National Socialism in Germany and the strengthening of Benito Mussolini’s Fascist regime in Italy. While these developments alarmed Kohn greatly, they had little if any impact on the isolationist convictions widespread in many American political and intellectual circles. In his autobiography, Kohn recalled, “In the 1920s and 1930s, most of Western Europe and North America refused to acknowledge the revolution that overturned the foundations of traditional European life and as a reaction produced fascism.”

It was at this time, as Adi Gordon points out, that Kohn, whose process of Americanization unfolded in the framework of his anti-isolationist activities, calling for the

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2 Kohn, Living in a World Revolution, 170.
United States to lead the war against Nazi Germany, seems to have quickly abandoned his earlier commitments to pacifism. It was also in this context that Kohn took on the role of a teacher committed to informing the moral and political wisdoms of people, and became, not only Americanized, but an American public intellectual. He authored several works designed to interpret contemporary events in Europe for an American audience, many of them based upon lectures given at Harvard University and in other forums as part of his broader campaign to fight American apathy, fear and isolationism.

The purpose of this chapter is to survey Kohn’s major writings and intellectual struggles during the lead up to American involvement in World War II, and after the formal entry of the United States into the war. We shall assert that the primary goals of Kohn’s intellectual and public activities during this time were: to challenge isolationism by explicating, through various formulations of his dichotomy, the ideological basis of fascist states and how they differed from Western democracies, to downplay the relative threat of communism and, after 1941, to support the Allied efforts while trying to emphasize an enlightened American creed that stood above the chauvinism and dehumanization inherent in war. All the while, Kohn engaged in a private struggle to save as many of his friends and family members as possible, as he saw the European world, in which he came of age, collapse.

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4 Kohn himself understood these works as a specific unit. In the final installment, *World Order in Historical Perspective*, he begins, "This volume concludes a series of books of which the first was written in 1936, when the Second World War started; this the fourth appears in 1942. See Hans Kohn, *World Order in Historical Perspective* (Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1942), vii."
Against Isolation

Kenneth Wolf has observed that although Kohn’s writings during the 1930s and early 1940s are tracts and not histories, they cannot be overlooked in an appraisal of his contribution to twentieth-century historiography. They are, in a broad sense, the position papers of a liberal humanist. In them, Kohn wrote in a clear, distinct tone. He employed stark contrasts in order to convince his readers that the totalitarian crisis was a radical, unprecedented development in the context of European history and that the United States would need to play an important role on the global stage in defending the values of liberal, rational democracy.

In analyzing Kohn’s work from this period, we must be conscious, in addition to the threat abroad, of the American context in which he functioned. Not only were many academics, intellectuals and politicians fearful of communism, which led a good number of them to downplay fascism, but several prominent figures—among them Henry Ford and Charles Lindbergh—were not only isolationists, but expressed sincere and public admiration for fascist leaders, ideas and regimes prior to World War Two.

At the time that Kohn began to write and speak about the role of the United States in the European conflict, American public opinion could hardly have been less in tune with his intentions. In 1936, there was near unanimity among American citizens that the United States

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should have no involvement in any future European war. These convictions among the public were further bolstered by the findings of the congressional committee led by North Dakota Senator Gerald Nye. The Nye Committee, which met from 1934–1936 investigated the role of the munitions industry and international finance in the entry of the United States in World War I, concluding that vested interests and greedy bankers had deceived the American public two decades earlier. With popular support, the United States Congress passed a number of Neutrality Acts. The Acts of 1935, 1936 and 1937 in particular limited President Franklin Roosevelt’s executive power to aid foreign countries through the sale and transport of arms.

Even closer to Kohn’s immediate context, American universities were often staging grounds for Nazi propaganda. Especially in the early years of Hitler’s regime, the lack of understanding that Kohn sought to address was in fact quite widespread. Despite the strong anti-fascist convictions of Smith College’s president, William Allan Neilson, and the general receptiveness of the Smith community to refugee scholars, sympathy with Nazism could even be found at Kohn’s new home institution. In the year that Kohn joined the Smith College faculty, for instance, a public forum was held in which four Smith professors reported on their recent trip to Germany. Each of them minimized the Nazi regime’s suppression of civil rights and freedom of the press. They also reported on “alleged” anti-Semitic policies: “Some professors stated that Germany’s Jews had controlled the banks, stores, and press until the Nazis came to power.”

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8 Jonas, Isolationism in America, 144–147.


Significantly downplaying Hitler’s anti-Semitic campaign, they asserted his regime was only concerned with Russian and Polish Communist Jews who had invaded Germany after the World War, posing serious danger to national unity.¹²

This context had a strong impact on Kohn’s polemical approach during these years. Surely, anti-Semitic policies made the threat of Nazism all the graver for many of Kohn’s friends and, after Hitler’s invasion of Czechoslovakia, for his family. As Stephen Whitfield has explained, though secular Jewish intellectuals, like Kohn, may not have pointed to explicitly Jewish elements of the threat, there were certain common characteristics to many of their assessments.¹³ Unlike their non-Jewish peers who may have shared their liberal commitments, Jewish intellectuals rarely grappled with the same initial uncertainties regarding the Nazi regime, especially as they may have related to the threat of communism. Rather, their condemnation of Hitler and the Nazis was almost always direct and unqualified. Kohn, as Whitfield explicitly acknowledges, was at the vanguard among his peers.¹⁴ While it is unlikely that Kohn sought to hide his Jewishness in these writings, he rarely spoke of specifically Jewish concerns. Nor did he publically refer to the highly personal element of the crisis. Rather, he approached the public that he addressed as an insider as an American.¹⁵


¹⁴ Whitfield, “The Imagination of Disaster,” 3: The essay on communism and fascism that Whitfield refers to is dealt with later in this chapter.

¹⁵ This despite the fact that Kohn did not become a citizen until 1941.
Defining the Threat: Fascism and its Worldview

Though the settlement at Versailles which ended the First World War affirmed and elevated democracy, the foundations for parliamentary democracy throughout much of Europe were in fact quite feeble. Few nations could claim any significant experience with it, and with the threat of communism looming, it was far from self-evident that liberal democracy was the most desirable or realistic approach to the deep and varying problems of inter-war Europe. As we have seen, Kohn’s experiences during World War I led him to turn increasingly away from neo-romanticism and toward Enlightenment thought and the global challenge of peace. Yet the most prominent voices of inter-war Europe often held diametrically opposite views. As Mark Mazower explains Anti-liberal and anti-democratic creeds had been gaining ground since the last quarter of the nineteenth century. In the wake of the Great War, they spread fast, through a gospel of violence most visible in the fascist movement. Reared on war, extremist ideologues preferred violence to reason, action to rhetoric. Kohn labeled the followers of this gospel of violence the Cult of Force.

For many Jewish intellectuals, including Kohn, the Nazi regime was the specific target. Although, as Whitfield has suggested, this may have been due to the relative lack of explicit anti-Semitism in Italy, it is also likely that many of these intellectuals recognized qualitative differences between these two forms of fascism.

As opposed to the Nazi state, Mussolini’s Fascist regime was consolidated more gradually, and in a less organized fashion. Even after his March on Rome in 1922, Mussolini was still subject to criticism from the press and was unable to immediately eliminate major

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elements of opposition for a number of years. Further, Mussolini's elevation of ‘struggle’ began as, and remained for over a decade, a primarily internal affair – the upbuilding of Italian production and infrastructure. Yet during the 1930s, as Eugen Weber emphasizes the Italian economy would flag no longer under colossal building projects, but under the burden of more murderous campaigns, the series of military enterprises that kept the country at war from 1935 to 1945. As we will see, Kohn criticized the Ethiopian campaign in a particularly pointed way, he used the words of Mussolini and Giovanni Gentile to define fascism, and he decried the general abuses of the Italian regime. Yet, like his peers, Kohn directed the vast majority of his invective against Hitler’s Germany.

Thus, in addition to their more radical, racially focused nationalism, the Germans, unlike the Italians, had the capacity to challenge the continent’s major powers. The Munich agreement reflected the hopes of many western statesmen that Hitler would turn those energies eastward. Yet one element that united both regimes was the explicit and unequivocal rejection of Western liberalism as symbolized by the French Revolution. Mussolini declared his movement the ‘sheer categorical definitive antithesis to the world which still abides by the principles laid down in 1789.’ In 1933 Goebbels addressed the entire German nation by radio: ‘The year 1789 is hereby eradicated from history.’ While such statements rattled Kohn, it was not apparent to most Americans during the 1930s that the eradication of 1789 would impact them personally.

20 Wilford, ‘Fascism’, 144.
Thus Kohn had to define for his audiences the greater meaning of Western liberalism and the connections between 1688, 1776 and 1789.

**Confronting Escalating Crises**

Already in 1932, prior to the ascendency of Hitler in Germany, Kohn had corresponded with the young American historian of nationalism, Koppel Pinson²¹ about the necessity of a work that explained Nazi ideology to English-speaking audiences.²² Once in the United States, Kohn did this himself under far more pressing circumstances. The first of Kohn’s *position papers,* *Force or Reason,* was based upon his lectures at the Harvard Summer School in July of 1936. It was in this work that Kohn laid down his central arguments about the nature and threat of fascist regimes. Yet, despite his alarm, at the time *Force or Reason* was published, in 1937, it seems that he still did not anticipate the extent to which Germany would actually act on Nazi totalitarian ideology.

On October 27, 1937, Kohn addressed the increased tensions between Germany and Czechoslovakia before the Smith College community.²³ His remarks, delivered the autumn prior to the Pact of Munich, are quite revealing with regard to his own expectations for the future of

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²¹ Koppel Shub Pinson (1904–1961) was a junior colleague and close friend of Kohn. He earned his doctorate at Columbia University in 1934, under the direction of Carleton Hayes, where he wrote on *Pietism as a Factor in the Rise of German Nationalism.* Pinson was also deeply involved in Jewish life and scholarship. He wrote, among other important works, one of the first studies of the Jewish DPs after World War II. See Koppel Pinson, *Jewish Life in Liberated Germany: A Study of the Jewish DPs,* *Jewish Social Studies,* 9 (1947): 101–126.

²² Hans Kohn to Koppel Pinson, June 30 1932 in KPC Folder 1/1A. Kohn also suggested that such a volume would sell quite well.

²³ See *Prof. Kohn: October 27, 1937,* in Smith College Archives, Northampton Massachusetts. Hans Kohn Chapel Talks, Box 892, Folder 4. These chapel talks were in fact mandatory for the student body. We can therefore assume that Kohn spoke before hundreds of students and members of the Smith faculty and administration at each of these addresses.
Europe and of peace. Kohn demonstrated significant optimism in this speech about the future of democracy in Britain and France. Fascism would continue, he was certain, in Germany and Italy. The rest of the continent, especially in Central and South-Eastern Europe, he believed, would be pulled between these two forces. It was politically vital for Hitler, Kohn argued, to bully Czechoslovakia in order to unite, through intimidation, Central and Eastern Europe under a German-led system of "vassal states." This, he believed, would be for the economic benefit of Germany and would bring further domestic support to the Nazi leadership.

Kohn was adamant, however, in his belief that Germany would not attack Czechoslovakia: "I wish to say that there is no danger of war..." Germany, he reasoned, would consider the risk of attack too great. Pointing to the recent confrontations in Spain, he asserted that the struggle in Spain has proven that it is in no way easy to crush even an unarmed country by quick attack and it would take much more to defeat a government as strongly organized and well-armed as the Czechoslovakian government. Having just returned from a trip to Prague, Kohn assured his audience that among those in the Czechoslovakian capital there was much less nervousness about the possibility of a future war than I find in Northampton or New York.

In 1937, Kohn did not anticipate that France and Britain would capitulate to Hitler's desire to occupy the Sudetenland. The occupation and the quick success of the Nazis in forming actual vassal states shook Kohn, as did Hitler's entry into his native Prague later that year. Force or Reason was republished in 1938 under the shadow of the Pact of Munich, as Kohn continued

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24 Prof. Kohn: October 27, 1937.
26 Prof. Kohn: October 27, 1937.
27 See Kohn Diary/App. Book, 15 March 1939, HKC, Box 5, Folder 29: Hitler in Prague!!! What a disaster!
giving lectures in a variety of forums, and writing updated works on the worsening situation abroad.\textsuperscript{28}

In this work, the first in what would become a wartime series, Kohn analyzes (in three chapters) the Cult of Force, its Dethronement of Reason and the Crisis of Imperialism that, he argued, made the contemporary events in Europe of universal concern. As with other writings of this time, Kohn’s approach takes on a decidedly polemical character. He blends political theory and homiletics with historical analysis in an attempt to understand and explicate the revolution whose reaction produced fascism.

In the first chapter of \textit{Force or Reason}, Kohn commences with an analysis of the nineteenth century. He observes that for those of his own generation, who had lived through the First World War, the events and figures of 1789 and its aftermath were almost vividly understandable. As opposed to the generations of 1815 and 1830, figures like Robespierre, the Terror and the Counterterror no longer appear to us who have witnessed the post-war transformations in Europe so strange and unique, nor so inhuman as they did in the nineteenth century.\textsuperscript{29} Although, Kohn notes that the post-Napoleonic nineteenth century was not without conflict, it did not experience the same upheaval as the generations of the late eighteenth-century revolutions. As a result, he argues, many of the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-centuries took for granted and almost disregarded the long struggle for liberty and reason in which their forbearers had engaged. According to Kohn, these generations were dazzled by the bright picture of the progress of rational and liberal humanism in the nineteenth century and as a result often overlooked or failed to appreciate the portentous consequences

\textsuperscript{28} Hans Kohn, \textit{Force or Reason} (Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1938), xxiv.

\textsuperscript{29} Kohn, Force or Reason, 12.
which some of the tendencies, which had made themselves felt as the nineteenth century drew towards its end, would have in the future.\(^{30}\) Though unknown to his readers, Kohn spoke here from personal experience, having been involved in metaphysically charged national movements as a youth. As we have seen, it was only following the disastrous First World War that he and many other Central-European intellectuals of the “generation of 1914” began to consider these portentous consequences of the late nineteenth century.

In Kohn’s view, the Cult of Force which grew out of the (mainly Central and Eastern European) national movements and volk ideologies of the late nineteenth century had pervaded certain rapidly growing and powerful states of Europe and threatened Western European democracies such as Britain and France. Perhaps the least threatened of all modern nations, both internally and externally, during the middle and late 1930s was the United States. This, for Kohn, lent special importance to his new home.

Because the United States, as of 1936, faced no dire threat from The Cult of Force, Kohn believed it was the best vantage point from which to understand the current crisis. He emphasized to his audience that, “it is here today that we are both allowed to discuss all the aspects of the crisis with full liberty and that it is incumbent upon us to do so, because we are enough involved in the crisis to understand it and distant enough from its emotional confusion to analyze it and to gauge its consequences.”\(^{31}\) Further, he explained, the United States was “the first country in the world to found its whole political life on the principles of the age of rationalism and enlightenment embodied in the Bill of Rights…”\(^{32}\) Thus, because the United States lacked the aristocratic, feudal foundations of Europe, its founders were able to import the

\(^{30}\) Kohn, Force or Reason, 14.

\(^{31}\) Kohn, Force or Reason, 16.

\(^{32}\) Kohn, Force or Reason, 14.
best political traditions of England and the European Enlightenment and apply them to a clean slate.

Recent critics have rightfully pointed out that Kohn’s blatant glorification of the “Anglo-American tradition” is, at times, misleading from a historical point of view. André Liebich, for example, has argued that Kohn understood America as an entirely linear extension of Englishness and his admiring attitude towards the United States was an extension of his pronounced anglophilia. Kohn seems to have regarded the relationship as one of immaculate conception. It is not our task in this context to determine the accurateness of Kohn’s views of the Anglo-American political tradition, but rather to take note of the sincerity of his viewpoint, especially insofar as it concerned increasingly dire circumstances. It was Kohn’s firm belief in the potential of liberal democracy that led him to attribute such an important role to the United States and to fight isolationism so passionately. Further, while anti-British sentiment was by no means the primary motivation for the vast majority of isolationists, it was generally a factor for many non-interventionists. After the outbreak of war in Europe, Kohn would place even more emphasis on, not only the common traditions, but the common interests of the United States and Great Britain.

From this point, Kohn proceeds to analyze current events through the dichotomy that has remained a large part of his lasting legacy. He argues that the long nineteenth century, which began with the French and American revolutions, represented a degree of civilization to which no other period of history, except for, perhaps, that of ancient Greece, could compare. Both periods, according to Kohn, were characterized by humanism, optimism regarding man’s place

33 Liebich, Searching for the Perfect Nation, 588.
34 See Jonas, Isolationism in America, 194–197.
in the world, and, quite anachronistically, "life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness."\textsuperscript{35} Unlike in ancient Greece, however, in nineteenth-century Europe these values were not limited to the confines of the \textit{polis}; rather they were universalized and extended to various groups and classes through the melding of the Greek and Judeo-Christian traditions that served as the foundation of Western Civilization and consciousness.\textsuperscript{36} In this age dominated by reason, Kohn argues, "the application of force still remained necessary, but it was to be used only so far as it was strictly avoidable."\textsuperscript{37} In this context force "remained in the background as an \textit{ultima ratio},"\textsuperscript{37} but "as far as men and governments used force, they did it with a bad conscience."\textsuperscript{38}

Even if gauged according to Kohn’s own historical writing, this characterization of the nineteenth century as a halcyon era of reasoned and peacefully restrained politics is, at best, too simplistic.\textsuperscript{39} Yet this picture of a peaceful order provided him, on a polemical level, with an excellent contrast to the emerging "Cult of Force." Though Kohn was well aware that the national embrace of force found its precedent in intellectual and political traditions of the nineteenth century, he believed that they were crystallized and actually gained legitimacy during World War I. Kohn asserts, for example, that "During the War, force became legitimate, not only in relations between states but even within the state. Everywhere civil liberties and the right of free discussions were curtailed or suspended."\textsuperscript{40} Both in terms of war and intellectual life, the

\textsuperscript{35} Kohn, \textit{Force or Reason}, 17: though Kohn does not make a distinction here, it is fair to say he would not have included the last third of the nineteenth century in this description.

\textsuperscript{36} Kohn, \textit{Force or Reason}, 18–19. See the first chapter of Kohn’s Idea of Nationalism (Israel and Hellas) for a more detailed and nuanced discussion.

\textsuperscript{37} Kohn, \textit{Force or Reason}, 19.

\textsuperscript{38} Kohn, \textit{Force or Reason}, 19.

\textsuperscript{39} See, for instance, Kohn’s discussion of Bismarck below.

\textsuperscript{40} Kohn, \textit{Force or Reason}, 19.
First World War represented a watershed that had allowed the "Cult of Force" to gain political and popular legitimacy. Kohn articulated both of these elements to his audience, beginning with the revolutionary ideology on which this "cult" was based.

On the level of ideology, Kohn takes specific aim at Carl Schmitt. Schmitt's thought, Kohn points out, is posited on the "inescapable antagonism between friend and enemy." For Carl Schmitt, mutual antagonism was the raison d'être of politics itself. Further, Schmitt argued, because the pre-constitutional, collective friend-enemy distinction was inseparable from the political, a completely pacified globe, would be a world without the distinction of friend and enemy and hence a world without politics... there would not be a meaningful antithesis whereby men could be required to sacrifice life, authorized to shed blood, and kill other human beings.

For Kohn, this construct reflects one of the primitive instincts of mankind, which in rationally based politics, is overcome by law, by compromise, by every effort at a peaceful and friendly settlement. The popularization of Schmitt's political theory represented, he believed, the unique intellectual climate of the post-War world where force became identified as a "master builder." It was this climate that allowed, and encouraged, a radical form of nationalist discourse, previously unknown, to thrive. Kohn cites, for instance, Adolf Hitler's vision, found in Mein Kampf, of the victorious sword of a master people which brings the world into the service of a higher culture. He argues that, even in the context of militant, Prussian-style

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41 Kohn, Force or Reason, 20.
43 Schmitt, The Concept of the Political, 35.
44 Kohn, Force or Reason, 20.
45 Kohn, Force or Reason, 20.
nationalism for the previous generation this close combination of sword and culture would have sounded even in Germany stranger than it does today.\textsuperscript{46}

Similar to the rhetoric of Hitler and Schmitt, Mussolini's doctrine of fascism rejected the hope for perpetual peace and affirmed a social hierarchy dictated by power. Kohn quotes for his audience a passage from an article contributed by Mussolini to the *Encyclopedia Italiana* in 1932. In this famous article on *The Political and Social Doctrine of Fascism*, Mussolini asserted that fascism views the future of humanity as separate from the political process, and rejects the pacifism as born of the renunciation of the struggle and an act of cowardice in the face of sacrifice. War alone brings up to its highest tension all human energy and puts a stamp of nobility upon the peoples who have the courage to meet it.\textsuperscript{47} Because fascism, according to Mussolini, deems human inequality as immutable, beneficial and fruitful, the highest expression of the human experience becomes power. For Kohn, the logical conclusion of this elevation of power and inequality as the substance of human life is the pursuit of empire. This, he points out was certainly not lost on Mussolini, who affirmed empire as an essential manifestation of vitality.\textsuperscript{48}

Kohn also acknowledges that influential European intellectuals of the nineteenth century such as Nietzsche and Wagner differed in their assessments of the modern condition - the former offered a critique of modernity, the latter a full rejection. Despite his preoccupation with power, Nietzsche was much too complex to be claimed by any one political or intellectual movement, too much a strong individualist, too much a hater of the state to be appropriated by Fascism.\textsuperscript{49}

\textsuperscript{46} Kohn, *Force or Reason*, 21.

\textsuperscript{47} Kohn, *Force or Reason*, 25.

\textsuperscript{48} Kohn, *Force or Reason*, 26.

\textsuperscript{49} Kohn, *Force or Reason*, 27.
Wagner, on the other hand, espoused a dangerous “nationalistic titanism” filled with primitive racial mythology that was later readily appropriated by the Nazis. In the late nineteenth century, however, it was not these intellectuals who made “the doctrine of force” a reality on a state level, but the “Iron Chancellor,” Bismarck.  

Bismarck’s elevation of the nation-state and his further development and use of the army, Kohn argues, coincided with, and complemented, the “dethronement of Man” that would result from various intellectual trends in the nineteenth century that descended from social and political applications of Darwinism. Such scientific advances were applied to politics with deleterious effects for humanism, if God had been dethroned in the eighteenth century, the later nineteenth century dethroned man. Man was no longer the volitional center of the universe; he seemed no more than a cog in the immense machine of nature…

This belief in determinism, he argued, combined with and supported the affirmation of national destiny. The dangerous outcome of this was the repudiation of reason but the unadulterated embrace of progress. Kohn takes particular aim at Oswald Spengler, who championed this line of thought. He points especially to Spengler’s celebration of “barbarism,” which excitedly greeted “the age old barbarism which for centuries lay bound and hidden under the severe discipline of a high culture is again awakening, that warlike healthy joy in one’s own strength, which despises the age of rationalistic thought.” Kohn agreed with Spengler that a barbaric force had awakened. Yet for Kohn, this was not the “age old barbarism” but one of a

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50 Kohn, Force or Reason, 27. Surely, Bismarck put an end to any sort of dynamic struggle between liberals and the representatives of the old order in his time. Kohn does not suggest a direct line from Bismarck to Nazism, but emphasizes the role Bismarck played in making the military central to the Prussian state, and to the Nationalism that would emerge from it. For a recent and very useful study see Jonathan Steinberg, Bismarck: A Life (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2013).

51 Kohn, Force or Reason, 33.

52 Kohn, Force or Reason, 44.
new type of barbarian. The new barbarian is different from former barbarians. He comes equipped with the latest devices and instruments of technique. He despises reason, but he accepts and cultivates science and technology and puts them to a new demoniacal use. Kohn, who remembered the horrors and mass destruction of the First World War, believed that nothing could be more destructive than scientific progress, harnessed by belief in national force and destiny. The result, he proclaimed, could only be the most unbridled reign of terror, which threatens to undermine the foundations of civilization.

In Kohn’s formulation, the rejection, or dethronement of reason represented a radical form of romanticism. Although, as we have seen, Kohn repudiated much of his pre-war neo-romantic worldview following his wartime experiences, he did not believe that all romanticism was inherently degenerate. In fact, Kohn believed that romanticism, in its initial forms, was an important countercurrent which could serve to remind man of the strength of irrational forces. He maintains that for most romantic thinkers of the first half of the nineteenth century, including Hegel and Marx, reason was indisputably the main current. This changed, however, with thinkers such as Schopenhauer, Nietzsche and Wagner, and at the beginning of the twentieth century, a new interest arose in these thinkers yielding further irrational currents of thought. Here, Kohn, connects these trends directly to the outbreak of the Great War, asserting that, irrational forces in men and society seemed not only the true directives, but they seemed also the only creative forces able to lift men up to enthusiasm and great deeds.

Out of the unknown dark depths of man where he seemed in intimate contact with

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53 Kohn, Force or Reason, 44.
54 Kohn, Force or Reason, 45.
55 Kohn, Force or Reason, 55.
56 Kohn, Force or Reason, 55.
nature, earth and race, out of his instincts, salvation could come.\(^57\) Unfortunately, the widespread destruction and alienation in the aftermath of the war served to further separate the masses from reason and faith in civilization. While pre-war neo-romanticism represented the rejection of reason by intellectuals, the First World War, he argued, had alienated the masses from reason at the very moment that it was most vital for them to embrace it.

While the experience of war had transformed Europe, Kohn cites imperialism as the force that had turned European problems into global problems.\(^58\) He identifies two types of motivations for European imperialism: economic and psychological. Modern, industrial economies demanded new sources of labor and resources, and the \(\text{lust for adventure and for power}\) captivated the minds, not only of colonialists, but also of the European masses. The subjugation of non-European peoples allowed for \(\text{a new sentiment of pride and superiority which animated even the lowest members of the white races.}\(^59\)

European imperialism, both intentionally and unintentionally, changed native societies irrevocably. While suffering subjugation, native populations absorbed European culture and values, along with modern technology. In the time since World War I, Kohn observes, modern life \(\text{has taken the native masses by storm, forced them, even against their will, to adjust to the new ways, to awaken them from their traditional lethargy.}\(^60\) The colonial administrators in Africa and Asia, according to Kohn, had underestimated the native populations. They believed

\(^{57}\) Kohn, Force or Reason, 60.

\(^{58}\) Zohar Maor has pointed to an important change in Kohn\(^\star\) attitudes toward imperialism around this time: \(\text{in a series of lectures published in 1937, he praised its civilizing potential while saying nothing about any deleterious effects.}\)\(^6\) See Zohar Maor, \(\text{Hans Kohn and the Dialectics of Colonialism in Leo Baeck Institute Yearbook (London, New York and Jerusalem: Oxford University Press, 2010), 270.}\) Maor is not completely correct, as this discussion shows, but it is true that Kohn\(^\star\) denouncements of imperialism became more oblique.

\(^{59}\) Kohn, Force or Reason, 80.

\(^{60}\) Kohn, Force or Reason, 83.
that the nature of the Asiatic or African man is fundamentally different from their own, that there is no possible ground for common attitudes and aspirations. This delusion, he argues, blinded imperialists to the rise of political and economic nationalism among the native populations. Even more disturbing, it denied the common rights and inherent humanity that all peoples share.

In his later book, *World Order in Historical Perspective*, Kohn makes this point in a striking manner by contrasting the way in which the daughter of the Ethiopian emperor and Benito Mussolini understood the Italian invasion of Ethiopia. Appealing to the largely apathetic and impotent League of Nations and the world community, Princess Tsahai, a child expressing more wisdom than most of the experienced civilized statesmen at the time, pleaded: ‘We are only a small race; but I am seventeen and its leading daughter, and I know, as you know, that if mankind lets armies and gas destroy my country and people, civilization will be destroyed too... Why, therefore, do not all do something to drive off this common danger to humanity, this agony, this death by bomb, shell and gas.?’

Kohn contrasts the words of the Emperor’s daughter with those of Mussolini, who after successfully occupying the country claimed that Abyssinia was ‘Italian in fact’ due to the military victory and ‘Italian by right, because with the sword of Rome it is a civilization that triumphs over barbarism.’ From his experience in Palestine and other parts of the colonial Middle East, Kohn was convinced that the distinction between ‘Orient’ and ‘Occident’ was, increasingly, an illusion. The Italian occupation was a

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61 Kohn, *Force or Reason*, 87.
63 Kohn, *World Order in Historical Perspective*, 150.
case in point. What the Emperor and his daughter, regarded as the indication of civilization’s mortal crisis, Mussolini claimed as its shining victory.64

This economic and psychological exploitation of native peoples, Kohn believed, was bound to backfire, especially during this particularly volatile time. In an increasingly global and rapidly changing world, current thought failed to meet the needs of the time. Thus, he concludes:

Our conscious, and even more our subconscious, life is still under the influence of motives and emotions which correspond to a reality which belongs to the past. We are, in our nationalism, children of the nineteenth century, whereas the twentieth century drives toward a super-national order. We are expansionists at a time when there is no room left in which to expand. We speak of backward races and of the inequality of races at a time when even the most backward ones start to take the road towards modern civilization and the more progressive among them try to keep abreast of it.65

Just as the world was moving toward a common community, nations were becoming increasingly provincial. Thus, in Kohn’s view, the proper lessons had not been learned from the First World War. In 1936, and especially by 1938, reason had declined, power was glorified and awakening peoples were increasingly exploited.

On Dec 8, 1939, with Hitler’s empire rapidly growing, Kohn wrote to Henry Hurwitz66 that it is an appalling world and alas I am pessimistic about the future.67 That year he published

64 Kohn, World Order in Historical Perspective, 150.
65 Kohn, Force or Reason, 104–105.
66 Henry Hurwitz (1886–1961) was the founder and editor of The Menorah Journal. For a more in-depth discussion see Chapter Five.
Revolutions and Dictatorships, which built upon the message of Force or Reason but included a larger array of material. Kohn included in this collection an essay simply entitled "Nationalism." Here we find an updated, broad statement of the meaning and development of nationalism, similar in scope to his earlier essay in Der Jude. This essay is also important because it includes some of the earliest formulations of the Kohn dichotomy. As in his earlier essay, Kohn locates the beginning of nationalism at the time of the French Revolution. Though there had always been national feeling, prior to the French Revolution, he claims nationalism did not influence the thought and actions of the masses in an all-pervading way. It was no purposeful will welding together all individuals in a permanent unity of emotions, of will and action. Nationalism spread along with Napoleon's armies, but though the message was accepted, the spirit of nationalism that characterized the French Revolution was often rejected. Nationalism was turned against Western liberalism, especially in Germany and became integrated into political romanticism. This integration stripped nationalism of cosmopolitanism, and the values that did remain, such as equality and fraternity, were strictly limited to the national community. Thus, the idea of nationalism became bifurcated: in the Anglo-Saxon countries and in France it denoted primarily the freedom of the individual against oppressive government, his inalienable rights against authority; in Germany it came to imply national independence and power much more than individual independence. The emergence, in the nineteenth century, of romantic historiography reinforced this trend. Romantic

67 Hans Kohn to Henry Hurwitz in American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati, Ohio. HHP, Box 26, Folder 11.

68 Hans Kohn, Revolutions and Dictatorships: Essays in Contemporary History (Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1941), 68.

69 Kohn, Revolutions and Dictatorships, 72.

70 Kohn, Revolutions and Dictatorships, 72.
historiography, according to Kohn, produced also an easy explanation of all historical events and developments by the mysticism of national spirits or national souls which took care of the right evolution of law and constitution, of politics and art.71 Romantic historians arrived at the strange and, in Kohn's view, a-historical conclusion that foreign influence was a degenerative factor in national development. The result was the proliferation of national ideologies that erected impregnable walls between nations and eschewed the universal message of the English and French Revolutions.72

Though Kohn does not indicate how, he observes that in the 1820s and 1830s, French Ideas began reasserting themselves, culminating in the uprisings of 1848. The revolutions of 1848 represent to Kohn a pan-European (aside from Russia) political awakening, inspired by the ideals of the French Revolution. According to Kohn, for this very short time, a great generous hope inspired the fighters of 1848, democrats and republicans of different nations who greeted the dawn of a new day of brotherhood for all liberated peoples. Nationalism seemed to have regained its liberal and cosmopolitan message.73

The new day of brotherhood quickly turned to dusk. The ideals of Mazzini would not be realized in the Italy that was unified by Cavour. The German republicans and the liberals of Frankfurt-Am-Main were brutally defeated. Bismarck's unification was achieved in the teeth of bitter opposition from German middle-class liberalism.74 Both Cavour and Bismarck, Kohn emphasizes, won over the middle-classes through a combination of fear and concessions.

71 Kohn, Revolutions and Dictatorships, 75.
72 Kohn, Revolutions and Dictatorships, 75.
73 Kohn, Revolutions and Dictatorships, 76.
74 Kohn, Revolutions and Dictatorships, 76.
Despite notable reforms, such as general suffrage in Germany, the middle classes, gaining in economic wealth, remained without executive power in political life.\(^75\)

Kohn introduces his formulation of what would later be identified as his dichotomous interpretation of nationalism by qualifying the dichotomy of the two types of nationalism that he presents. In the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century, we find the two currents liberal, progressive and humanitarian, and romantic, reactionary, and power-politics nationalism. Often, we find the two currents intermingling in many different shades of expression.\(^76\) Yet, increasingly, the power politics nationalism became the dominant current in Central and Eastern Europe. This laid the groundwork for Fascism and National Socialism that, in fact, created the dichotomy by setting the ideas of 1914 against the ideas of 1789.\(^77\)

In this essay, Kohn presents us with two dichotomies, one of time and the other of space. 1789 is set against 1914, France and England against Germany and Italy. Yet neither of these dichotomies was the result of inevitable developments. As Kohn’s emphasis on the revolutions of 1848 shows, the potential for liberalism existed beyond the Rhine. Totalitarianism was not even a direct outgrowth of romanticism, but grew out of a combination of the radicalization of certain forms of exclusivist romantic ideas, a relatively weak middle class and a militaristic aristocracy. This form of the dichotomy is a good example of its relationship to the radical, contemporary nationalist movements that Kohn was writing about. It is, therefore, important to observe that to a large degree, Kohn’s dichotomy was bound to the specific time at which he wrote. It was largely descriptive and functioned as a device for explaining the seriousness of the

\(^{75}\) Kohn, Revolutions and Dictatorships, 77.

\(^{76}\) Kohn, Revolutions and Dictatorships, 79.

\(^{77}\) Kohn, Revolutions and Dictatorships, 80.
situation abroad presented a clear way to juxtapose differing ideas of nations, politics and the future of both.

The year 1940 was a particularly desperate and busy one for Kohn. In a chapel talk at Smith in January, he asserted that the moral climate of his present time was perhaps as low as it has ever been in recent history. Hitler’s success, he claimed, was rooted as much in the fears, inner weaknesses, and indecisions of his adversaries as in his use of force. Further, Kohn made a distinction between Soviet dictatorship and Hitlerism: Hitler’s dictatorship has differed from that of Stalin and Lenin in this respect, that it is inspired not by fear, but by Hitler’s confidence in the impotence of his opponents. We are now paying for our sins of omission. In another talk that year, Kohn’s rhetoric rose to even more shocking levels, asserting that while the year before he had argued that Mussolini had a dream of riding on horseback down the Champs Elysees, and that Hitler dreamed of riding in a motor car into Buckingham Palace, now, he believed they both dream of sleeping in the White House. He also stressed cooperation with other countries, specifically in providing the allies with airplanes. We are living during a strange period, he argued, in which one day may decide things for hundreds of years.

The alarm, desperation and frustration that plagued Kohn at the turn of the decade led him to join forces with a diverse group of intellectuals, known initially as the Committee on Europe, and then as the Committee of Fifteen, who met in Atlantic City, New Jersey and issued a collective pamphlet entitled The City of Man: A Declaration on World Democracy.
Their Declaration began by emphasizing the apocalyptic vision of Hitler and its realization through his deeds. By the third page of text, the authors assert the central role that needed to be played by the United States. England, where modern man first rose to his dignity, still holds out in tragic valor a bastion in flames. Yet it was crucial that the New World rescue the last bastion of the old. The United States, which was powerful yet increasingly alone in the global chaos, was the real New World. The authors posit Pax Americana as a necessary forerunner to a Pax Humana. They argue that, Universal peace can be founded only on the unity of man under one law and one government. This conviction leads them to a very explicit call to arms. The authors argue that it is not enough for America to act purely defensively. Rather, American citizens would need to resist complacency. The emergency of democracy, they assert, must be the emergence of democracy.

This source, though fascinating, presents us with a number of challenges. Kohn, as we have seen, strongly agreed with the pamphlets emphasis on the connection and shared fate of


81 Committee of Fifteen, The City of Man, 12.
82 Committee of Fifteen, The City of Man, 13.
83 Committee of Fifteen, The City of Man, 66.
84 Committee of Fifteen, The City of Man, 23.
85 Committee of Fifteen, The City of Man, 67.
86 For one of the few analyses of this document, see Adi Gordon and Udi Greenberg, The City of Man, European Émigrés and the Genesis of Postwar Conservative Thought, Religions 3, (3), 681-698. Gordon and Greenberg note the irony of émigré scholars explaining the meaning of America to Americans. Although they make an important point in tying this document to postwar American conservative thought it is difficult to assess the extent to which Kohn can be grouped among these thinkers. Kohn certainly differed regarding the relative threats of Fascism and Communism, and, during the postwar period, seemed to have a more humble vision of what the United States could accomplish in a global era of nationalism.
Great Britain and the United States. He also advocated for the spiritual unity of liberal democracies, which would become even more pronounced in his post-war writings. Yet the pamphlet, in addition to its very christological focus and tone, also diverges from some of Kohn’s central convictions during these years. The most striking contrast is that the manifesto does not distinguish between the evils of Communism, Fascism and Nazism.

Reflecting on his involvement, Kohn points out that the declaration, largely crafted by Giuseppe Antonio Borgese, was written in the shadow of the greatest danger ever to threaten the survival of Western civilization. Fascism was on the verge of triumph. Thus, in response to the crisis, Kohn was not excessively concerned with the niceties of the Committee’s declaration and put details of ideology aside for more pressing aims.

With the war in Europe approaching its height, Kohn continued to emphasize many of the themes in Force or Reason, but became much more explicit and direct. In Not by Arms Alone, based on his 1940 lectures at Harvard and published in 1941, Kohn commenced with an analysis of contemporary discourse. He claimed that at the present moment the same words cover different and sometimes opposite meanings, and much confusion is due to the indiscriminate and ambiguous use of words. The most commonly confused word was war. Kohn argues that until very recently, war represented a departure from the normal state of affairs. Even earlier,

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87 See for instance the striking statement that despite being bearers of the prophetic tradition, the Synagogue was overcome by the sterility of its unshakeable conservatism and by the racial stubbornness which severed the orthodox Jew from Jesus, highest of Jewish prophets. In Committee of Fifteen, The City of Man, 40.

88 Committee of Fifteen, The City of Man, 67.

89 G.A. Borgese (1882–1952) was an Italian literary scholar who taught at Smith College until 1935, and then took a position at the University of Chicago, where he spearheaded the Committee on Europe. In the United States he was best known for his book, Goliath: The March of Fascism.

90 Kohn, Living in a World Revolution, 164.

91 Hans Kohn, Not by Arms Alone: Essays on Our Time (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1941), 3. Though this book was published in 1941, the lectures were given in 1940.
hawkish nationalists such as Bismarck and Clausewitz understood war as a strictly circumscribed and exceptional state of affairs.\textsuperscript{92} In this former scenario, war was an instrument of politics, to be used only as the \textit{ultima ratio}, as a case \textit{in extremis}. Politics was the art of avoiding war\textsuperscript{93} As we have seen, Kohn eschewed any \textit{metaphysicization\textsuperscript{94}} of history. In his view, totalitarian ideology represented a dangerous and radical metaphysical view of history and, more specifically, the history of a single nation or people.

This emphasis on struggle and national mission led, in Kohn\textsuperscript{95} view, to a conception of life itself as a state of war, the totalitarian philosophy of war derides stability and security with its accompanying preference for a quiet and comfortable life. War becomes the highest and normative state of life; what is called peace is only a pause between the real manifestations of life, preparing for them, subservient to them.\textsuperscript{94} This radical worldview was apparent in the writings and speeches of both Hitler and Mussolini. He cites the preamble to the statute of the Italian Fascist party, which stated, From its beginnings until now, the party has always thought of itself as in a state of war.\textsuperscript{95} Likewise, Hitler\textsuperscript{96} fascist worldview demanded a state of struggle. Kohn relates this directly to Hitler\textsuperscript{96} theory of race, Hitler\textsuperscript{96} racial theory had the effect of destroying the remaining sense of reciprocity and responsibility in the German people and of convincing them on account of their superior qualities... that the heroic warrior ideal which they have cultivated justified their world domination.\textsuperscript{96}

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{92} Kohn, Not by Arms Alone, 3.
\item \textsuperscript{93} Kohn, Not by Arms Alone, 3.
\item \textsuperscript{94} Kohn, Not by Arms Alone, 7.
\item \textsuperscript{95} Kohn, Not by Arms Alone, 18.
\item \textsuperscript{96} Kohn, Not by Arms Alone, 17.
\end{itemize}
At the end of Kohn’s first chapter in *Not by Arms Alone*, we find another early formulation of his dichotomy, based on opposite concepts of war: "Wars exist, in the liberal conception, only as a result of the shortcomings of the political and social order which in a not-too-distant future may be overcome by the rational efforts of man. In the totalitarian philosophy war is the normal and welcome concomitant of all life, the supreme manifestation of vitality and virtue."

Kohn’s plea for reason is highly similar to that found in *Force or Reason*, but in this case, we are offered examples of reasoned nationalisms that embraced peace and reason and rejected force. One example is the development of Czech democracy. According to Kohn, Czech democracy was the only form of nationalism in Eastern Europe that did not develop around an "aggressive, proselytizing" will to national power. The Czech nation, like other emerging Eastern European states, emerged from a largely peasant population. Yet importantly, the nature of nationalist education dictated the difference. As Kohn puts it, "only with the Czechs was this sociological foundation strengthened by a philosophy of democracy, which was based on an interpretation of Czech history and became part, by pervading the whole of Czech education, of the mental and moral inheritance of the nation."

Rather than appeal to a history of power, and inherent superiority as did Heinrich von Treitschke in Prussia, František Palacký looked to the Hussite movement of the fourteenth century and interpreted it as the foundation of a humanism that the Czech peoples needed to live up to in order to justify their national existence. As a result, "the Czechs were able to build their existence, under the leadership of Palacký’s disciple, Masaryk", on these principles which they

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derived not only from the example of Western Europe but from their own national traditions.\(^9^9\)

Thus even at this time we find an exception to Kohn’s usual West/East, Civic/Ethnic nationalism divide. It is important to note that even within Kohn’s, at time simplistic, construct, exceptions existed that, he believed, could serve as examples to nations with similar traditions.

Kohn concludes by imploring his American audience to help him combat isolationism in a time of imminent crisis. It is imperative that without further delay we concentrate all our intellectual and moral resources upon the one task of freeing our people from the lack of understanding, from the illusions and fears, that shackle them and make them undecided, hesitating and panic-stricken instead of resolute and farsighted.\(^1^0^0\) Kohn’s plea takes on a desperate tone here, as he was convinced that without American intervention, “the Cult of Force” would permanently dethrone reason rendering the future of liberty and democracy, at best, bleak.

In addition to his published works, Kohn’s correspondences also reflect his involvement in the anti-isolationist movement during this time. Throughout 1940, for example, Kohn maintained correspondence with Lloyd K. Garrison, Dean of the School of Law at the University of Wisconsin at Madison. Garrison greatly respected Kohn, but he believed that totalitarianism was not as much of a threat to the United States as was American imperialist policy. He wrote to Kohn “your fears, I take it, are based not only on your estimate of the weakness of democracy but on your assumption that the totalitarian drive will continue unabated after the fighting in Europe is over” it is difficult for me to believe that a regime which, according to all accounts, is antipathetic to the majority of the German people can continue indefinitely to take the peace-

\(^9^9\) Kohn, Not by Arms Alone, 82.

\(^1^0^0\) Kohn, Not by Arms Alone, 137.
loving and fundamentally decent German people along a course which they do not wish to pursue.\textsuperscript{101} We do not have Kohn\’s direct response to this letter, but we do find a response from August of that year which reiterates Kohn\’s view of the essential elements of a thriving democracy (taken from the French Revolution), equality, liberty, and fraternity. Of these, he asserted, these three fundamentals seem to me to belong so closely together that it is impossible to omit one without endangering the whole structure.\textsuperscript{101} Importantly, this letter to Lloyd Garrison also delineates Kohn\’s view of the difference between communism and fascism. Kohn writes, \textsuperscript{102}In my opinion, communism offers at present no real danger (except for the intellectual and moral confusion which it produces among part of our intelligentsia and among our youth), the real danger, the only danger at present, threatening equality and the dignity of man comes from fascism.\textsuperscript{102}

\textbf{The Question of Communism in the Context of the Fascist Threat}

As we will see, following the conclusion of World War II, Hans Kohn would become an important intellectual of the Cold War. However, during the 1930s, and through the end of the war, Kohn continually emphasized the greater long-term threat that Nazism presented. The best and most detailed example of this contrast in his wartime writings can be found in an essay entitled, Communist and Fascist Dictatorship: a Comparative Study.\textsuperscript{103} Here, Kohn describes modern dictatorship as being tied to mass movements in possession of a distinctive worldview: they are similar (and different from all other forms of dictatorship) in claiming absoluteness for

\textsuperscript{101}Letter from Lloyd Garrison to Hans Kohn, 31 May, 1940, in HKC; Box 3; Folder 9.

\textsuperscript{102}Letter from Hans Kohn to Lloyd Garrison, 14 August, 1940, in HKC, Box 3; Folder 9.

\textsuperscript{103}This essay is found in Kohn, Revolutions and Dictatorships.
their philosophy and in their effort to indoctrinate the masses and the youth with a new way of life.\textsuperscript{104} Kohn acknowledges that Fascist Italy, Nazi Germany and the Communist Soviet Union all conformed to this particular definition.\textsuperscript{105} However, when forced to choose between the radical universalism that characterized Soviet utopianism and the Nazi drive for racial hegemony, Kohn leaves no doubt as to which form of dictatorship should concern American citizens.

According to Kohn, \textit{Fascist dictatorships are founded on three principles: the state, authority and the leader. All three are believed to be permanent, since they are held to correspond to unalterable elements in human nature. Dictatorship is therefore an essential part of Fascism due to its focus on the natural inequality of men}.\textsuperscript{106}

\textit{Communist dictatorships}, on the other hand, due to the inherently dialectical nature of the class struggle, are not \textit{inherently} permanent in nature. Kohn quotes Joseph Stalin, \textit{Marxian socialism, means not the cutting down of personal requirements but their universal expansion; not the restriction or the abstention from satisfying these requirements but the all sided and full satisfaction of all the requirements of culturally developed working people.}\textsuperscript{107} An important part of Kohn\textsuperscript{\textdagger} polemic here lies in what he does not say. The reader is given little context in which to understand the sincerity of Stalin\textsuperscript{\textdagger} proclamation. Rather, despite the dictatorial nature of Stalin\textsuperscript{\textdagger} regime, the communist idea is still presented as the primary, driving force.

Thus, for Kohn, it was important for American audiences to realize that \textit{The dictatorship of fascism is charismatic, nationalistic and permanent; the dictatorship of Communism is}

\textsuperscript{104} Kohn, Revolutions and Dictatorships, 189.
\textsuperscript{105} Kohn, Revolutions and Dictatorships, 188.
\textsuperscript{106} Kohn, Revolutions and Dictatorships, 192.
\textsuperscript{107} Kohn, Revolutions and Dictatorships, 197.
rational, universalistic, and temporary.\textsuperscript{108} And, as in his correspondence with Garrison, Kohn presents Soviet Communism as mere temporary confusion.

\textbf{An Enlightened Ethos in War}

On December 11, 1941 Hitler declared war on the United States and Kohn\textsuperscript{\textcircled{109}} anti-isolationist campaign came to an end. Two days after Pearl Harbor and two days prior to Hitler\textsuperscript{\textcircled{109}} declaration of war on the United States, Kohn addressed a special assembly at Smith College.\textsuperscript{109} He began with the end of Abraham Lincoln\textsuperscript{\textcircled{110}} message to Congress 79 years prior: "Fellow citizens, we cannot escape history... No personal significance or insignificance can spare one or another of us... We shall nobly save or meanly lose the last, best hope on earth."\textsuperscript{110} Kohn acknowledged that all present had suffered a "great shock," and that there "will be greater shocks coming."\textsuperscript{111} Already, Japan had bombed Pearl Harbor, was attempting to occupy the Philippines and had already occupied several islands in between: the war had not begun well for the United States. Yet, as devastating as the attack and the early Japanese advances were, Kohn declared "People like us need shocks, apparently."\textsuperscript{112} Just as Dunkirk had dispelled the moral and spiritual confusion of England and had led to that countries "Chamberlainization," so too the United States would need to dispel its own confusion and self-doubt. In doing so, however,

\textsuperscript{108} Kohn, Revolutions and Dictatorships, 192.

\textsuperscript{109} Mr. Kohn to Special Assembly, December 9, 1941: The Crisis and its Implications, in Smith College Archives. Hans Kohn Chapel Talks, Box 892, Folder 4.

\textsuperscript{110} Mr. Kohn to Special Assembly, December 9, 1941.

\textsuperscript{111} Mr. Kohn to Special Assembly, December 9, 1941.

\textsuperscript{112} Mr. Kohn to Special Assembly, December 9, 1941.
Americans needed to avoid underestimating the enemy. Nothing, Kohn declared is more dangerous than this loose talk of going right over to Tokyo and licking those Japs. In the first place it makes us forget the dignity of our struggle; in the second place, it is untrue. It will not be easy for us to defeat the Japanese Empire, it will not be easy for us to defeat Germany. The dignity of America’s struggle is something Kohn returned to at the end of the speech. He exhorted his audience: Never degrade yourselves by cheap and hateful emotions. Never forget to respect the individual human dignity of every Japanese and every German, every Italian and every other enemy who may rise against us. Whatever they may be, above all they are human beings.

His final position paper, published in 1942 reduces the outcome of what was a global conflict to the showdown between the United States and Germany. Only these two nations, in Kohn’s view, had the power and resources to determine the course of the future. Only Germany, Kohn believed through its unique military tradition, the high efficiency of its military equipment, and the discipline and intelligence of its population, can make good the totalitarian claim to universality. Thus the struggle of totalitarianism against democracy reduces itself ultimately to one between Germany and the United States.

Personal Dimensions

Aside from his attempts to combat isolationism, Kohn’s autobiography gives us little insight into his personal thoughts and feelings during this time. Yet, compared to any other time

113 Mr. Kohn to Special Assembly, December 9, 1941.

114 Mr. Kohn to Special Assembly, December 9, 1941.

115 Kohn, World Order in Historical Perspective, 56.
in his life, world events bore greater consequences for Kohn and his family abroad. His brothers, Franz and Fritz remained in Prague. Aside from convincing his newly fellow countrymen of the threat to the future of liberty and democracy that the Cult of Force posed, he also tried to convince and enable his brothers to leave Prague following Hitler’s invasion of Czechoslovakia.

He labored tirelessly to help family and friends who were still in Europe. In 1936, Kohn wrote to Salo Baron hoping that Baron could arrange for the Columbia University Library to purchase complete collections of *Die Welt* and *Ost und West* from a friend in Germany who desperately needed money to emigrate. Strikingly, Kohn was so fearful of the situation abroad and the possible implications for his friend, that he would not even reveal the person’s name to Baron, the dean of Jewish historians in America. Kohn also brought Robert Weltsch’s son Ruben to the United States, where he resided with the Kohn family.

Prior to and during the war years, Koppel Pinson labored tirelessly to secure affidavits and visas for as many Jews as possible still trapped in Nazi dominated Europe. Kohn, who did not arrive in the United States until 1934, and did not attain American citizenship until 1941, relied heavily on Pinson to help secure passage for family members, friends and colleagues.

A letter from the State Department, from March 29, 1941 informed Kohn that his brother, sister-in-law and nephew had been preliminarily approved for visas with expectations to sail out from Lisbon (they eventually escaped successfully to the United States).

Unfortunately, Kohn was unsuccessful in arranging for his brother Fritz and his sister-in-law

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116 *Die Welt* was the Zionist newspaper founded by Theodore Herzl in 1897. *Ost und West*, published from 1901–1923, was a culturally focused publication that sought to provide a cultural bridge for the European Jewish world. On the latter see David Brenner, *Marketing Identities: The Invention of Jewish Ethnicity in Ost und West* (Detroit, Wayne State University Press, 1998).

117 *Letter from Hans Kohn to Salo Baron, 15 December, 1936*, in SBC; Box 6; Folder 4.

118 *Letter from Department of State to Hans Kohn, 29 March, 1941*, in HKC; Box 3; Folder 9.
Grete to leave. In 1945, Koppel Pinson, who had tried to assist Kohn as much as possible during the war years, responded to a note from Kohn, which stated, “Fritz and Grete are dead. They were transported to a Polish extermination camp from Theresienstadt in the fall of 1944—the last transports!” All Pinson could do was pledge to remember. Of Kohn’s brother and sister-in-law, he declared, “Pre-Hitler Prague will always be associated in our minds with the memories of these two noble souls. May they rest in peace.” This very short letter reflects the highly personal dimension of Kohn’s fight against fascism, one that, for him personally, was not won on all fronts.

A few months later, Kohn delivered a lecture at Temple Emmanuel of New York City. Though the war had been tragic, the Allied forces had finally won. The idea of a nation based on liberty, overcame the nation forged in blood. Kohn waxed triumphant. In nationalism based on liberty and diversity, he proclaimed, “lies not only the unique strength but also the great hope and promise of America for mankind.” The Germans were convinced that this nation not built upon a common blood would disintegrate into its component racial parts— that blood was more important than the spirit, that it determined the fundamental loyalties and the essential qualities of man. The Germans were mistaken.

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119 Letter from Hans Kohn to Koppel S. Pinson, 15 August, 1945, in KPC; Box 1; Folder 1/1A.

120 Letter from Koppel S. Pinson to Hans Kohn, 18 August, 1945, in HKC; Box 3; Folder 9.

Conclusion

In 1937, in a short reflection on the role of adult education, Kohn asserted his belief that, \[ \text{the real and comprehensive reason for the present world crisis, political, economic, intellectual and moral, is the persistent survival of old emotions, ideas and mores at a time when all external conditions in the world around us are in process of rapid and momentous change.} \] Kohn believed that the historian had a responsibility to be an interpreter of contemporary events for the public. In times of crisis, he took this role very seriously, and his dichotomous juxtaposition of the forms of the nationalist idea, especially pronounced in this period, served, as such presentations often do, as a rhetorical device through which his listeners could understand the unprecedented crisis facing their world. Though Kohn's books, articles and speeches during this period were often extremely erudite and certainly not devoid of scholarly achievement, his primary role in these years was that of an educator of the American public. He eschewed nuance for clarity and sought to aid his readers and listeners in orienting themselves to a rapidly changing world. Kohn's goal was to convince Americans that they too were threatened by the totalitarian revolution across the ocean and had an inescapable responsibility to safeguard democracy. Despite the many shortcomings in American society during the 1930s and 1940s, Kohn believed that American democracy offered the best hope for a thriving nationalism rooted in civic participation, diversity and liberty.

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Chapter Three

The “Idea of Nationalism:” Between the Universal and Particular

Having published the last of his wartime position papers in 1942, Kohn was able to devote more of his attention to an extended scholarly treatment of nationalism, for which he had already received a Guggenheim grant in 1940. According to Robert Weltsch, this effort was planned far earlier, but was postponed due to Kohn’s exhaustive activities in the 30s and 40s.¹ The Idea of Nationalism, generally recognized as Kohn’s magnum opus, finally appeared in 1944. For Kohn, The Idea of Nationalism: A Study in its Origins and Background represented both a capstone and a departure from his previous intellectual activity in the United States.

This chapter engages Kohn’s most enduring contribution closely. Unlike the position papers of the 1930s and early 1940s, The Idea of Nationalism is an academic rather than a polemical work. Yet, it also bears the imprint of the crisis during which, and because of which, it was conceived, as evidenced by Kohn’s statement that “Only fascism, the uncompromising enemy of Western civilization has pushed nationalism to its very limit.” ²

For Kohn, the vital polar tension between the universal and particular that defined Western civilization, and limited various forms of nationalism, was broken by fascism. I argue that in The Idea of Nationalism Kohn offers his readers a genealogy of modern nationalism that that traces this particular tension through the history of Western civilization in an attempt to

¹ See Robert Weltsch, “Hans Kohn on Nationalism,” Orbis: A Special Issue Dedicated to Hans Kohn, 10, no. 4 (Winter 1967): 1310. Weltsch notes that Kohn had planned a three-volume work, but the diversion of his energies resulted in the Idea of Nationalism, along with several smaller works on particular national movements and themes.
identify a healthy balance between these two elements of human existence. The fact that Kohn ends this work on the cusp of the explosion of national movements in the nineteenth century demonstrates the departure of the Age of Nationalism from the more ideal balance that he found in the eighteenth-century Enlightenment.

In a recent introduction to the 2005 edition, sociologist Craig Calhoun offers an important reflection on the context in which the work was composed. The 1940s must have been an extraordinary time to write about nationalism. They were perhaps a still more extraordinary time to take up the challenge of showing that nationalism and liberal democracy were compatible, and indeed that enlightened nationalism was inseparable from liberalism. From Hans Kohn’s point of view, it was just the right and necessary moment to defend the Enlightenment.

In the wake of World War Two, it was far from clear to many intellectuals that Enlightenment-based modernity offered compelling solutions to contemporary problems. Perhaps the most famous argument for the degenerative nature of the Enlightenment was composed in the same year as Kohn’s book. In *Dialectic of Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments*, Max Horkheimer and Theodore Adorno argued that modernity was based on a dialectical relationship to pre-modern myth. The Enlightenment, they asserted, sought to transcend myth, but ended up leading to a more dangerous one—the myth of perfection. In the modern period enlightenment had released the ideas of perfection and harmony from their hypostatization in a religious Beyond and made them available as criteria for human endeavor or within the form of the system. Once the utopia which had once inspired the French revolution

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3 In a particularly interesting review, American historian Charles A. Beard, perhaps the most vocal of isolationist historians, provided a very positive assessment of *The Idea of Nationalism*. Beard noted Kohn’s focus on the parallelism of universalism and patriotism in the book’s last two chapters. Yet Beard does not acknowledge the connection of the rest of Kohn’s study to this modern tension. See *The Idea of Nationalism* by Hans Kohn, Review by: Charles A. Beard, *The American Political Science Review* 38, no. 4 (August, 1944): 801–803.

4 See Craig Calhoun’s introduction in *The Idea of Nationalism*, xi.
had been absorbed the established bourgeois order entirely functionalized reason. It became purposiveness without purpose, which for that very reason could be harnessed to any end.\(^5\) Kohn would have rejected this neo-Marxist methodology and assessment of modernity of these two famous representatives of the Frankfurt school.\(^6\) Rather, as we will see, it was not Enlightenment but the rejection of human autonomy and cooperation by nationalist movements that, in his view, led to twentieth-century mass destruction.

In a review written shortly after the book’s publication, Salo Baron hailed the *Idea of Nationalism* as a "stupendous achievement.\(^7\) He was, however, disturbed that Kohn nowhere offered his readers a clear-cut definition of nationalism.\(^8\) Indeed, Kohn’s vagueness as to a clear definition is apparent. We will therefore seek a descriptive definition through Kohn’s statements and method.

Kohn traces the national idea’s filiation on an intellectual plane, and also charts the absorption of its initially elite intellectual concepts and components into the worldview of everyday people. Thus, while Kohn offered his readers a primarily intellectual history of nationalism, he is attentive to the fact that an "age requires a significant reorientation of worldviews, hearts and minds.\(^9\) As he puts it, "important periods of history are characterized by

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\(^6\) Kohn did not review this work or correspond with its authors regarding its thesis.


\(^8\) Review by Salo W. Baron, 409.

\(^9\) While by the standards of more contemporary treatments of nationalism, Kohn does not give enough attention to this later aspect, he resists calling important harbingers of the nationalist idea "nationalism" until 1789.
the circumference within which the sympathy of man extends. Beginning with the nineteenth century in the Western world, and with the twentieth century in the Orient, the circumference was set by nationality.¹⁰

While nationalities have existed for a long time as ethnographic material, as pragmatic and accidental factors in history, and while sentiment for the place of one's origin has always been a visceral, almost innate orientation, Kohn emphasizes that this does not constitute Nationalism.¹¹ In the very beginning of his introduction to the work, Kohn asserts that Nationalism as we know it is not older than the second half of the eighteenth century.¹²

Despite this relatively recent reorientation of mass consciousness, the emergence of nationalism was dependent on certain factors and trends that were rooted in developments over centuries. In order for the Age of Nationalism to commence, three fundamental developments needed to converge. These conditions, in Kohn's formulation, are: political (popular sovereignty), economic (rise of the 3rd estate) and intellectual (secularization).¹³ Nevertheless, the foundational ideas and sense of broader consciousness that would later define nationalism began far earlier, in ancient Hellas and Israel.

¹¹ Kohn, The Idea of Nationalism, 16.
¹³ Kohn, The Idea of Nationalism, 3.
Athens and Jerusalem

In line with the rejection of determinism that runs through his mature thought, Kohn prefaces his analysis with a disclaimer of sorts: “Every people participates in the entire spiritual world of humanity and its richness; no human trait is missing in any people” It is not the possession of definitive traits which defines a people, but the tendency to accentuate them. As with all living beings and their associations, there exist no definite or fixed limits. Classical civilization did however contribute immensely to the intellectual universe of modern man. Kohn’s distinction here echoes his earlier writings: “To the artistic serenity of the Greek the Jew opposed a burning religiosity; but the difference went deeper. While the Greek developed the plastic sense to perfection, the Jew did not see so much as he heard; he lived in time.

Insofar as both Israel and Greece constituted the only two ancient civilizations with a sense of national consciousness, they navigated the tension between universalism and particularism in different ways. Ancient Israel’s sense of national purpose, Kohn points out, was defined by its covenantal relationship to God. Israel’s covenant was preceded by a covenant with Noah, who represented humanity, and Abraham, whose descendants would become Israel. The meaning of Israel’s covenant (brit) could, at times, be radically particularistic. Kohn


15 Kohn, The Idea of Nationalism, 31. Recently, Noam Pianko has pointed out that though Kohn acknowledges his early essay, Nationalismus, in the introduction to the Idea of Nationalism, he neglects to mention the Political Idea of Judaism which he believes was far more influential on The Idea of Nationalism. In fact, as Pianko correctly points out, entire sections are incorporated verbatim into the first two chapters of the Idea of Nationalism. Turning to Kohn’s chapter on Israel and Hellas, Pianko argues that though the Greek civilization, in the Political Idea of Judaism, was primarily contrasted in an inferior sense with the covenant idea of Ancient Israel, in the Idea of Nationalism Kohn puts the two on par. See Pianko, Did Kohn Believe in the Kohn Dichotomy? 300f 301. Yet this reuse of material is not only from The Political Idea of Judaism. Compare, for instance, the quote above to our discussion of Kohn’s writings in Vom Judentum (see Chapter One).
explains “The chosen people had been singled out by God through His deeds in history. God promised them historical accomplishments, the conquest of a country, the destruction of its inhabitants. The enemies of the chosen people became the enemies of God. They were to be destroyed utterly and without clemency (I Samuel 15:3).”

Kohn bases the Bible’s universalistic impulse on Noah’s covenant: “The content of the covenant was a moral command, the prohibition of shedding human blood because God has created man in His image.” Through the Prophets, Kohn emphasizes, Israel was called to a higher purpose and understanding of its national covenant, “the Covenant was, the Prophets taught, not a privilege, not a guarantee for a successful life, but an added burden calling for increased earnestness…” Israel should know that God was a God of absolute and equal justice for all “Thus, Kohn’s discussion identifies the foundations of the tension between universal and particular orientations as already present in biblical thought.

While, as Kohn sought to demonstrate, the idea of the “chosen people” did have chauvinistic and even violent elements in Ancient Israel, the concept of Hellenic superiority was more drastic: “The Greek idea of the chosen people had not the religious fervor of the Jewish idea, but it was also devoid of the moderating corrective of the Jewish faith that all men had been created by one God and that every man had been created in His image.” Despite this strong sense of inherent Greek qualities, “the objective basis of Greek national feeling was very slight. It consisted largely in the Delphic Amphictyon and in the Olympic Games.”

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18 Kohn, The Idea of Nationalism, 41.
Sophists formulated arguments for the universal value of human beings, this approach was firmly rejected by Plato and Aristotle who summed up the old Greek city-state patriotism and Hellenistic racial nationalism, in a more uncompromising form than ever before.

Kohn places a great amount of importance on Alexander the Great as a transitional figure, not only in his ideological departure from Aristotle’s view of inequality in human nature, but in his demolition of the bifurcation of humanity into Greeks and Barbarians. According to Kohn, Alexander’s vast empire, opened the possibility not only of regarding the uneducated Greek as a Barbarian but also of regarding the educated Barbarian as a Greek. The de-centering of Attic culture also prepared the soil for the new universalistic philosophy of the Stoic school. As a result of Alexander’s attitude the universalistic philosophy of the Stoics had a practical example set before it, and the diffusion of uniform civilization throughout the then known world was made possible.

It was Alexander’s conquest, Kohn maintains, that first brought a form of Western culture to the East. Yet it would be later, he argues, under Roman rule and after the rise of Christianity that both Athens and Jerusalem would be assimilated and truly universalized. Therefore, for Kohn, it was via Christianity and Roman tradition that modern European civilization is descended from both Jerusalem and Athens.

Kohn observes that while Rome physically conquered Greece and the Near East, it was culturally conquered by these older civilizations, now in their older universalistic form. Rome

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21 Kohn, The Idea of Nationalism, 56.
24 Kohn, The Idea of Nationalism, 27. It is important to note here that following his discussion of Ancient Israel, Jews as a living people play no role in the developments that Kohn traces.
readily appropriated the Stoic ideal in both education and in broader concepts of citizenship. The Roman version of Stoic thought, he explains, was embodied by the Latin term, *humanitas*, an ideal that transcended any prior Greek conceptions of inherent human worth, and it came to mean a compound of the qualities of the human and the humane, that quality which makes man a man.\(^\text{26}\) Stoicism, for Kohn, paralleled the eighteenth-century Enlightenment in its ideal balance of universal and particular elements of human life.

For Kohn, the stoic ideal reached its apex under Augustus. The Emperor, Kohn notes, became the living symbol of a new world civilization, which, according to its philosophers, was based upon peace and justice.\(^\text{27}\) Rome's vast territory brought several different cultures, from east and west, under a single, universal order.\(^\text{28}\) Paradoxically, Kohn's discussion of the fall of Rome centers on the imperfect realization of the first-century idea that he praises. Rome was unable to assimilate the barbarians who threatened its periphery. Despite extending citizenship to all in the empire in 212 CE, it was unable to bring the masses under the umbrella of civilian activity, and further, it had granted citizenship rights and equality at a moment when citizenship and equality no longer meant much in view of the growing despotism of the Emperors.\(^\text{29}\)

Our analysis thus far should make clear that while Kohn did not ignore social changes or political and economic factors, he focused primarily on the development of worldviews. This is especially evident in his transition from Rome to the Middle Ages. While Imperial Rome was unable to execute the universal idea for long, the spirit of the idea would remain its legacy. In


\(^{29}\) Kohn, *The Idea of Nationalism*, 68: Kohn's discussion seems somewhat self-serving here. He does not cite contemporary scholarship concerning the fall of Rome, but focuses on the fall of a sort of Stoic utopia.
Insofar as the Middle Ages were defined by Christianity, \textit{exclusiveness} or particularism played, according to Kohn, almost no part in the way most people understood their role in the cosmos. The new Roman Empire, he asserts, was instituted as an instrument of religious universalism. The main conflict was not between universalism and the desire of separation of individual groups, but between two forms of universalism, \textit{Sacerdotium} and \textit{Imperium}. While, for Kohn, these two institutions competed for earthly authority and placed checks on one another's complete domination, the \textit{Imperium}, unlike modern states, could never claim the complete loyalty of its constituents, who were highly localized and socially stratified.

As a result, Kohn maintains, as opposed to classical civilization, the Middle Ages in Europe were devoid of nationalism, even though many modern nationalists tried to claim a national, pre-modern past. Kohn points out that some, relatively contemporary, German scholars had sought to establish Charlemagne as a German nationalist. In his notes, he goes into some detail about this historiographical debate in which he detects fascist motives: Some historians, such as Erwin Rundnagel, followed Herder in excluding Charlemagne from German history because he operated under \textit{alien} influences. These historians tended to see Charlemagne...
rival, the Saxon leader Widukind, as the early medieval embodiment of the true Germanic spirit. Others such as Carl Erdmann and Frederich Schneider, who claimed that though there were no concepts of French or German during Charlemagne’s time, still maintained that Charlemagne was actually a German, and sought to reclaim him for Germany. In addressing this blatant contradiction, Kohn points out that Charlemagne conducted long campaigns against the Saxons in order to push his kingdom further eastward and to protect its eastern frontier; and for religious reasons to carry the civilization of Christianity into the pagan and barbaric East. Kohn mockingly dismisses the debate: How Charlemagne could be a German if at that time no Germans existed is a mystery which only nationalistic historiography can solve. For Kohn, the Middle Ages in Europe were the least nationalistic of times covered in his study. He notes that while in the divisions of some universities and also at the early fifteenth century Council of Constance, votes were indeed cast based on national affiliation, these were, in fact, purely territorial terms and were devoid of any ethnic character. Although a certain linguistically based affinity developed in Czech lands during the Hussite wars, Kohn is quick to note that this was short lived, especially since the Czechs offered Frederick, Elector of the Palatine, the Bohemian crown. Rather, it would be the cumulative cultural and political impacts of the Renaissance and the Reformation that would begin to transform European life and thought, eventually providing fertile ground for particularistic and nationalist sentiments. Yet

33 Kohn quotes Schneider in Kohn, The Idea of Nationalism, 598, n.32. Schneider and Rundnagel are no longer very well known. Erdmann, far more prominent, was politically and intellectually much more liberal minded.

34 Kohn, The Idea of Nationalism, 598, n.32.

35 Kohn, The Idea of Nationalism, 598, n.32.


still, despite highly significant changes which Kohn identifies as part of the shift from medievalism to modernity, he resists calling these changes "nationalism," explaining that "Though in the breakdown of the universal order the national individualities began to emerge in a more conscious form, Renaissance and Reformation cannot be called an age of nationalism. They remained dominated by religious thought and emotions. Both sprang from the same source — the desire of renovation by a return to the origins — and represented an effort for a synthesis of the old universalism and the new individualism." Not only would it be inappropriate to label the political and intellectual elites as nationalists, in Kohn’s view, but even more importantly, the masses remained largely unchanged, being "untouched by the new high winds of secularism and individualism which swept through the ranks above them."

Kohn does point to some notable individuals in this period who can be considered "forerunners" of nationalism. He regards "the voice of Niccolò Machiavelli," for example, as the earliest form of Italian nationalist expression. Reacting against the invasion and occupation of the Italian peninsula by the French King Charles VIII, and the violent recapture of Florence by the Medici, Machiavelli had wished to rid Italy of its "barbarian" occupiers and restore the ideal of the Republican city state that had characterized the Apennine Peninsula during the earlier Renaissance. For Kohn, Machiavelli's uniqueness lies in his rejection of the religious universalism of the Middle Ages, and his uncompromising embrace of secularism. In these ways, Kohn believed, Machiavelli "sensed the future with relentless clear sightedness." For

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39 Kohn, The Idea of Nationalism, 123.
41 Kohn, The Idea of Nationalism, 129.
him, the state could exist on its own terms, that is, without a religious basis. Thus it could easily become an absolute, moving entirely by and within its autonomous raison d’État.\footnote{Kohn, The Idea of Nationalism, 128: Kohn’s critique of Machiavelli lies not so much in the latter’s pessimism regarding the future of Italy, but his pessimism regarding human nature. Kohn argues that with his pessimism based upon a Utopian perfectionism, he did not see that, although men are not entirely good, nevertheless they will keep faith with one another in many cases, and that on this rule as a moral precept, the existence of civilized society depends, even if the rule be broken in individual cases (128).\footnote{Kohn, The Idea of Nationalism, 130.}} While Machiavelli’s patriotic ideal did not find fertile ground in the waning years of Renaissance Italy, other states in Northern and Western Europe began to consolidate, allowing and even encouraging the rise of vernacular languages and the growth of a sense of particular national identity.

Kohn\footnote{Kohn, The Idea of Nationalism, 132.}’s contrast of Francis I of France and the Holy Roman Emperor Charles V is meant to bring this transition into relief. Francis, Kohn points out, assembled at his court a brilliant array of writers and artists who did much to foster an increased feeling of pride in the political and cultural achievements of the kingdom.\footnote{Kohn, The Idea of Nationalism, 130.} Under the patronage of Francis, the French language began a process of standardization. French humanists translated ancient classics into French, and composed works in the newly elevated vernacular. As Kohn noted, Machiavelli’s pessimism reflected Italy’s diminishing status in the sixteenth century. In contrast, French political thought was imbued with the optimism that characterized sixteenth-century France. Like Machiavelli, these thinkers eschewed medieval universalism, yet began to develop new approaches to the role of the state. Machiavelli saw around him only corruption and decay, and cast about in vain for the savior prince; the French humanists of his time greeted a king whom they hoped to see a king-philosopher and a father of the people…\footnote{Kohn, The Idea of Nationalism, 130.}
In contrast to Francis, the Emperor Charles V reasserted, in a last great effort, the medieval tradition of religious and political universalism. As king of Spain, along with its newly acquired colonial dominions, and as Holy Roman Emperor, Charles sought to maintain imperial and religious unity. Yet, as Kohn demonstrates, the medieval, Catholic universal idea had already been abandoned by most of his peers, including the pontiff himself: "[T]his dynastic imperialism, medieval in its dream, modern in its reality, was resisted by the leading Catholic princes of the time. In his fight against Charles V, Francis I of France, who even allied himself with the Turks against the Christian Empire, represented the nascent idea of a national state. The Pope, a territorial prince of the Renaissance, took up arms against the imperial champion of the Catholic faith. Thus, according to Kohn, Charles V clung to an already abandoned ideal. Additionally, he seeks to demonstrate, the unique nature of Lutheranism and Germanic humanism were even less suited to the "this worldly" approach of the Renaissance, which was indicative in its own way of the changing political culture of Europe.

Martin Luther is not treated by Kohn as any real precursor to German nationalism as he was by some German nationalists and even some contemporary historians. Surely, as Kohn admits, Luther's emphasis on the sermon and his Bible translation exercised a vital role in establishing a common language and literary vehicle in German lands. However, even in Luther's time, he disassociated his Protestantism from the Empire and from the battle against the social iniquities of his time; instead, Protestantism supported the local princely powers and

46 Kohn, The Idea of Nationalism, 146.

47 Kohn, The Idea of Nationalism, 148: While Kohn points out the alliance of Francis I with the Turks against the Holy Roman Empire, he emphasizes later on that at the beginning of the 17th century, "The Turk still seemed a great danger to Christianity and a common enemy of Europe; the spirit of the Crusades was not yet entirely dead. (187)."

48 While Kohn notes that Luther made some isolated statements that could be interpreted this way, he points to the appropriation of Luther, primarily by Treitschke, in building up a German national history. See Kohn, The Idea of Nationalism, 617ff. 618, n. 21.
the established order of class and caste. Very soon the concern of Lutherans for national matters ceased entirely, and their only problem was the religious struggle against the Antichrist in Rome, a struggle not confined within any national or political frontiers.⁴⁹ Therefore, though the Reformation would shatter Rome’s formerly universal hold on the souls of Western and Central Europe, Luther sought not to demolish universal Christianity, but to replace the one that existed in Rome.

A nascent form of German national consciousness could be found, Kohn believed, in the thought of the early sixteenth century reformer, Ulrich von Hutten.⁵⁰ In the general atmosphere of classical revival that characterized the humanist movement, Hutten appropriated the Germanic conqueror Arminius as a heroic symbol of the moral virtues and the political struggle of the whole German people throughout history.⁵¹ Contrasting Hutten and Machiavelli, both of whom departed from the universalistic tradition of the Middle Ages, Kohn stresses that unlike Machiavelli, Hutten was tied to the Medieval imperial idea. What is important for Kohn, however, is that both were unable to find fertile ground for their respective outlooks.

Only in England, during the sixteenth century and seventeenth centuries, did trends transform the masses as well as the elites.⁵² Kohn gives significant attention to the withdrawal of England from the continent in the aftermath of the Hundred Years War, which allowed for a domestic focus not possible on the continent. The rise of the Tudors, especially Henry VIII, furthered these important trends. He explains, "Henry VIII, a typical product of the Renaissance,

⁴⁹ Kohn, The Idea of Nationalism, 143.
⁵⁰ Ulrich von Hutton (1488–1523), as opposed to Luther, sought to tie Lutheranism to the tradition of medieval knighthood in German lands.
⁵² For a similar, more recent account see Greenfield, Nationalism: Five Roads to Modernity, especially the first chapter, "God’s Firstborn: England."
played for English history and nationalism a role similar to that of the absolute kings on the continent; and the result of his reign was a conscious English etatism. Further, Henry destroyed finally, the bond which tied England to medieval universalism. He accepted the title of Majesty, reserved until then for the Emperor. He established the national English Church, a Church in its beginning supported by reasons of state rather than by the life giving forces of nationalism.

Thus, Kohn depicts developments in England, such as etatism, as anticipating those on the continent by at least a century. Factors that would contribute to nationalism on the continent were still in nascent stages. Yet during the seventeenth century, they began to coalesce in England. By the century’s end, Kohn believed, England had become the first modern state, and the first true example of nationalism.

The English State as a Turning Point in World History

The strengthening of the state and the growth of national consciousness that accompanied the Tudor dynasty set the stage for more important transformations in the socio-cultural identity of the English people. Kohn points to the proliferation of the sciences during the Elizabethan era through the seventeenth century as a particularly transformative factor. The Renaissance had attempted to recover classical civilization and learning, whereas the growth of natural science led to a new and distinctly modern form of thinking. Kohn points to Francis Bacon, who combatted the pessimism of his time by asserting that science was a cause for hope, and the foundation of a

greater future. Kohn asserts that it was through science and in England that the pessimistic conviction of ancient superiority was broken: "The seventeenth century controversy between the ancients and moderns was fought in England less on the battlefields of belles lettres and aesthetic criticism (as it was in France) than in the field of experimental research and scientific progress. The idea of the superiority of the moderns thus soon merged with the superiority of the English, as leaders of the new science of which even the ancients had been ignorant." While Kohn represents scientific progress as a force that created and strengthened a new, modern universalism, he acknowledges that England increasingly applied these principles in the particular realm of national politics. Thus the seventeenth-century Puritan revolution, "was a synthesis of far-reaching importance, of Calvinist ethics and a new optimistic humanism."

This synthesis was exemplified by Oliver Cromwell. Inspired by the values of the Old Testament, England represented a reinterpretation of the concept of "choseness." Through him, Kohn argues, this biblical concept was transformed to define the English nation. Cromwell, he asserts, "more than any other, awakened the consciousness of the English as the chosen people, a consciousness in which every Englishman was called to participate."

Kohn was too good a historian not to address some of Cromwell's less savory endeavors, although his analysis of Cromwell's military campaigns in Ireland presages the apologetic way he treats later instances of British imperialism. As a "chosen people," the English, in Cromwell's view, were obligated to bring the principles of religious liberty and felicity to the

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55 Kohn, The Idea of Nationalism, 162.
56 Kohn, The Idea of Nationalism, 163–164.
57 Kohn, The Idea of Nationalism, 166.
59 See for instance, in our next chapter, the way in which Kohn treats British imperialism in India.
other peoples in their midst. Thus, Kohn admits, his lack of knowledge of Irish history and of Irish social conditions caused him to misunderstand the situation in that unhappy land, he was sincerely convinced that the English army brought to Ireland a truly human life for all.60

At the end of the seventeenth century, England’s Glorious Revolution established a more tolerant and moderate version of the synthesis that had animated Cromwell and the nation. The optimism and pragmatic emphasis on stability that defined the English in this period can be seen in the writings of John Locke, who believed in the fundamental goodness of man, in the social character of the state of nature, in which violence or was occurred only if men abandoned the rule of reason.61 Further, Kohn emphasizes, Locke gave vital attention to the rights of property which were indispensable to the middle and mercantile classes.62

By the end of the seventeenth century, therefore, England had become the first nation in the modern sense of the term. Having overcome the bounds of absolutism, and having reached a sense of common peoplehood, modern nationalism had been established.63 In continental Europe, however, the transition would be defined by strife and a far more consequential, eighteenth-century, revolution.

60 Kohn, The Idea of Nationalism, 177. In his footnotes, Kohn further defends this position. Unlike during the Elizabethan era, during which there was discussion of outright and indiscriminate massacre against the Irish, Kohn maintains that Cromwell believed accounts that otherwise peaceful co-existence between the English and Irish was being disturbed by wicked priests. See Kohn, The Idea of Nationalism, 633, n. 72.


63 As we have noted, Liah Greenfield has recently presented a similar interpretation to Kohn’s regarding the rise of English nationhood. Linda Colley, however, has presented a more complicated and certainly less civic-centered picture of British nationalism in the early to mid-eighteenth century. She identifies, for instance, the role of the Jacobite threat in creating a more unified British identity. See Linda Colley, Britons: Forging the Nation, 1707–1737 (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2005).
Continental Shifts

Kohn conceptualized the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries as key periods of transition in the rise of nationalism. While the breakdown of imperial and religious unity was reflected in the 1648 political settlement at Westphalia, the resulting forms of particularism were both political and elitist. As Kohn explains, Etatism, not nationalism emerged from the disintegration of medieval universalism. The dynasty took the place of religion; loyalty centered in the prince.64

As Absolutism, now abandoned in England, came to define the political structure of Western and Central Europe, a new rationalism, raison d’état, served as the foundation for the political process. Not surprisingly, Kohn points to Cardinal Richelieu as the representative of this seventeenth century trend. Richelieu’s rational approach to the state, its resources and foreign relations led the way to the consolidation of absolutist states in Europe. Mercantilism, Kohn emphasizes, was the economic outcome of these developments. Mercantilist commercial policy, he explains, was of an intrinsically warlike nature, trying to strengthen the state in its competition with, and for its struggles against, other states. It was ever conducted to the disadvantage of other states and of foreigners.65 Thus, despite the rise of universalistic political theories, such as those of Hugo Grotius, or scientific advancement that stressed the ever present laws of nature, such as Descartes, the political reality of the seventeenth century, though balanced, was far from universal. Significantly, Kohn makes this point by contrasting the time in question with the time in which he himself came of age: The seventeenth century showed a

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64 Kohn, The Idea of Nationalism, 188.
65 Kohn, The Idea of Nationalism, 201.
glaring discrepancy between the universalistic philosophy and the parochial reality. In that respect it was the very reverse of the first half of the twentieth century, with its universalistic reality, as a result of fast communications and economic interdependence, and its parochial philosophy which preserved the nationalistic outlook of the nineteenth century.\(^66\)

Though states increasingly nationalized their respective economies, political structures and even their religions, Kohn emphasizes that the states of the seventeenth century were not in any way driven by motives of nationality.\(^67\) He points out, for example, that Even in the second half of the eighteenth century, Prussia under Frederick II was as glad and willing to incorporate subjects of Polish Nationality as those of German; in fact Poles might have appeared to the absolute state to be better subjects than Germans.\(^67\) The Habsburgs, he emphasizes, looked admiringly upon French language and culture, seeing the French language as the most effective tool of efficient administration. Additionally, Kohn points out, The lack of German nationalism among the Habsburgs was clearly discernible in their attitude towards the French in the Low Countries.\(^68\)

While the mid-seventeenth to mid-eighteenth century was an exceedingly important period for thriving states, and for the proliferation of important new, often rational and humanistic, ideas, The masses continued to live in the emotional forms of religion; the change in the political superstructure did not reach deep into their lives or mold the substance of their daily thoughts and actions.\(^69\) Rather, it was the emergence of the later eighteenth-century

\(^{66}\) Kohn, The Idea of Nationalism, 201.

\(^{67}\) Kohn, The Idea of Nationalism, 203.

\(^{68}\) Kohn, The Idea of Nationalism, 644, n. 35: Kohn points out that both French and Flemish subjects, and their respective languages, were treated equally.

\(^{69}\) Kohn, The Idea of Nationalism, 188.
Enlightenment which began the necessary awakening of the masses and confronted the political realities under which it grew.

**The Enlightenment: Tensions in Balance**

The eighteenth century is the most pivotal period in Kohn’s work. Though it does not receive the same degree of attention in his oeuvre as the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, on which he focuses due to the rise of nation-states and the later radicalization of nationalism, it represents, for him, an ideal balance of the universal and particular tensions that *the Idea of Nationalism* charts. Kohn’s reading of the major thinkers and events of this period is vitally important in understanding his outlook as a liberal who sought to establish a difficult balance of the forces within the “Age of Nationalism.”

In this discussion, even the tone of Kohn’s writing changes significantly. Modern civilization, he poetically asserts, was molded into its definite form in the eighteenth century. It was a rebirth of the Greece of Socrates, of its optimism as to the validity of reasoned conclusions and its belief in man as the proper study of mankind. The Athenian tradition of rationalism and humanism, of the perfectibility of man by right thinking, was deepened by the Palestinian inheritance of respect for the sanctity of life and of the conception of history as a dynamic process towards a more perfect world. Embodying this unprecedented balance of Athens and Jerusalem, the men of the eighteenth century found themselves animated by a new power and a new daring. The individual and social world opened before them in a new and brighter light; an immense effort seemed to wait for the insight and the courage of the

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builders.\textsuperscript{71} For the \textit{philosophe}, who thought and wrote in a post-Newtonian age, \textit{reason} showed him the way to an understanding of the universe in its infinity, of which the starry sky above reminded him, and to a guidance of himself together with his fellow men, directed by the moral law within him. This autonomy endowed him with a new dignity and a new responsibility.\textsuperscript{72}

While Kohn emphasizes this powerful new sense of autonomy, he is quick to note that \textit{the} elevation of man did not imply any dethronement of God.\textsuperscript{73} Rather, \textit{God} went from an absolute monarch to a constitutional one, \textit{who} had established the most wonderful and perfect constitution, the laws of nature by which \textit{He} Himself was bound and which man was to learn and to know.\textsuperscript{74} Kohn emphasizes that this realization, that natural law is universally applicable and valid, led the thinkers of the eighteenth century to question absolute monarchy in its earthly forms. While references to \textit{fatherland}(\textit{patrie}) began to emerge in the mid-eighteenth century, Kohn maintains that during this period the concept of \textit{fatherland} was inseparable from the new, and quickly all pervasive, discourse concerning liberties. Thus, Kohn believes that we can speak of \textit{patriotism} in this period; but this form of proto-civic nationalism was still in its very nascent stages.

For thinkers like Voltaire, Kohn points out, the state and its sovereign drew their legitimacy insofar as they conformed to the universal principles of the \textit{new philosophy}.\textsuperscript{75} Already by the second half of the eighteenth century, however, \textit{the} benevolent sovereignty of

\textsuperscript{71} Kohn, \textit{The Idea of Nationalism}, 215.
\textsuperscript{72} Kohn, \textit{The Idea of Nationalism}, 216.
\textsuperscript{73} Kohn, \textit{The Idea of Nationalism}, 216.
\textsuperscript{74} Kohn, \textit{The Idea of Nationalism}, 217.
\textsuperscript{75} Kohn, \textit{The Idea of Nationalism}, 219.
the prince bound by his own laws seemed insufficient for the rapid development of the public
mind. The subjects demanded participation in the sovereignty.\textsuperscript{76} Kohn also ties this trend to
the economic thought in the second half of the century, among the French physiocrats and, most
importantly, in the thought of Adam Smith.\textsuperscript{77}

With the principles of universal liberty and morality seemingly triumphant, the late
eighteenth century appears to be a strange birthplace for modern nationalism. Kohn attempts an
explanation as to how these roots emerged, one that speaks to his philosophy of human nature:
\begin{quote}
In the eighteenth century the free personality emerged in all fields of human activity—political,
cultural and economic. But this new order posited the grave problem of how to reconcile the
liberty of the individual with the exigencies of social integration, how to subject man to a law
which could no longer claim the authority of an absolute lawgiver outside and above men. In
this situation nationalism was to become a tie binding the autonomous individual into the
partnership of a community.\textsuperscript{78}
\end{quote}

For Kohn, this dilemma and attempts at its resolution was what separated the \textit{early} and
\textit{late} Enlightenments.\textsuperscript{79} According to Kohn, the \textit{early} Enlightenment, which roughly spanned
the years 1680 to 1750, was animated by the spirit of optimistic benevolence. This rococo
civilization was still limited to very small circles of an aristocratic society and a few free spirits
in close contact with them.\textsuperscript{80} In this early Enlightenment, in Kohn’s formulation, reason

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{76} Kohn, The Idea of Nationalism, 220.
\item \textsuperscript{77} Kohn, The Idea of Nationalism, 221\textsuperscript{–}225.
\item \textsuperscript{78} Kohn, The Idea of Nationalism, 226.
\item \textsuperscript{79} Kohn does not cite any historical works in making this split. The vast majority of citations in his treatment of the
Enlightenment refer to primary texts. It is possible that he took the date 1780 from Paul Hazard’s \textit{The European
Mind: 1680\textsuperscript{–}1715}. 1750 likely refers to the publication by Rousseau of his \textit{Discourse on Arts and Sciences}.
\item \textsuperscript{80} Kohn, The Idea of Nationalism, 234.
\end{itemize}
was recognized as the fundamental essence of man, but at the same time as a discipline which in no way should suppress the other sides of man’s nature, but moderate and ennoble them and help to realize the universality of man.\textsuperscript{81}

The late Enlightenment, which began in the mid-eighteenth century, was characterized by the increasing influence of middle class circles. Lacking aristocratic restraint, a new aggressive tone, sometimes even sharp and bitter, made itself heard in philosophical and political discussions; skepticism gave way to an assertive faith in criticism of existing institutions.\textsuperscript{82} Unlike the earlier Enlightenment, there was a significant hearkening back to classical civilization and its forms. Even more importantly, he points to the diversity of thought and interpretations in this later Enlightenment. Thus, despite the principles based in reason which guided the late Enlightenment, so complex, intricate, and even contradictory was the climate of the period as throughout most of modern history that this turn to antiquity which in men like Goethe formed the foundation of a universal and conservative wisdom, became with others an appeal to revolutionary emotions and created the conditions for the rise of national feeling.\textsuperscript{83} For Kohn, no other thinker of the Enlightenment was appropriated by so many and in so many contradictory ways as Jean Jacques Rousseau, who symbolizes the trend of complexity and contradiction that he cites.

As the old order and its institutions came under increasing criticism, the task emerged to create a new order of freedom, based upon the autonomy of the individual. Rousseau was the first to understand the problem fully and to attempt its solution. Under his hands evolved, almost reluctantly, the new center and justification of society, the sacred collective personality of the

\textsuperscript{81} Kohn, The Idea of Nationalism, 234.
\textsuperscript{82} Kohn, The Idea of Nationalism, 234.
\textsuperscript{83} Kohn, The Idea of Nationalism, 235.
Thus, Kohn emphasizes, "Nationalism was to provide the integrating force of the new era which dawned over France, and through France over western mankind." Kohn commences an in depth discussion of Rousseau by pointing to important parallels with Nietzsche, which is one of the few times in this work that Kohn comments beyond the specific time he is treating.

According to Kohn, "Rousseau's importance for and influence on the development of modern political thought could hardly be exaggerated; in certain respects he occupied in the second half of the eighteenth century a position similar to that of Nietzsche in the second half of the nineteenth century. Their highly sensitive minds reflected coming changes in the intellectual climate of Europe; as they were groping to put into words and formulas future and sometimes almost imperceptible attitudes, their writings remained by necessity contradictory, and open to diverse and conflicting interpretations. In spite of many elements in their thoughts and works to the contrary, Rousseau helped lay the foundations for the democratic nationalism of the nineteenth century, and Nietzsche those for the fascist nationalism of the twentieth."

Unique among the Enlightenment intelligentsia, yet one of their greatest minds, Rousseau sought to bridge the gap between rational liberty and sentiment. Kohn defines Rousseau's task and contribution as it departed from Locke and the French Encyclopedists. While these thinkers, "had stressed individualism and rationalism in their task of liberating man and society from the fetters of the past, attempting to build society under these new conditions, had to shift the emphasis without abandoning the foundations." Rousseau feared the "disintegrating forces of"

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84 Kohn, The Idea of Nationalism, 237.
86 Kohn, The Idea of Nationalism, 238: Significantly, the following two chapters (6 and 7) begin with quotes from Rousseau and Nietzsche respectively.
personal voluptuousness and inertia in the context of his communal vision, Kohn stresses, but the same time (and here Rousseau was truly the son of the eighteenth century) this community must be one in which individual freedom was neither suppressed nor oppressed, but found its highest realization. Kohn also emphasizes the impact of Rousseau’s native Geneva and his time as an exile in France on his thought. Exiled from his native town, he explains, he built his thought on a nostalgic memory of the civic and republican virtues of Calvin’s community, in which the influences of Old Testament theocracy and the literary memories of republican Rome and of Stoic philosophy were revitalized by the Reformation in a hard-working and proud middle-class society. His unfortunate experiences in a strange land increased his attachment to his small native republic, where power politics and thoughts of glory and conquest seemed absent, where independence and liberty were cherished and strict ideas of virtue emphasized.

Thus, for Kohn, Rousseau defies easy categorization. Attempts to do so, he reveals, have resulted in dangerous misappropriations. Though Rousseau wrote admirably of Ancient Sparta and the Roman republic, he abhorred their expansionist policies. The Roman Empire, and Empires in general, were repulsive to him. Further, Kohn emphasizes that Rousseau understood that different cultures demand different formulae for the implementation of the republican ideal. This is made clear through Kohn’s discussion of Rousseau’s separate proposals for Corsica and Poland.

Rousseau understood, Kohn argues, that Conditions differed in the two cases: Corsica offered the rare chance of a new beginning, Poland was an old state in disintegration, whose

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89 Kohn, The Idea of Nationalism, 239.
90 Kohn, The Idea of Nationalism, 250.
survival demanded a moral and political rebirth.\textsuperscript{91} Kohn notes that in his *A Project of the Constitution for Corsica* (1765), Rousseau formulated a Corsican oath, in the final line of which "liberty and justice precede the fatherland."\textsuperscript{92} Further, Corsica would allow Rousseau to formulate his own agrarian Utopia. Suspect of urban life, Rousseau elevated rural virtues and civic equality: "universal military service seemed to Rousseau to be the only truly democratic foundation for the preservation of liberty; farmers and all citizens should share equally in this common task. All should employ the same rights, bear the same burdens without aristocracy, privileges, or hereditary distinctions. As all would serve in the army, all of them would be equally eligible as magistrates.\textsuperscript{93}

Poland presented Rousseau with a more difficult scenario. Far from a potential Utopia, Poland, in Rousseau's view, needed to reduce its expansive territory and implement reforms that focused upon national education. Among other important reforms, Kohn points out two which were designed to imbue Polish society with a patriotic, republican spirit: "he opposed the election of foreigners as kings, because they would introduce foreign customs; he demanded universal military service in a national militia which would cost little, would always be ready, and would fight well, because men would fight for their own."\textsuperscript{94}

Though Rousseau's ideal of small, relatively isolated and militarily able republics seems far from the pursuit of peace which defined much of the Enlightenment, Kohn emphasizes that Rousseau had a larger vision, beyond individual republics: "Rousseau, like all liberal nationalists

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{91} Kohn, *The Idea of Nationalism*, 253.
\item \textsuperscript{92} Kohn, *The Idea of Nationalism*, 254.
\item \textsuperscript{93} Kohn, *The Idea of Nationalism*, 254: Kohn points out that this constitution never reached the Corsicans, and was only discovered after his death (255).
\item \textsuperscript{94} Kohn, *The Idea of Nationalism*, 257.
\end{itemize}
from the French Revolution to 1848, was deeply convinced that a free people would never attack another people. Rousseau envisioned a world federation of small independent and peaceful states and the extension of the rule of law from the national city-state to the city of man.\textsuperscript{95}

Rousseau, depicted as one who fully engaged reason and liberty, as well as sentiment and national feeling, is a central figure in Kohn\textsuperscript{\textdegree}s genealogy of nationalism. He also helped to ground the vision of Kohn\textsuperscript{\textdegree}s most superior prophet of the eighteenth century, Immanuel Kant. Like Rousseau, Kant at the end of the century regarded free republican constitutions as the only possible basis for the organization of a lasting peace.\textsuperscript{96}

Further, through Kant\textsuperscript{\textdegree}s absorption of Rousseau\textsuperscript{\textdegree}s ideals, Kohn asserts strongly that the Enlightenment project can serve, not only as the foundation for hope in the twentieth century, but perhaps mankind\textsuperscript{\textdegree}s only chance at redemption. It is through this discussion that Kohn presents his most striking observation about the relationship of the eighteenth and twentieth centuries. Kant, according to Kohn, founded his project upon a deep insight into the nature of man and of ethics. His little book, \textit{a mature fruit on the mighty tree of eighteenth-century Enlightenment and rationalism, in whose shade the twentieth century will have to build the city of man if it is not to be engulfed by the widening desert of death}, would have been unthinkable without Rousseau.\textsuperscript{97}

While Rousseau\textsuperscript{\textdegree}s proposals for Corsica lay unread, his thought had a far greater impact on a new society he could not have anticipated. As Kohn points out, nobody could have foreseen the rise of a nation in the North American colonies in the middle of the eighteenth century.\textsuperscript{98}

\textsuperscript{95}Kohn, The Idea of Nationalism, 257.

\textsuperscript{96}Kohn, The Idea of Nationalism, 258.

\textsuperscript{97}Kohn, The Idea of Nationalism, 258. Emphasis is mine. Here Kohn is referring to Kant\textsuperscript{\textdegree}s \textit{Perpetual Peace} (1795).

\textsuperscript{98}Kohn, The Idea of Nationalism, 271.
From Kohn’s point of view, the initial period of English settlement in the New World encouraged a distinct form of communal identity. The English tradition of constitutional liberties and common law, as expressed in the colonial charters, was augmented by the young and experimental character of the settlements so remote from European society and its time honored distinctions. Further, Kohn points out, the early colonists shared the Calvinist religious fervor of their counterparts in England: Like the Puritans in England, those in the colonies felt themselves to be the new Israel. Their perilous migration to a new and fertile country, in which they were soon to prosper in both numbers and wealth, increased their self-identification with the old Hebrews and kept it more strongly alive. While Biblical interpretation could of course support very opposite conclusions, and though Kohn points out, leaders such as John Winthrop and John Cotton often used the Old Testament for anti-democratic ends, the interpretation of the scriptures in Connecticut and Rhode Island, and by many in the Puritan revolution in England, became the foundation on which modern democracy was built.

This early republican spirit was bolstered by the emphasis on natural rights, which crossed the Atlantic in the eighteenth century. Thus, in Kohn’s formulation, The American colonies revolted not because they were oppressed, but because they were free and their freedom carried the promise of still greater freedom, one unrealizable in the more settled and static conditions of old society but beckoning as a possibility in the new continent.

Kohn’s admiration for British and American democracy was especially pronounced in his earlier position papers. This tendency, as we have already seen, is also quite strong in the Idea

100 Kohn, The Idea of Nationalism, 269.
101 Kohn, The Idea of Nationalism, 270.
of Nationalism. Yet despite these important ties, the development of American democracy was not exactly the "immaculate conception," that André Liebich finds in Kohn's presentation. Kohn asserts, "The American Revolution became not a new link in the chain of English liberty, but the venture of a nascent nation which undertook to build its life on the new foundation of the human rights of the eighteenth century." Though Kohn does give attention to the context of the ideas and personalities that he analyzes, a tendency in Kohn's work is to cite and analyze transitional figures and "national prophets," who embody the tensions of their respective national movements, and communicate a national image and vision to their compatriots. Kohn points to several crucial figures in the early years of the United States. Noah Webster, for example, labored to establish a national education, a sense of culture, and even a "national fashion." Alexander Hamilton, as a proponent of "economic nationalism," wished to create an "American England," with a strong centralized structure. Yet, Kohn declares that in the case of American nationalism, "Rousseau had carried the day over the Glorious Revolution." In the case of the United States, Kohn's national prophet is clearly Thomas Jefferson. Through an examination of Kohn's analysis of Jefferson, we can see that though the United States emerged from and spoke the language of English traditions, the nascent nation was strongly infused by Rousseauan ideals.

Jefferson's ascent to the presidency, Kohn states, would "consummate the task started in 1776." Noting the far from unanimous support of the revolution among the colonists, and the "purely constitutional motives" which drove the initial rebellion, Kohn cites Jefferson's central

104 Kohn, The Idea of Nationalism, 280.
contribution as his reinterpretation of the American Revolution in light of natural rights.\textsuperscript{106} In fact, noting the romanticized image that many western European intellectuals had of the nascent United States, Kohn is quick to note that their keen flight of imagination had not the slightest backing in fact: for a very long time to come, culturally and politically, the young nation remained on the outskirts of the civilized world.\textsuperscript{107} That being said, Kohn points to the profound idea that grounded American independence and nationalism: for the first time a nation had arisen on the basis of these truths held do be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness.\textsuperscript{108} Thus, Kohn emphasizes, the nullification of any of these rights would amount to the abrogation of the nation itself. It was from this standpoint, in both the past and seemingly in Kohn\textsuperscript{109} present, that the ideological foundations of American nationalism were a blend of Enlightenment traditions: Because America has been realizing what the ideologists of the English and French Enlightenment strove for, because her nationalism has not been original or autochthonous, but universal, America, in proclaiming liberty and happiness both as her foundation and as her goal, regarded herself as the trustee of these blessings for Europe and mankind.\textsuperscript{109}

Kohn presents Jefferson as the primary exponent of this national self-conception. According to Kohn, Jefferson believed that the young nation had been singled out by Providence to become the embodiment of the rational and liberal ideals of the eighteenth

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\textsuperscript{106} Kohn, The Idea of Nationalism, 277.
\textsuperscript{107} Kohn, The Idea of Nationalism, 290\textsuperscript{−}291.
\textsuperscript{108} Kohn, The Idea of Nationalism, 291.
\textsuperscript{109} Kohn, The Idea of Nationalism, 293.
\end{flushleft}
Further, through Jefferson, the ideals of Rousseau, designed for far smaller and more heterogeneous republics, became translated to apply on a much larger scale. Aside from Jefferson’s idealization of an agrarian republic, he emphasized the centrality of a national will. Kohn observes that in Jefferson’s vision all its liberty and diversity the nation was to be one, and this supreme allegiance to the national idea, this single-mindedness of the national will in all decisive crises, was to Jefferson, as to the men of the French Revolution, the prerequisite of national existence.

Kohn gives significant emphasis to Jefferson’s vital role in ensuring the separation of church and state, thus consummating the work begun by Roger Williams and John Locke, as well as the centrality of public education and universities to his vision both for Virginia and the country at large. More problematic, perhaps, is Kohn’s praise of Jefferson as a leader in the moral condemnation of slavery. Though Jefferson was a southerner, Kohn contents he took through his stand in the question of slavery as a true son of the Enlightenment. Kohn continues to cite Jefferson’s moral pronouncements against slavery as well as his conviction that emancipation would accompany the general march of progress. Yet, Kohn makes no mention of Jefferson’s ownership of slaves. He also points to Jefferson’s pronouncements on behalf of humane treatment of Native Americans and the recognition of their Natural Dignity.

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110 Kohn, The Idea of Nationalism, 308.

111 Kohn writes that though Jefferson outlived Rousseau by almost half a century, he remained faithful to his master’s emphasis on agriculture as the foundation of economic life, of civic virtue and moral happiness (315).

112 Kohn, The Idea of Nationalism, 309: In the same paragraph, Kohn continues to explain that Jefferson was an early proponent of what would become known as the melting-pot. He notes to facilitate the process of integration, Jefferson strongly opposed the settlement of immigrants in compact groups, and advocated their wide distribution among the older settlers for the purpose of quicker amalgamation.

113 Kohn, The Idea of Nationalism, 313.

Thus, for Kohn, Jefferson was the “founding father” of American nationalism, which made the United States the only nation to be founded by a true man of the Enlightenment. As he puts it: “Thus, over a long life which stretched from the zenith of Voltaire’s influence to that of the Restoration and the Holy Alliance, the American apostle preserved his faith in the Enlightenment and its universal blessings. In the fifty years from July 4, 1776, to Jefferson’s death on July 4, 1826, what had been a promise and intention had become the firm foundation of the American republic.”

Despite Kohn’s, at times, whitewashed account of Jefferson and, as we will see, other national prophets that he admired, he does acknowledge that the “American ideal” has been rather imperfectly understood and acted upon. Aside from citing, as we have seen, the issue of slavery and the treatment of Native Americans, he notes that the “promise” of America, as carried forth by manifest destiny, “very imperfectly realized and often obscured or denied the rights it promised to bring. Further, he acknowledges that the Louisiana Purchase was acquired in “an outright imperialist and undemocratic way” Kohn’s final judgment of America’s imperial endeavors, however, echoes almost verbatim his analysis of English imperial rule. Kohn states “America, like seventeenth century England, had visualized her own national birth as a step in the struggle for the liberty and happiness of the human race; though she might often allow the consciousness of herself and her conscience to become blacked out, nevertheless she could not give up entirely without undermining the foundations of her existence.”

Thus, the United States was an imperfect, yet the most perfect, realization of the ideals of the Enlightenment. The tension of universal values and the mission of the particular nation lived

117 Kohn, The Idea of Nationalism, 323.
in relative harmony. Yet the early nineteenth century would represent an end to the domination of Enlightenment abroad and a form of reaction that would abrogate the values that grounded the American republic.

Upon returning to an analysis of the Old World, Kohn presents a clear statement of the now well-known dichotomy that characterizes his broad analysis of nations: While the formation of national characters has gone on through many centuries, the crystallization has taken place in the age of nationalism. In the Western world, in England and in France, in the Netherlands and in Switzerland, in the United States and in the British dominions, the rise of nationalism was a predominantly political occurrence; it was preceded by the formation of the future nation state. Outside the Western world, in Central and Eastern Europe and in Asia nationalism there grew in protest against and in conflict with the existing state pattern—primarily to transform it into a people’s state, but to redraw the political boundaries in conformity with ethnographic demands.\[118\]

Despite this simply stated dichotomy, a close reading of Kohn’s analysis of central European nationalism shows that far from being determinative, in many cases liberal ideas were indeed absorbed into the intellectual traditions of the cultures he discusses. In the eighteenth century, he points out, Western enlightenment began to stream into Germany not in small rivulets, but in broad rivers, and within a century the intellectual backwardness of the country had been overcome.\[119\] Why it did not take hold in the broader structures of society and in the worldview of everyday people is Kohn’s main question, and is an important part of his famous bifurcation.

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\[118\] Kohn, The Idea of Nationalism, 329.

\[119\] Kohn, The Idea of Nationalism, 345.
Turning to the Early Enlightenment, Kohn contrasts Locke and Bayle with Leibniz. As opposed to the worldview of Leibniz, which still straddled medieval concerns along with early modern scientific innovation, Locke and Bayle, through the societies in which they lived, took a decidedly active role in the life and history of their nations, writing to transform public opinion, which had become increasingly influential. Leibniz sought a reunion of western Christendom. As Kohn observes ÓMuch of his thought was still dominated by the medieval concepts of Church and Empire.Ó Yet Leibniz was, first and foremost, part of the world of scholars, and his intellectual isolation from politics was characteristic of later German scholars whose isolation from the political would prove, in Kohn's view, ineffectual, and in some cases, dangerous.

As we have seen, Kohn placed a great deal of importance on the role of religion in the rising national consciousness of western societies. In England, and in the United States, the Calvinist-puritan spirit leant a sense of purpose to the common people and middle classes, and reinforced the republican ideal. In Germany however, Kohn does not find a comparable elevation in the dignity of the common man. The Lutheran reformation, as he understands it, was elitist Ó Luther relied on the nobility for support, and remained relatively apolitical. Drawing on Koppel Pinson's analysis of Pietism and German nationalism, Kohn concedes that Pietism did give increased worth and dignity to the masses, yet it was more moderate, far more akin to Methodism than to Calvinism. Additionally, Kohn contends, while the Enlightenment's rational secularization paved the way for the modern German state; it did not coincide with any popular will for societal change. Rather, the will to change coincided with the

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120 Kohn, The Idea of Nationalism, 342.
121 In Kohn's discussion of the Reformation, he points to Luther's hatred of Zwingli, Anabaptists and his suspicion of the peasantry (Kohn, The Idea of Nationalism, 137).
122 Kohn, The Idea of Nationalism, 349.
waning of Enlightenment and the rise of Romanticism, which harnessed the religious enthusiasm and popular focus of pietism in an entirely new direction: the irrationalism and enthusiasm of the Pietists, an enthusiasm no longer filling the heart of the lonely individual walking humbly before God, but poured into the mystic body of the national community.⁷¹²³

**Conceptualizing the “National Community”**

Kohn points to Christian Furchtegott Gellert as an illustrative example. A German writer who continued the literary achievements of Johann Christoph Gottsched, Gellert was a true son of the Enlightenment and of its humanitarian rationalism, eager to ennoble human sentiments and to liberate the wellsprings of goodness in the human heart which had been desiccated by the despotism of princes and the rigidity of orthodoxy.⁷¹²⁴ Yet Gellert lacked any desire to bring his enlightened values to the political realm. Even as Prussia gained in power and influence and upheaval abounded, Gellert was, in Kohn’s words, more than satisfied to leave all politics to the wisdom of the rulers and their officials, and most thankful for not being interrupted in the enjoyment of a life in which domestic peace, sentimental friendships, and the easy grace of poetry alone counted.⁷¹²⁵ By removing themselves from the political realm, and seeing their own isolation as a virtue, German scholars prepared the ground for an otherworldly, ideological focus.

There is, however, a scholar whose personal isolation Kohn is more than willing to forgive: Immanuel Kant. On no German thinker, Kohn asserts, had Rousseau’s influence

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⁷¹ Kohn, The Idea of Nationalism, 349.
⁷² Kohn, The Idea of Nationalism, 347.
⁷³ Kohn, The Idea of Nationalism, 347.
⁷⁴ Kohn, The Idea of Nationalism, 347.
⁷⁵ Kohn, The Idea of Nationalism, 347.
been so decisive and lasting as on Kant.\textsuperscript{126} Yet, for Kohn, Kant moved beyond Rousseau, both morally and in his vision of an overarching, global, rational order. Kohn expounds on the distinction: "Both shared the fundamental respect for the dignity of the human individual, but Kant's ethics never knew any other horizon than the universal one of mankind. To treat man as an end and not merely as a means, to subject him to no other legislation than to that which he has concurred as an autonomous member of the general will, was Rousseauan; but beyond that Kant visualized mankind, a universal society of free individuals, as the goal of all human development.\textsuperscript{127}"

For Kant, this was a process. Thus, insofar as nations existed, they were not ends in themselves but means to a higher rational and cooperative order. This cosmopolitan dream was, for Kant, the end goal of a rather long process of enlightenment. As Kohn sums up, "The greatest problem for mankind is the establishment of a cosmopolitan order of universal law, a problem of utmost difficulty, as Kant concedes, but one which man is forced to solve because otherwise the mounting chaos of wars will destroy him. Kant did not regard the universal order of peace and liberty as a Utopia; he was convinced that human development would by necessity lead to it. He saw it as a rational fulfillment of the ethical faculties of man.\textsuperscript{128}"

Kohn groups Schiller and Goethe, similarly, in this cosmopolitan category.

In what was, perhaps, the most thorough review of the *Idea of Nationalism*, the intellectual historian Jacob Salwyn Schapiro took issue with this elevation of Kant. Acknowledging the universal nature of Kant's cosmopolitan idea, Schapiro pointed to Kohn's omission of Kant's problematic bifurcation of public and private uses of reason in his essay "What is Enlightenment?" Because Kant did not provide a basis for political action, Schapiro

\textsuperscript{126} Kohn, The Idea of Nationalism, 395.

\textsuperscript{127} Kohn, The Idea of Nationalism, 396.

\textsuperscript{128} Kohn, The Idea of Nationalism, 399-400.
argued, the absence of a public sphere, the basis for his concept of the public use of reason, left individuals largely impotent in the face of state power.\textsuperscript{129} Indeed, Schapiro’s critique is poignant. This tension in Kant’s thought is largely glossed over by Kohn who, as was often the case, seems to have valued the potentiality and the sum of the Kantian ideal more than its component parts.

Among precursors of German nationalism in the later eighteenth century, Kohn identifies only three—the poet, Klopstock, the historian and writer Justus Moser and, most important for his purposes, the philosopher, Johann Gottfried Herder. Though they differed from more universal ideas of their time, Kohn located their departure within its time, asserting that even they were deeply rooted in the climate of the Enlightenment: humanitarians, who felt as much cosmopolitan as they felt national.\textsuperscript{130} For Kohn, Herder is a particularly complex, transitional figure. Herder emphasized nationality as an innate value, yet was wary of nation-states, Herder’s discovery of nationality carried revolutionary implications: he regarded the state as something artificial and accidental, nationality as something natural and essential.\textsuperscript{131} His emphasis on the folk community and its language soon was to give a new importance and dignity to the different ethnographic groups of Central and Eastern Europe and to create a national consciousness in them. Its dynamism was soon to break the purely cultural framework of Herder’s concept.\textsuperscript{131} In Kohn’s account, it was the reaction to the French Revolution and the imperialistic export of its ideas which expanded Herder’s cultural ideas into the realm of politics and statism. By the mid-late nineteenth century, Kohn points out, cultural nationalism


\textsuperscript{130} Kohn, The Idea of Nationalism, 417

\textsuperscript{131} Kohn, The Idea of Nationalism, 429
had become the foundation of political nationalism. Yet, Kohn asserts, nothing could have been further from Herder's mind than the nationalism of the nineteenth century with its desire for power and political assertion. His concept of nature was not biological and scientific (or rather pseudo-scientific), but metaphysical and moral. His nationalism can only be understood within its conceptual context of enlightened humanitarianism and rational morality. This is a good example of Kohn's relative tolerance for particularistic national formulations, insofar as they reconcile themselves to a broader community. For Herder, each nation was but one unique instrument in a broader orchestra. Yet once combined, anachronistically, with the will to power as embodied in the nation state, the consequences were far less ecumenical. Pianko has pointed to the importance of Herder in Kohn's overall narrative arguing that, Kohn's long apology for Herder allows him to reaffirm, as it were through the back door, his belief that ethnic attachments are not antithetical to universal liberty. Yet Kohn's attentiveness to the complexities of Herder's thought do not really constitute an affirmation, especially of ethnicity. Rather, Herder was but a diverse voice within the Enlightenment tradition whose ideas of individual peoples were still subject to the magnetic pull of universal reason that characterized the age.

132 Kohn, The Idea of Nationalism, 430: Kohn notes in the following paragraph that though born in East Prussia, Herder hated Prussia with its military despotism and bureaucratic order.

133 Pianko, Did Kohn Believe in the Kohn Dichotomy? 306.

134 Arie Dubnov has recently taken up the question of similarities between Hans Kohn and Isaiah Berlin. Though I agree with Dubnov's general thesis, that their differences outweighed their similarities as it concerned nationalism, our discussion here shows that far from constituting a villain for Kohn, Herder could still be located within the spirit of Enlightenment. Unlike Berlin, however, Kohn did not seek to harness Herder's thought in building his own political ideology. See Arie M. Dubnov, What is Jewish (If Anything) About Isaiah Berlin's Philosophy? Religions 3, no. 2 (2012): 296.
A parallel to Herder in Kohn’s thought can be found in the Italian, Giambattista Vico, whose work influenced both Herder and Hamann. Like Germany, Kohn points out, Italy in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries was fragmented. Unification seemed not only impractical, but undesirable. The people of the Italian peninsula, Kohn emphasizes, had neither political nor intellectual aspirations; they accepted the political structure of the different Italian states, and, if they demanded anything, it was mild government, not a specifically Italian government. An Italian nation was at best the melancholy memory of past glory and the vague hope of future fame. Unlike Germany which had an, albeit weak, emperor and an imperial legal tradition, Italy had no recent memory or current symbol of unity. The eighteenth-century revival of Italian culture, Kohn emphasizes, was based in a degree of cultural, linguistic and historical pride, but most intellectuals of that period looked to France and England as models for the revival they sought.

Kohn points out that, in his own time, Vico was relatively obscure. The influence of his New Science, however, would transcend Vico’s time and place. Kohn dubs Vico’s historical writing as one of the most suggestive attempts in the philosophy and morphology of history. Seeing history as a cyclical process, corso and ricorso, of civilized growth and decay, Vico sowed many seeds which grew later into the relativism and historicism of romantic nationalism. Yet, despite elements of Vico’s thought that anticipated romanticism and certain elements of nationalism, Kohn is emphatic, as he is in his treatment of Herder, that these

139 Kohn, The Idea of Nationalism, 503.
attributes of his thought were embedded with him into the enlightened philosophy of his age; his attitude was definitely antiheroic, anti-aristocratic, and cosmopolitan; he glorified reason, moderation and the humanitarianism of the century, in which he saw the peak of human development.\textsuperscript{140} Thus, as with Prussia, Kohn emphasizes the frequent chasm between nationalistic thought in the eighteenth century, and the nationalism of unification in the nineteenth.

Moving eastward, the direction in which nationalist thinkers faced becomes all the more pronounced in Kohn's presentation. His treatment of Greece is a prime example of this. Like the Italians, the Greeks remembered a glorious past. Kohn emphasizes that the only tangible connection to the past, to Byzantium and to the Greek language in its literary forms, was the Greek Orthodox Church.\textsuperscript{141} Yet, as the unity and vitality of the Ottoman Empire began to falter, Greek self-consciousness began to arise, bolstered in part by the French Revolution. Kohn explains, \textit{The Greeks, at the crossroads of Mediterranean commerce, occupied a unique position of growing importance at a time when the decline of the Ottoman Empire reopened the Eastern question; and as heirs of ancient Greece they profited from the deep interest of neoclassicists in Greek Civilization}\textsuperscript{142} The Greeks received from the West not only the general revitalization of enlightenment, but the rediscovery of their own forgotten and neglected past.

In the development of Greek nationalism, as Kohn frames it, there was a unique tension and corresponding tension between time and space. The most immanent symbols of the past, Byzantium and the Orthodox Church, were also claimed by the Russians, whose power was far superior. Yet, her classical civilization connected her with Western scholarship and the modern

\textsuperscript{140} Kohn, The Idea of Nationalism, 503.

\textsuperscript{141} Kohn, The Idea of Nationalism, 535.

\textsuperscript{142} Kohn, The Idea of Nationalism, 534\textsuperscript{f} 535.
Western mind. From the West came also the first tendencies of secularization; and that meant with the Greeks the rediscovery of their pre-Christian past.\textsuperscript{143} Further, soon after Napoleon's defeat the Greeks were the first successfully to raise the banner of nationalism and liberalism. With their war of independence the age of nationalism in Eastern Europe was established.\textsuperscript{144} The two early "prophets" of Greek nationalism that Kohn examines, Constantine Rhigas and Adamantios Coray, looked to the West in their attempts to provide a foundation for Greek national life. Rhigas advocated a cultural Greek nationalism that would form the basis of a larger confederation of peoples. Rhigas' ideal Hellenic-Balkan realm for which he drafted a liberal constitution was modeled after the French constitution of 1793, guaranteeing to all inhabitants, irrespective of race, religion, or language, all the rights of man and citizen under the cultural leadership of the Greeks.\textsuperscript{145} Like, Rhigas, Coray had imbibed the ideals of the Enlightenment and French Revolution. Though both were concerned with culture, and particularly the revival of the Greek language, Coray, as Kohn puts it, was above all an educator who worked to create a synthesis of ancient Greece and contemporary civilization.\textsuperscript{146} The result of this, what Kohn calls Gallo-Greek cultural nationalism, looked within and to the past, yet was open to vitalization from the outside, particularly from French Enlightenment ideas. Further in Coray's thought, similar to Kohn's depictions of Ahad Ha-am, political liberation was only an ulterior goal; moral regeneration had to come first and could be achieved only by education.\textsuperscript{147}

\textsuperscript{143} Kohn, The Idea of Nationalism, 536.
\textsuperscript{144} Kohn, The Idea of Nationalism, 537.
\textsuperscript{145} Kohn, The Idea of Nationalism, 538.
\textsuperscript{146} Kohn, The Idea of Nationalism, 540.
\textsuperscript{147} Kohn, The Idea of Nationalism, 541.
Kohn points out that despite these important and idealistic forerunners, the conservative forces, mainly religious, in Greek nationalism prevailed. In this sense, Greek nationalism was extremely typical of Eastern Europe generally: "Greek nationalism, Kohn explains, did not follow the quiet wisdom of its awakener: in its historical course it looked as much eastward as westward, a fate which it shared with the smaller Slav nationalities whose nationalism was inspired by Western Enlightenment, but found itself often tangled in Russian and Pan Slavic romanticism and in the imperial aspirations of the East." Thus while most Slavic nations were touched by the Enlightenment, they were far more influenced by traditional enmities and the great power of the East, Russia. Herder’s thought, along with Rousseau’s, Kohn points out, exercised a great deal of influence in the nineteenth century among a variety of nationalist ideologues, yet only the Czech, Frantisek Palacky drew from it a conclusion that did not oppose the Czechs to Western liberalism but made it their forerunners. According to Palacky the Czechs pioneered in the Hussite wars for the whole of humanity in a spiritual struggle against authority and hierarchy for the equality of men and the freedom of conscience. Figures like Rhigas, Coray, and Palacky and, later, Masaryk and Ahad Ha-am represented to Kohn a different Eastern type. Situated, as they were, in a cultural and historical heritage unique to their place, their sense of a "mythic past" did not glorify power and military prowess, but symbolized the embodiment of ideas that arose, in modern times, in the West but which transcended time and space. It was only among the Czechs, however, that this interpretation was essential in the building of a nation and national identity, as Palacky’s view of Czech history was later taken up by Thomas Masaryk.

In Kohn’s opinion, this made the Czechs the eastern outpost of the liberal West instead of the western outpost of the Slav East.\(^{150}\)

If, in Kohn’s formulation, England was Europe’s guiding beacon, Russia was a black hole whose influence exercised a profound pull on Eastern European peoples and nations. Kohn explains this in what may be the most lucid expression of his geographic dichotomy in the *Idea of Nationalism* England and Russia not only form the western and Eastern outposts of Europe; their political ideas and social structure represent the opposite poles of development. England has been the classical home of liberty and of individualism. Both were unknown in Russia. There the prince was the sole owner of the land; all the people without distinction were equally subject to him, liable to compulsory and universal service to the state which was identical with the prince and was everything.\(^{151}\)

Surely, Russia did not always show contempt of western models. As Kohn points out Peter the Great looked westward during the seventeenth century in what would become his sweeping attempt to modernize Russia. Yet Peter’s reforms were motivated primarily by the needs of war. Peter’s mind was not attracted by the humanism and freedom of Europe; he did not long for spiritual relations; what he wished to gain from Europe was the outward armor.\(^{152}\)

Though, in the eighteenth century, Catherine the Great attempted to bring elements of the Enlightenment to Russia, there was no fertile soil for her ideas. Under Catherine, Foreigners were indispensable for every progress. When Shuvalov founded in 1755 the first Russian University in Moscow, very few students could be admitted on account of their complete lack of

\(^{150}\) Kohn, The Idea of Nationalism, 560.


\(^{152}\) Kohn, The Idea of Nationalism, 563.
preparation, and most of the professors had to come from Germany.\textsuperscript{153} As a reaction to the French Revolution, there was a decisive conservative and inward shift in Russia at the end of Catherine’s rule and in the first half of the nineteenth century. The nature of this “narrow nationalism” is, to Kohn, evidenced in the writings of Nikolai Mikhailovich Karamzin. Karamzin, to whom Kohn credits the invention of Modern Russian literary style, served as the official historian of the state. Karamzin praised the accomplishments of Russia, hearkening back to an age before foreign influence and modernization. Thus, he saw the greatness of Russia not in Peter but in Ivan the Terrible. He accused Peter of interference with the moral life of the Russian people and its continuity, through which the Russians became citizens of the world but ceased to be citizens of Russia.\textsuperscript{154} Thus, for Kohn, unlike Palacky, who reconciled past and present and, as a result, the universal and particular, Karamzin became a reactionary who withdrew inwards and praised Russian autocracy and imperial grandeur. Such contrasts, as we will see in the following chapter, came to define much of Kohn’s post-war scholarship.

\textbf{Conclusion}

Kohn offers no decisive or separate conclusion to the \textit{Idea of Nationalism}, only a short section which sums up his work. The book, in fact, ends on the cusp of the explosion of nationalism that would take place in the nineteenth century. At the end of the eighteenth century, the French revolution spread national consciousness across the entire continent. Through the revolution, Kohn contends, “nations gained consciousness of themselves, as the French nation

\textsuperscript{153} Kohn, The Idea of Nationalism, 566.

\textsuperscript{154} Kohn, The Idea of Nationalism, 570.
had done. But there was a difference: French nationalism was born (as English and American
had before it) in a wave of generous enthusiasm for the cause of mankind; the opposing
nationalisms lacked this initial inspiration of disinterested humanitarianism from the beginning
they were directed to laudable but narrower goals before the revolution there had been states
and governments, after it there emerged nations and peoples. 155

Thus, Kohn ends with beginning of the Age of Nationalism. By the end of the
Napoleonic era, to which he gives little attention, the circumference within which the sympathy
of man extends was defined by national identity, at least throughout Europe. Yet Kohn's
relative lack of engagement with nation-states and nineteenth-century ideology brings into relief
both the central themes, and the ultimate message of the book. In his review, cited above, J.
Salwyn Schapiro aptly identified Kohn as a philosophical historian. Our close reading of
Kohn's most famous text, clarifies his focus as an historian, and his philosophy of history.

The Idea of Nationalism posits that human history is defined by perennial tensions which
are framed, molded and understood in the historical circumstances within which they present
themselves. As we have seen, Kohn traces the elements of universal and particular identity from
classical civilization through the early nineteenth century. At the very end of the Idea of
Nationalism, he identifies these elements in the often complementary, but not mutually
contingent concepts of liberties and nations. For Kohn, the Age of Nationalism introduced a
new morality, which manifested itself in the two concepts of nationality and liberty. They
have seemed often almost inseparable. Yet they are different in origin and substance, in effect
and duration. In the word liberty vibrates the message which pervades all human history and
makes it human: the promise of the dignity of man, of his rights as an individual, of his duties to

Compared with it, nationalism is only a passing form of integration, beneficial and vitalizing, yet by its own exaggeration and dynamism easily destructive of human liberty. Kohn closes with a message that bears great similarity to that which he attributed to Immanuel Kant. Nations, for Kohn, may define the present, but there lies hope for a deeper liberty that transcends a passing era: from Jerusalem and Athens shine also the eternal guiding stars which lift the age of nationalism above itself, pointing forward on the road to deeper liberty and to higher forms of integration. His search for these higher forms of integration during the post-war period will be the subject of our next chapter.


Chapter Four
Towards A North Atlantic Enlightenment: The Post-War Balance

As we have seen, in the Idea of Nationalism, Kohn presented his readers with two "poles" within European nationalism: England and Russia. Developments in the post-war period made this construction especially pertinent.¹ In his 1946 "Fulton Speech," Winston Churchill delineated a highly similar paradigm for the American public by speaking of an "iron curtain," drawn across the European continent from Stettin in the Baltic to Trieste in the Adriatic. Having already established both his scholarly reputation and his role as a public intellectual in America, Kohn was in an excellent position to advocate a "Western" approach to the Cold War. Yet Kohn's "West" now had to be reconfigured to confront the challenges that began to emerge even prior to the end of World War II, and that later came to define the central political questions of the post-War period.

This chapter analyzes Kohn's approach to Cold War policy, and also analyzes the dominant themes of many of his post-war writings that together constitute the continuation of his Idea of Nationalism. I suggest that in response to the many challenges that the post-war period posed, Kohn advocated a more expansive and inclusive version of the West, as reflected in his various post-war studies and his political affiliations. Though he was a true intellectual of the Cold War — highly critical of the Soviet Union and embedded in several public and private agencies and think tanks, Kohn focused less on the Soviet threat than on the opportunities for the growth of liberal democracy among the post-war states of Western Europe. He was extremely active, for example, in West Germany. Thus, despite the convictions that he carried over from

the 1930s and 1940s, Kohn did not seek to develop a counter-ideology to Soviet Communism, but rather strove to build a new West based on positive Enlightenment values. Prior to analyzing Kohn’s activities and scholarly works during this period, we will briefly survey the broader context of the post-war period.

The Post-War Context

By 1944, Churchill and Stalin had largely determined the spheres of influence into which the European continent would be divided after the war. At Yalta, Stalin had promised free elections within what would eventually be the U.S.S.R’s sphere of influence, but once most of Eastern Europe was firmly under his control he left nothing to chance. Though they aggressively rooted out elements of opposition within their respective spheres, both the Soviets and the Western democracies largely respected the lines that had been drawn. Both the Soviet Union and Western democracies deemed this modus vivendi necessary following the devastation and human loss that both sides had suffered throughout the Second World War. As Mark Mazower explains, Most Europeans accepted the division of the continent and the post-war balance of power. The wartime alliance preserved its basic understanding, and the brutal peace of the Cold War brought the continent the most precious commodity of all time which allowed an extraordinary and largely unexpected regeneration of its economic life and a sweeping transformation of its political habits.

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4 Mazower, *Dark Continent*, 249.
Much of this sweeping transformation, at least in Western Europe, was significantly aided by the United States. Yet, in the immediate aftermath of the war, it was not overly clear to what extent and in what way the United States would be involved in Europe. American public opinion reflected a wariness of foreign commitments. Further, the post-alliance relationship between Britain and the United States was uncertain, with many politicians, some of them as critical of British imperial policy as Soviet communism, advocating a return to isolationism.

The Marshall plan reoriented American policy in a concrete way. Designed to prevent the election of communist regimes in Western Europe through immense aid and rebuilding, it successfully preempted the spread of communism in the West, and also caused Stalin to draw his iron curtain even tighter. By May, 1949 the North Atlantic Treaty Organization added mutual military protection to the process of economic revival. Thus, as in the Nazi period, Kohn’s contrast between East and West during the Cold War was primarily a reflection of concrete geopolitical realities of the time.

**Kohn as a Cold War Intellectual**

As John Patrick Diggins has pointed out, there were a sizeable number of public intellectuals, many based in universities, who joined government organizations prior to and during World War II as part of the overall brain trust established by Franklin Delano

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Roosevelt. Following the war, however, the intellectual became increasingly "suspect as a loyal citizen and naïve and impractical as a potential statesman." In addition to being subject to this suspicion on the part of many in the American public, the intellectual community, particularly after Yalta, was split. Some, especially among conservatives and ex-communists, believed that Roosevelt abandoned the East European sphere, desperate for liberty, to Stalin. Others, he notes, especially among Democrats, believed that Roosevelt had only yielded territory that Stalin had already taken, thus making further provocation impractical and dangerous. The Cold War, therefore, presented both problems and opportunities to scholars and intellectuals. Yet the status of Kohn and many of his peers represented an exception to the post-war anti-intellectual shift that Diggins has identified.

This exception was due, in large part, to Kohn’s willingness to work within post-war realities and with a variety of institutions. Adi Gordon has emphasized that the immense faith that Kohn invested in the North Atlantic Community, which became, for him, the post-war embodiment of a potentially redemptive West. While he still believed that the United States was the nation most qualified to take the lead, the post-war scenario led Kohn to push actively for the ideal of a "federation" that he had also advocated earlier as part of his anti-isolationist polemics. He was among the founders of the American Committee for Cultural Freedom, and

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9 Diggins, "The Changing Role of the Public Intellectual," 100.


12 Gordon, "The Need for West," In this respect several of Kohn’s studies do reflect political concern. See for example his statements on the failure of the Habsburgs to achieve a viable federalism in Hans Kohn, *The Habsburg Empire: 1804–1918* (Princeton: D. Van Nostrand, 1961), 102–103. A much more successful example, for Kohn,
was active in its successor organization, the Congress for Cultural Freedom. The first of these organizations emerged out of the general problem to the unity of intellectuals in the immediate post-war period. It was established following a rift at the 1949 Conference for Scientific and Cultural Workers for World Peace, which had alienated many of its American participants because of its strong Stalinist sympathies. Kohn also became involved, beginning in 1954 and especially after his retirement from City College, in Robert Strausz-Hupé’s Foreign Policy Research Institute at the University of Pennsylvania. Both the culture of the institute and Strausz-Hupé himself were considered rather conservative. Although in various places Kohn alluded to ideological differences with Strausz-Hupé, the two of them found common ground through their immense concern with the cultural and ethical foundations of NATO. Together they arranged a conference in Bruges that focused not on the military and anticommunist aspects of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, but on the enduring spiritual and ethical values of modern Western civilization. The 1957 conference, co-sponsored by the University of Pennsylvania and the European University in Bruges, and partially funded by the Mellon Foundation, hosted approximately a hundred representatives from both NATO member nations and non-affiliated countries. It was important to both Kohn and Strausz-Hupé that the discussions would focus on

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13 Gordon, "The Need for West," 34.

14 In a letter to Kohn, Strausz-Hupé complained of this perception, "we are stuck with the label ‘conservative’ or worse." See "Letter to Hans Kohn from Robert Strausz-Hupé March 14, 1960" in HKC, Box 3, Folder 13.

15 In several cases, Kohn points to Strausz-Hupé’s admirable life story, impressive eloquence and erudition, but in a likely attempt not to be grouped with his military focus, he tends to note the controversial nature of his views. See, for example, Kohn’s review of Strausz-Hupé’s autobiography: A Life of Many Things: In my Time, review by Hans Kohn, New York Times, November 21, 1965, BR 82. Here he notes, after admitting that many of Strausz-Hupé’s views may be disagreeable, that "Strausz-Hupé is a never-compromising defender of the individual against Collectivity."  

16 Kohn, Living in a World Revolution, 184.
common cultural and historical themes, rather than economic and military questions.\(^{17}\) The cultural orientation of the conference reflected Kohn’s insistence during the post-war years that NATO needed to reflect a deeper, more permanent spiritual alliance.

Kohn understood the power that history wielded in German culture. Thus, in the early 1950s he took two trips to West Germany where he engaged with German historians who sought to rethink the role of Germany in the past and present through historical inquiry. Frederick Meinecke was an elder statesman of sorts among these historians, and Kohn’s volume contains an essay by Frederick Meinecke on Ranke and Burckhardt. As a precondition for Germany’s participation in the life of the West, for example, Meinecke demanded the renunciation by Germany of the ideological power concept and the material power complex.\(^{18}\) This was especially important, in Kohn’s view, since he believed that with the return to prosperity in Western Germany the old nationalism, with its ideological misconceptions and infatuations, is returning.\(^{19}\) As a young man, Kohn notes, Meinecke had rejected the legacy of the Aufklärung. Rather, he praised the German ascent from the cosmopolitanism of a Kant or Goethe to the nation-state of a Ranke or Bismarck.\(^{20}\) Yet Meinecke, before the war, but more importantly after the experience of the Nazi regime began to ask himself whether Ranke had not misled German historiography and the German intellectual development. He pointed out that Ranke’s concept of the powerful states as the embodiment of God’s thoughts and ideas ennobled and sanctioned their elemental struggle for power.\(^{21}\)

\(^{17}\) See Proposal for a Conference on the North Atlantic Community in HKC, Box 3, Folder 12.

\(^{18}\) Hans Kohn, German History: Some New German Views (Boston: Beacon Press, 1954), 42.

\(^{19}\) Kohn, German History, 42.

\(^{20}\) Kohn, German History, 24.

\(^{21}\) Kohn, German History, 24.
In addition to noting the resurgence of certain dangerous ideologies, Kohn also criticizes the trend of seeing violent, anti-liberal trends as a pan-European phenomenon. Kohn concedes that there is a grain of truth to this approach, "Totalitarian terror was foreshadowed in the democratic nationalism of the Jacobins; the racialist theory of Count Gobineau influenced Richard Wagner, the Nazi creed of ‘Blut und Boden’ was anticipated in Maurice Barrès and not a few Americans or English soldiers and writers were impressed by power." Thus, even in liberal states, ideologies of violence exist and can even become fashionable. However, Kohn emphasizes that "the inclination of the majority of the German people and of German intellectuals to accept them uncritically is the troubling problem."

It was therefore incumbent upon a new generation of historians, Kohn believed, to chart a new path of German historiography. Unlike the tradition of Ranke and Treitschke, Kohn hoped that this fresh approach would lead Germany away from xenophobic hatred of the West and toward a new and fruitful relationship.

The Soviet Union presented a different challenge to Kohn’s method. Unlike the fascist states of World War II, the Soviet Union was anti-nationalist, at least in the conventional sense of the term. Ideology, not racial superiority or national destiny, drove the Soviet idea of empire, as Soviet alliances were, at least theoretically, with a trans-national proletariat. Kohn thus argued that the "Cold War" was not new. Rather, "between 1918 and 1940 the main target of the Cold War was, for obvious reasons, Western Europe and not the United States. The British and French empires were expanding after World War I and seemed unshaken in the 1920s. Italian and German Fascism were, in the Communist interpretation, only more vigorous forms of

22 Kohn, German History, 26.
23 Kohn, German History, 26.
24 Kohn, German History, 43.
Despite these observations, Kohn believed that the Soviet Union, and communist parties as a whole, had to accommodate themselves to the realities of the Age of Nationalism. Thus, despite the technically supra-national nature of communist thought, Kohn gives significant attention to the ŒfusionŒ of communist ideology with nationalist rhetoric. For example, noting the fact that the vast majority of Russian communists in 1905 were quite happy to see Japan victorious over imperialist Russia, Kohn points to StalinŒs later appeal to a Œnational past.Œ In 1945, praising the Russian armies, Stalin explained the defeat of 1905 as a Œstain on RussiaŒs history.Œ According to Kohn, ŒStalin expressed the joy of the men of his generation who had allegedly waited forty long years for this moment in history to undo the alleged ignominy of the 1905 defeat.Œ In France and Germany, communist parties appealed to the belief that one could only be Œtruly FrenchŒ or a champion of Œthe interests of the fatherland,Œ as a communist.Œ

After World War II, the Soviet Union expanded its territory and influence from Œthe Elbe to ShanghaiŒ at a time when British and French imperial claims were quickly eroding.Œ Thus, as the greatest capitalist power, the United States had become by default the natural enemy of the Soviet Union. Even given these factors, Kohn believed that the actual chances of war with the Soviet Union were relatively slim. Despite the distrust of the U.S.S.R. on the part of inter-war Western European leaders, no armed conflict ever resulted. Thus, Kohn proposed that the United States should pursue Œa policy which, though being prepared for war, does not regard war

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26 Hans Kohn, ŒOne World?Œ in *Reflections on Modern History*, 244.

27 Hans Kohn, ŒOne World?Œ 245.

28 Hans Kohn, ŒOne World?Œ 245.
as probable.  This led Kohn to advocate a policy of patience. Especially in the age of nuclear arms, he believed, "total victory" over the Soviet Union, or communism on the whole, was neither possible nor desirable. For these reasons, Kohn believed provocation was both useless and dangerous. In a speech to the City College Alumni Association, he criticized the crossing of the 38th parallel in Korea, along with the plan to rearm Germany as exceptionally "serious blunders." He doubted the likelihood of war, in part because he believed that Soviet citizens, as well as Western Europeans were wary of armed conflict after the immense human cost of the previous half-century. Though he cited the exception of Israel and France during the Suez Crisis, he maintained that "the overwhelming force of disapproval expressed everywhere was a stronger indication of the general trend." Praising the United States for pursuing a wiser policy in Egypt, he stressed the importance of abandoning imperial aims in the Third World, at least abandoning the pursuit of them through force. Moreover, Kohn pointed out, the general trend toward decolonization had put the United States in a largely favorable position, and therefore it would be vital for the United States to pursue a clear and consistent policy both at home and abroad.

Kohn pointed to the "definite though slow progress" being made in granting full civic equality to black Americans. Yet he emphasized the important progress that lay ahead both for the achievement of full civil rights within the United States, and in the process of decolonization: "The fact that there are still islands of resistance to this trend is the cruel colonial

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war in Algeria, the position of Africans in the Union of South Africa, our support of dictators in Spain and Latin America weakens the position of the West in its struggle with communism. For this struggle is not only one of military might or economic efficiency, but of ideas.⁴³⁴

Although Kohn’s writings, as we have seen, revealed some tolerance for the liberal imperialism of the nineteenth century, he believed that during the Cold War period it was incumbent upon all Western nations to withdraw, at least gradually, from colonial territories. Writing to Eleanor Roosevelt, he stressed that support for colonialism would lead to distrust among emerging nations and their peoples. In addition, he emphasized that any unilateral action was likely to alienate the Western allies who would fear being drawn into any military situation. Noting his agreement with Roosevelt’s concerns about the French colonizers in North Africa, he wrote “I perhaps go even further than you in believing the French attitude in North Africa mistaken and dangerous (Though I do not think that France alone turns the Arabs against us; a large part of the responsibility rests with what the Arabs think to be our support of Zionist conquest of Palestine).”⁴³⁵

Kohn’s approach to the Cold War bore certain resemblances to the “containment” approach of George Kennan. Kohn, who hoped that NATO would become the foundation of a North Atlantic Community that focused on culture and liberty, would have agreed with Kennan’s view that the Soviet Union was a very different foe from Nazi Germany, and that force must not be considered a natural response. Kennan believed that “The sources of tragedy in international life lie in the differences of outlook that divide the human race; and it seems to me that our purposes prosper only when something happens in the mind of another person, and perhaps in

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⁴³⁵ Hans Kohn to Eleanor Roosevelt, December 8, 1952 in HKC Box 3, Folder 10.
our own mind as well, which makes it easier for all of us to see each other’s problems and prejudices with detachment and to live peaceably side by side.\textsuperscript{36} In the final chapter of \textit{American Nationalism}, Kohn warned the American public against believing that the defeat of communism would be a true panacea to their problems: “In the 1950s many Americans tried to see in communism the only obstacle to a peaceful world and to accept the unwarranted thesis that all liberated peoples would become democracies after the American image.\textsuperscript{36} In view of the multiplicity of traditions and ways of life on this earth, such a development is neither desirable nor possible. The modern West represents one, but not the only valid form of human civilization.\textsuperscript{37} He struck a similar note, in 1964, in his autobiography:

In the 1960s, as in the 1930s, misinterpretations of the past haunt many people and cause them to draw oversimplified conclusions. Many Americans again believe that an all-out victory over communism would solve all our problems. This time it is not the Peace of Versailles but that of Munich which dominates their minds. Khrushchev is not Hitler (nor, of course, do West Germany’s policies bear any resemblance to Hitler’s policies, despite the allegations of Communist propaganda)... above all, the West of the 1960s is not the West of 1938.\textsuperscript{38}

Both Kennan and Kohn saw the use of force as a last result and advocated for a robust battle of ideas. Kohn took up this challenge. However, his writings during this time rarely take explicit aim at the Soviet Union. Rather, he focused, as before, on liberal and illiberal nationalism with a special attention to the diverse manifestations of the former kind. His work


\textsuperscript{38} Kohn, Living in a World Revolution, 174.
during this period reveals not only an East/West paradigm but also a middle spectrum. Through the examples he harnesses, Kohn demonstrated that nationalisms could be diverse, cultural, historical and, at the same time, grounded in liberty.

Modern Nationalism and its Spectrum of Prophets

Aside from the civic forerunners to nationalism – England and the United States, the Age of Nationalism, according to Kohn, truly began with the French Revolution and the Napoleonic Wars. Because the French Revolution took place in the heartland of European civilization, and because of the pervasive intellectual receptivity of the time, its impact quickly radiated throughout the continent. Yet, Kohn maintains that the aspects of the revolution that were absorbed and imitated varied. Not surprisingly, Kohn’s discussion of the French Revolution brings his dichotomy into particular relief. He points out that the United States, England, Switzerland, the Netherlands and Scandinavia were strengthened in their democratic orientations. Yet in some nations, primarily those with absolutist forms of government, the spirit of the French army, the command of Napoleon Bonaparte and the centralization of the French state provided the most compelling models.39 The Revolution itself, though initially concerned primarily with the rights of individuals and citizens soon swung away sharply from the historic confusion of internal divisions: its desire for rational order and its passion for national unity pushed it further towards excessive centralization than the monarchy had gone, a process culminating in Napoleon’s regime.40

It was Napoleon’s attempt to unify Europe on the model of imperial Rome that aroused the resistance of nationalism. Here, Kohn registers his agreement with Benjamin Constant’s critique of Napoleon’s hearkening back to the pre-modern spirit of conquest. According to Constant, “War was the instrument of the past, commerce, that of enlightened civilization.”

Though Kohn points to the relative success of the Congress of Vienna in reestablishing a balance of power that ushered in a period of almost forty years without any significant international war, the old order could never be truly reestablished. With the Revolution of 1848 in France, “the events affected all of central Europe with unexpected speed,” especially the twofold heritage of 1789—liberalism and nationalism. Yet of the two, Kohn insists, nationalism largely prevailed. France, where the revolution began, ended up in a nationalist military dictatorship. Its mouthpiece was Jules Michelet—one of Kohn’s modern “prophets.”

In the introduction to his 1946 study, Prophets and Peoples, Hans Kohn provides a description of the “national prophet” that has an overwhelmingly autobiographical ring. The Age of Nationalism, he writes, made “peoples,” the true causal force of history. These modern, mass cultures:

Found their spokesmen in national prophets who became the voice and conscience of their people, interpreting its history or mission and shaping its character and personality. They were historians or journalists, statesmen or creative writers, orators or social scientists. In most cases they combined several of these vocations; always they developed a philosophy of history and society, in the center of which stood their own nation and the principle which was to sum up its idea and faith. It would be a dangerous mistake to assume that any one of them represents the whole image of his nation and its trends. For a national character is a highly complex phenomenon with

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41 Kohn, The Age of Nationalism, 6.
42 Kohn, The Age of Nationalism, 8.
many cross-currents of thought and aspirations and with all the human breadth of 
individual variations.\(^{43}\)

Nonetheless, Kohn’s prophets introduced meaning, a raison d’être, to the national community. Thus, in this work, Kohn put his dichotomy in terms of “mission” and “messianism.” In the age of nationalism some nations have claimed for themselves a “mission” here on earth: the divine right of kings was replaced with the divine right of nations. Messianic dreams with the nation as their center put the nation into immediate and independent relations with the absolute.\(^{44}\) Kohn notes that of the “national prophets” he analyzes in this particular work (Mill, Michelet, Mazzini, Treitschke and Dostoevsky) only John Stuart Mill lacked dangerous illusions concerning his people’s mission. Still, he maintains, Michelet and Mazzini, despite their illusions, were “good Europeans” as compared to Treitschke and Dostoevsky.\(^{45}\)

As we have seen, the notion of a national “mission” was not foreign to Kohn’s own ideal. In this case, his observation of “dangerous illusions” seems to relate more to the way that “immediacy” and “independence” transformed the character of various national “missions,” especially, as we will see, in the case of the Germans and Russians. Kohn’s wariness of national movements which sought to establish their connection to “the absolute” in a hasty and particularistic fashion is one element of his thought that survived his various “conversions.” His words should recall, for instance, the struggles of Ahad Ha-am with the early Zionist settlers. Ahad Ha-am warned against the rushed settlement of Palestine and the rejection of universal reason and prophetic teachings in favor of chauvinistic particularism. Yet, Ahad Ha-am like

\(^{43}\) Kohn, The Age of Nationalism, 3.

\(^{44}\) Kohn, The Age of Nationalism, 17.

\(^{45}\) Kohn, The Age of Nationalism, 17.
Martin Buber and, at one time, Hans Kohn himself believed in a Jewish national mission. This was the very reason that all three of these thinkers criticized the Zionist establishment in Palestine. Thus, we see that it was not the mission per se that Kohn rejected but the conception that any national mission could isolate itself from that which is universal and morally sound. Kohn places Ahad Ha-am in the same intellectual race as Mill and Masaryk: Differences of origin have disappeared before the unity of the spirit. Men like Thomas G. Masaryk, born where Czech and Slovak peasants intermingle, and Asher Ginsberg [Ahad Ha-am], brought up in a Jewish ghetto in Russia, were, in the sobriety of their moral realism, in their unsparing search for truth, and in their respect for human dignity, of the same race as Mill.

Therefore, when Kohn states in *The Idea of Nationalism* that Germany remained, like all other countries east of the Rhine, outside the great currents of political transformation which in Western Europe had laid the foundations for the growth of modern nationalism and of rational liberty he is not speaking, naively, of an *intellectual* absolute dictated by geography as some scholars seem to suggest.

“Prophets and Peoples”

Among all the prophets of European nations John Stuart Mill is, for Kohn, the paragon of what a national prophet should be. His thought, which represented Kohn’s ideal English nationalism, was the embodiment of European nationalism’s Western pole. Kohn’s often blatant

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47 Kohn, *The Idea of Nationalism*, 378. Also, see Yfaat Weiss, *Central European Ethnonationalism and Zionist Binationalism*. Weiss does not refer to Kohn’s conception of intellectuals east of the Rhine. So while Kohn did truly believe in the early 1940s that the boundary between civic and ethnic nationalism traversed Europe along the Rhine, the failure to note both Kohn’s optimism and his acknowledgement of intellectual precedent for civic nationalism in Eastern Europe oversimplifies Kohn’s views, even if they are in some places dichotomous.
anglophilia, along with his personal admiration of Mill, comes to the fore in this depiction of Mill's “prophetic” activity. According to Kohn, the Puritan Revolution can be identified as the “birth” of the English nation while the Glorious Revolution represented its “confirmation.”

The Puritan Revolution was violent and uncompromising yet its central ideals were realized in the “bloodless” revolution of 1688. These two revolutions both contributed the political form of the English state which allowed its society great flexibility and durability. Kohn asserted that “The English inherited from the Puritan Revolution the religious matrix and the spirit of non-conformism, from the Glorious Revolution the habits of toleration and respect for law.” The result was a reliable system of checks and balances and the ability to endure innovations both industrial and political. For these reasons, it was the “settlement of 1689” which gave rise to a new attitude of civility and allowed the transition from medieval to modern to take place. While the French Revolution fought to establish some of the same ideals as the Puritan revolution (in an irreligious framework), France lacked any equivalent of the Glorious Revolution to reconcile the tensions of the reign of terror. For this reason, Kohn maintains, the nineteenth century was for England a placid era, for France a time of upheaval.

Despite Britain’s balanced societal infrastructure, Kohn points out that the early nineteenth century brought new challenges. The values of the Glorious Revolution needed to be reworked in order to withstand new tensions between progressives and conservatives. The previous balance of conservative pragmatism and liberal progress was in danger, with the conservative side exercising disproportionate influence. A viable liberal program was called for and the response, as Kohn sees it, came from two sources.


49 Kohn, Prophets and Peoples, 20: This echoes his earlier discussion of the English revolutions in The Idea of Nationalism that we have treated above. His background here is essentially an epitome of that discussion.
As opposed to the French revolutionary scenario, the religious components of English society tended to be progressive. The Glorious Revolution’s moderating effect on religious expression had led to a secularization of Christian values. Though the Methodists and other evangelical movements of the early nineteenth century possessed religious conviction and enthusiasm, they were kept in bounds by the "broad minded tolerance" of their society. The result was an inspired movement which encouraged humanitarian reforms and initiative amongst the lower classes.\(^50\) The Utilitarian movement complemented the evangelists in the proliferation of liberal values. Jeremy Bentham was the central figure of this movement and his practical doctrine of "the greatest happiness for the greatest number" served as a catalyst for social progress and reform.\(^51\) Bentham’s work was reorganized and systematized by James Mill who added clarity and an economic emphasis to Bentham’s work. Yet, according to Kohn, it would be John Stuart Mill (1806–1873) who would fuse the values of the Evangelists and Utilitarians into a viable system which would allow England to progress.\(^52\) Mill both overcame utilitarianism’s systemic limitations and "endowed rational and individual liberty with a new warmth and richness by fusing with it the missionary emotionalism of the evangelical gospel, the spiritual values of the Romantic tradition, and the humane fellowship of the socialist movement."\(^53\)

Kohn’s analysis of Mill’s life and work is important because it reveals to us his ideal prophet for the European nation he respected and idealized the most. Kohn articulates the

\(^50\) Kohn, Prophets and Peoples, 23.

\(^51\) Kohn, Prophets and Peoples, 23.

\(^52\) The reconciliation of popular religiosity and rational-political systems is a central component of modern nationalism for Kohn. This goes back to his earlier writings on Jewish nationalism, which he understood as a fusion of Hasidism and Haskalah.

\(^53\) Kohn, Prophets and Peoples, 26.
problem that Mill inherited from his intellectual predecessors as follows: how to integrate the masses into a system of liberty and how to control the power of the industrial and financial lords. The self-dependent individual had to be protected against the abuse of this potential tyranny, in the face of which he might be held back as much by absence of help as by its excesses.\textsuperscript{54}

Though, for Kohn, England was ahead of its time with regard to civil liberties, the problem that Mill faced represents the problem of modernity writ large.

With new modes of social control introduced by industrialization and capitalism, the dignity of the individual needed to be preserved without restricting freedom as a general category. The solution would have to be a careful balance. The liberty of the masses was a moral necessity, yet if not tempered by order, liberty could descend into anarchy, and if order was not limited by liberty, an absolute state could result. Mill's solution was that neither liberty nor order could be mutually exclusive. This could only be achieved by creating an atmosphere of freedom and compromise where individual and society were complementary.\textsuperscript{55} The way to achieve this was by maintaining an educated public. Though, for Mill, education helped to maintain the balance of the state, he did not believe in state education which aimed at either conformity or uniformity. By cultivating individuality, as long as it did not impede the liberty of others, Mill believed that human beings become both a noble and beautiful object of contemplation and more prone to advance their society.\textsuperscript{56} If each human being is educated and granted liberty then progress is only limited to the number of liberated individuals. The method of educating individuals in this fashion was for Mill a continuous task. He believed liberty and

\textsuperscript{54} Kohn, Prophets and Peoples, 31.

\textsuperscript{55} Kohn, Prophets and Peoples, 32.

\textsuperscript{56} Kohn, Prophets and Peoples, 33.
progress to be fragile; their maintenance could only be possible through continuous educational effort.\textsuperscript{57}

Importantly for Kohn, Mill also eschewed national chauvinism. While he was devoted to his society he strongly emphasized the universal dignity of Man. He saw in nationalism the danger of chauvinism and the dehumanization of the \textit{\textvisiblespace}other.\textsuperscript{57} Kohn quotes Mill as decrying the state of emerging nationalism in other nations\textsuperscript{58} He complained that in the backward parts of Europe and even in Germany, the sentiment of nationality so far outweighs the love of liberty that the people are willing to abet their rulers in crushing the liberty and independence of any people not of their race or language.\textsuperscript{58} For Mill, liberty constituted the highest value and took precedence over national allegiance. However, Mill was not, at least in theory, opposed to imperialism. In fact, Mill\textsuperscript{58} love of liberty led him to approve of imperialism if it liberated the native populace to a greater extent than would their actual self-determination. Kohn observes:

Knowing Indian history well, and living in the period of great imperial expansion of the United States through Mexican and Indian wars, he never deluded himself into thinking that national independence in itself would lessen injustice or tyranny, or that every acquisition of territory by a free nation would be disastrous for the cause of humanity\textsuperscript{59} If the smaller nationality, supposed to be more advanced in improvement, is able to overcome the greater, as the Macedonians, reinforced by the Greeks, did in Asia, and the English India, there is often a gain to civilization.\textsuperscript{59}

Mill, therefore, assigned little importance to the nation\textsuperscript{59} as such. National entities existed in order to create organic societies which allowed the individual, through liberty achieved by educational means, to grow, develop and progress. This very belief which prevented Mill

\textsuperscript{57} Kohn, Prophets and Peoples, 33.

\textsuperscript{58} Kohn, The Age of Nationalism, 12.

\textsuperscript{59} Kohn, Prophets and Peoples, 35: This discussion strongly resonates with Kohn\textsuperscript{59} presentation of Cromwell\textsuperscript{59} campaigns in seventeenth century Ireland (see Chapter Three).
from condemning imperialism on the part of liberal nations led him to strongly condemn slavery. Mill’s intellectual activity coincided with the Civil War in the United States and he maintained that the liberty of African slaves was more vital than any claim of the South’s right to self-determination. Peace was not worth the cost of millions of human beings living in bondage and the victory of the North would be essential to preserving the United States as a liberal nation.\footnote{Kohn, Prophets and Peoples, 38–39.}

John Stuart Mill exemplified the values which Kohn attributed to the humanistic nationalism of the West. Above everything, even the nation itself, he placed the dignity and liberty of the individual. The challenges which Mill faced and the values he developed relate directly to Kohn’s experience. As a member of Brit Shalom, Kohn had once believed that the Jews could help the Arab population of Palestine. Later, as we have seen, he came to believe that a binational society under a British imperial umbrella would be necessary. In this regard, Kohn did not decry what can be called political-intellectual imperialism that is, the introduction of liberal state infrastructures which could help champion the cause of civic liberty amongst a population to whom such ideals were foreign. Kohn agreed with Mill with regard to the case of English imperialism in India. Without the introduction of British thought in India, the Indian people would have lacked the conceptual framework to implement liberal values in their society. As we have seen Kohn also, like Mill, praised Alexander the Great in The Idea of Nationalism by pointing out that Alexander deviated from the ethnocentrism of his teacher, Aristotle, and brought Greek culture and universal values to the Asian masses. The result was a
unification of mankind in a peaceful order based not upon ties of blood but upon the community of spirit and civilization.\(^{61}\)

Kohn realized that Mill’s task was not complete in his own day. Just as Mill believed that the maintenance of liberty was an ongoing task for every age, Kohn saw the scope of the problem in his own time. He recognized that true prophets foresee developments; not only are their words valid in the hour in which they are spoken, but they offer a guide amid the growing complexities and changes which have developed since their time and of which they forewarned. The burning questions of Mill’s day—individual liberty and national independence, the justification of war and intervention, the ever growing need for peace and social reform are still with us.\(^{62}\)

Kohn viewed Mill’s life and work as the true role of a prophet and saw Mill as someone who gave strength and societal stability to the English people. While Mill was his model prophet, Kohn also expresses qualified admiration for Jules Michelet (France) and Giuseppe Mazzini (Italy), who serve as examples of the “middle prophet” in Kohn’s presentations.

Neither Michelet nor Mazzini maintained the same level of universalistic conviction as Mill. They also lacked Mill’s dynamism as an intellectual. Yet, both Michelet and Mazzini, while championing their national causes and glorifying their people, held liberty and human dignity in high regard, often in opposition to prevailing national sentiments.

Benjamin Constant and Alexis de Tocqueville were the nineteenth-century liberals of France whom Kohn admired most. Significantly for Kohn, Constant, unlike many French

\(^{61}\) Kohn, *The Idea of Nationalism*, 59. For Kohn this did not happen until the Roman Empire’s first century, when the stoic philosophy reached its apex. While Kohn saw this imperialism as potentially helpful in the nineteenth century, he was opposed to this form of imperialism in his present, mid-twentieth century context.

\(^{62}\) Kohn, *Prophets and Peoples*, 44.
intellectuals following Waterloo, cited the civilian society of England, its cult of legality, and its habit of compromise, as a model. In his struggle to define liberty, he emphasizes, Constant expressed as much concern about individual tyrants as he did the despotism of the masses. Yet, in Constant’s time, Kohn argues, French liberalism had become largely stultified due to the fashionable rejection of English modes of liberty. Men like Alexis de Tocqueville, a prophet of liberty, who searched England and the United States for positive models of liberty, were in the minority. Rather, the intellectual engagement with English ideas and institutions which had characterized the thinkers of the eighteenth century was replaced by Germanomania which swept intellectual France after 1815.

Kohn presents Jules Michelet as a rather complicated example of this trend. Michelet, as Kohn puts it, was a prophet of the trinity of People, Revolution and France. As Kohn points outs, Michelet’s friendship with Edgar Quinet was transformative. Both men, starting in the mid-1820s, became enamored with the thought of Vico and Herder: From Vico Michelet learned the importance of great turning points and crises in the growth of civilization, the meaning of myths and symbols as motive forces in history. From Herder he accepted the optimism of the Enlightenment and the idea of a Volksgeist, of national souls and of nations as living manifestations of the spirité. Michelet was so taken by Herder that he traveled to Germany to study and to read Herder in the original German.

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64 Kohn, *Making of the Modern French Mind*, 37. Here Kohn quotes at length from Constant’s 1816 treatise *Cours de politique constitutionelle*.

65 Kohn, Making of the Modern French Mind, 42.

66 Kohn, Making of the Modern French Mind, 38.


68 Kohn, *Prophets and Peoples*, 47.
In the "white heat" of the July 1830 revolution, Kohn asserts, Michelet began to write history and trans-valued Herder and Vico’s thought to the French national mission. France, Michelet believed, was to become the "glorious pilot of mankind’s ship." As such, Michelet advocated a collaborative relationship with Italy and Spain and felt deep sympathy with Germany. He tended to show great hostility to England, and identified the English nation with the very corrosive, bourgeois elements he identified in his native France. Britain, he believed, was rich but without soul or idea. By the time he authored his Le Peuple, Michelet had firmly rejected both Catholicism and Christianity as a whole for the God of 1789.

Later in his life, Michelet faced great discouragement. The great revelation of 1789 went unfulfilled under Louis Napoleon. And, thus, at the end of his life, Kohn is quick to point out, Napoleon and his heritage, not England, had become the enemy of Europe. Though, Kohn asserts, Michelet was as slow to understand Germany as he was to appreciate Britain, the outcome of the events of 1848 and 1851 turned him away from his earlier, uninhibited idealism: in his old age he loved liberty more than the interests of France, hated despotism more than her enemies.

Along with Gobineau and Barrès, Georges Sorel represents the illiberal pole of French thought. Sorel’s Reflections on Violence, posited the degenerative impact of democracy on national life. Thus, Sorel called for a total transformation of society by the ruthless seizure of

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69 Kohn, Prophets and Peoples, 50.
70 Kohn, Prophets and Peoples, 51.
71 Kohn, Prophets and Peoples, 72.
72 Kohn, Prophets and Peoples, 63.
73 Kohn, Prophets and Peoples, 72.
74 Kohn, Prophets and Peoples, 73.
power by a group inspired, as Sorel said, by a "myth." Sorel, as Kohn points out, later praised Lenin and Mussolini as models of his desired change. Yet, despite the fact that Sorel expressed the alienation of many French intellectuals from modern society and their faith in the magic efficacy of revolution, Kohn did posit a certain French "sens de mesure" which was represented by the "cry for peace" of thinkers such as Jean Jaurès.

Like Michelet and Quinet, the Genoese thinker Giuseppe Mazzini absorbed the thought of Vico and Herder. From Herder and Condorcet, Kohn explains, he accepted the idea of the irresistible progress toward an even greater harmony, and like Herder he regarded the peoples as the collective individualities through which the process of history is carried on. Mazzini, however, faced a far different challenge. He sought not only to orient the nation, but to create it. The Italian nation, then fractious and largely under Austrian domination, was but an idea. Far more than his contemporary, Michelet, Mazzini looked to, and admired, English institutions. Unlike many of Mazzini's fellow Italian intellectuals, he did not look to France. Italy, for Mazzini, was the heart of Europe and thus he claimed for Italy the initiative and moral leadership in the regeneration of humanity, and he called upon the Italians to live up to their mission.

Kohn emphasizes that national mission was, for Mazzini, a means to a higher purpose. Mazzini rejected the concept of nationality as a self-contained whole. Rather, he focused a great deal of attention on the necessity of a federation of smaller nations that would

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75 Kohn, Making of the Modern French Mind, 76.
76 Kohn, Making of the Modern French Mind, 77.
77 Kohn, Making of the Modern French Mind, 80.
78 Kohn, Making of the Modern French Mind, 81.
79 Kohn, Making of the Modern French Mind, 92.
help establish a favorable balance of power in Europe in the spirit of democracy and cooperation.\textsuperscript{80}

In his analysis of Thomas Masaryk, Kohn finds a "prophet" of East Central European nationalism akin to the ideas of the West, who maintains the historical focus of the East.\textsuperscript{81} These intellectuals are characteristic of what we will identify as the "middle prophet" in Kohn's thought.

The Czechs, for whom, as Kohn puts it "The struggle between East and West always meant... a struggle between Europe and Russia," had progressive voices in figures such as Karel Havlíček and František Palacký who guided the Czechs towards the West.\textsuperscript{82} Masaryk, who was for most of his career a philosophy professor, continued this heritage by rejecting pan-Slavism and sympathizing with the ideas of the Russian liberals who "strove to bring to their land the Western concept of liberty under law."\textsuperscript{83} Masaryk, like Palacký, stressed the historical interpretation of the Hussites as pre-cursors of Western liberty, but stood against the arbitrary use of the past for national glorification. Kohn points to Masaryk's insistence that "two famous medieval poems on which the Czechs based their claims to early cultural prominence were forgeries."\textsuperscript{84} As a philosopher-statesman and expert on Russia, Masaryk espoused a qualified...

\textsuperscript{80} Kohn, Making of the Modern French Mind, 94\textsuperscript{1} 95.

\textsuperscript{81} Hans Kohn, "The Heritage of Masaryk," Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science, 258, Looking Toward One World (July, 1948): 70\textsuperscript{1} 73.

\textsuperscript{82} Kohn, "The Heritage of Masaryk," 71.

\textsuperscript{83} Kohn, "The Heritage of Masaryk," 71.

\textsuperscript{84} Kohn, "The Heritage of Masaryk," 72: The Rukopisy or "Hanka" manuscripts were forged in the second decade of the nineteenth century by Václav Hanka who sought to establish that Czech literature was more ancient than German. Masaryk refused to hide their dubious provenance. See Demetz, Prague in Black and Gold, 335.
pacifism which led him to see the February revolution in Russia as legitimate and hopeful, and the second, that of Lenin, as the result of illegitimate lust for power and suppression of liberty.\textsuperscript{85}

These thinkers along with, to a lesser extent, Mazzini and Michelet represent the “good” side of the Kohn Dichotomy. Their nationalism, though not devoid of ethnic emphases, places civic liberty above national glorification. It is not difficult to understand Kohn’s identification with those who fight against the main currents of nationalist thought. And it is understandable how Ahad Ha-am came to occupy such an important place in Kohn’s later presentation of Jewish nationalism (See Chapter Five).

Both Mill and Masaryk exemplified the role of a true prophet, within the context of different nations in different stages of national and liberal development. Neither saw their people as an end in themselves (despite Masaryk’s more nationalist and historical focus). Both thinkers understood the precedents that contemporary events would set for the future of their respective nations and did all in their power to fight for the highest ideals of reason, truth and liberty.

Before we turn to thinkers who we can term “false prophets” according to Kohn’s formulation—Heinrich von Treitschke of Germany, and Fyodor Dostoevsky being the primary examples of this end of Kohn’s spectrum—it is important to acknowledge thinkers who Kohn locates closer to, but not completely of, illiberal “Eastern” nationalism. Kohn’s analysis of Fichte is a case in point.\textsuperscript{86}

\textsuperscript{85} Kohn, The Heritage of Masaryk, 72.

Kohn identifies Fichte as Kant’s foremost though unfaithful disciple. He was a domineering personality; acquaintance with Kant’s philosophy and his own re-interpretation of its central position in the spirit of Storm and Stress opened to him the way to combine thought and action. In Fichte’s earlier years, he was largely tone deaf to patriotism and believed that the fatherland of every man was the land of individual liberty. Kohn stresses that throughout the 1790s Fichte was clear that this land was France.

Kohn points out that Fichte’s indifference to the German nation, in his early writings stemmed from his conviction, largely taken from Rousseau, that man was both a good and rational being. Therefore, the end of history, for Fichte, would be the full realization of man’s rational capacities without the artificial and therefore, unethical constraints of the state. Only for the transitional period could the state be justified; ultimately in the world as it should be, it would wither away.

The turn of the century marked a shift for Fichte, whose expectations of a radical reorientation of mankind through the French Revolution were not met. He then, as Kohn shows, transferred his hopes from the French to the Germans. However, Kohn is quick to point out that for Fichte mankind was one in spirit and should become one in reality. Mankind is man’s true fatherland. But in the various stages of history one nation, a different nation at each stage, seemed destined to take the lead.

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87 Kohn, The Paradox of Fichte’s Nationalism, 319.
88 Kohn, The Paradox of Fichte’s Nationalism, 319.
89 Kohn, The Paradox of Fichte’s Nationalism, 321.
90 Kohn, The Paradox of Fichte’s Nationalism, 322.
91 Kohn, The Paradox of Fichte’s Nationalism, 324.
The Napoleonic invasion led Fichte to an even stronger identification of the mission of 
the German people. Rejecting the hope of his teacher, Kant, for “perpetual peace,” he came to 
regard pacifism as “superficial, anemic and puny.” By the time he delivered his famous 
*Addresses to the German Nation* (1807), he had developed a view of an innate German task, 
posited on their resistance to ancient Roman domination, and their independent cultural 
development through history. By this time, Kohn argues Fichte spoke neither as a statesman 
nor as an educator, neither as an historian nor as a political philosopher: he was carried away by 
the same utopian dream that had excited him in 1793: only this time he had lost faith in the 
French people and in the nature of man. It was this facet of Fichte’s thought that later German 
nationalists would adopt, and for Kohn, this reflected an unforgivable weakness in Fichte’s 
thought: “Like the Romanticists, he never responsibly faced or understood the concrete problems 
of political and social reality. High above them, he soared to the Heavenly City of ideal 
Germans, who were nothing but ideal Fichtes.” Though, for Kohn, Fichte’s ego and later 
cultural chauvinism led to an irresponsible and utterly unrealistic philosophy, still his end goal 
was far more admirable than his later disciples: “His intolerant and arrogant lust to create and 
dictate led him into many strange and dangerous by-paths. But beyond their maze and 
threatening darkness there shone for him the light of his conviction that a universal order of 
morality is the only true principle of a constitution, a conviction to which he remained faithful 
from the revolutionary and rational mysticism of his youth to the Christian mysticism of his last 
year.”

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Fichte is a vital transitional figure with whom Kohn needed to contend. If his presentation of Fichte's thought was meant for any one purpose, it was to strip away the dangerous, militant illusions from what could, in Kohn view, still be understood as an inherently liberal approach. The same could not be said for Heinrich von Treitschke.

According to Kohn, Treitschke's highest value was a kind of freedom. However, as opposed to thinkers like Mill, Treitschke saw freedom not as a universal value which was the right of every human being as an individual, but as a value that had to be attained solely through a national framework. This belief fed Treitschke's xenophobia and anti-Semitism. Treitschke, as a historian, wrote various national histories of the German nation and took great pride in the establishment of Bismarck's Reich in 1871. While Kohn stresses that Bismarck cannot be categorized as an "anti-Semite," he notes that the realpolitik approach of the chancellor included manipulating anti-Semitism for his own purposes. Kohn points to Prussian Court Chaplain, Adolf Stöcker, and the anti-Jewish Christian-Social movement that he founded. "More important than these popular movements," Kohn believed, though this is certainly questionable, was the impact of Treitschke on young academics. Though Treitschke was opposed by Theodore Mommsen the vast majority followed Treitschke and his rejection of the ideals of the Enlightenment, of humanitarianism and of emancipation. Yet, identifying the twentieth century's radical departure, he opines that the form that this "contemptuous rejection of Western

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96 An earlier example of these anti-western, xenophobic and anti-Jewish trends can be found in Kohn's analysis of Frederick Ludwig Jahn (1778-1852). "Father" Jahn glorified an innate Prussian love of fatherland, he regretted the fact that the war of liberation was the work of an alliance and not a solely Germanic accomplishment. He represented a far more extreme form of German nationalism that focused on a "Greater Germany," which, Kohn emphasizes, was even more radical than the nationalism of Ernst Moritz Arndt who still maintained some aspects of universalism. See Hans Kohn, *The Mind of Germany: The Education of a Nation* (New York: Harper and Row, 1960), 75-86; 93-95.

97 Kohn, *Nationalism and Realism*, 52ff 53.
Enlightenment and emancipation took in the 1930s would have been far too radical to obtain the approval of its progenitors.  

To Kohn, Treitschke’s greatest ideological mistake was to make freedom, a universal and timeless value, contingent upon something as anachronistic and accidental as nationalism. Thus Treitschke attempted to attain the universal by temporal and superficial means. It was Dostoevsky, however, who became Kohn’s greatest nationalist villain. Dostoevsky not only saw the state as the sole means of attaining higher values he made the nation itself the highest value.

According to Kohn, Dostoevsky was the spokesman for an already established intellectual community in Russia that rejected the West and sought to spread the Russian message through imperial means. This school of thought romanticized the peasant and those who worked in the soil as the heart of Russia. They rejected what Kohn saw as the liberal values of the West which transcended race and appealed to a pan-Slavic ideology which sought to unite Russia with other Slavic peoples in an attempt to solidify and spread "authentic" Russian values. Unlike Western thinkers, Dostoevsky (along with Danilevsky) saw this unity with the Slavs not so much in terms of common ideology but, fallaciously, in terms of common race.

Kohn considered Dostoevsky to be a brilliant novelist, whose characters possessed unparalleled complexity. At the same time, he believed, Dostoevsky’s depictions of politics and nations in his literary works were in black and white and lacked the nuanced understanding which he demonstrated in relation to individual personality. Political opposition was

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98 Kohn, Nationalism and Realism, 53.
99 Kohn, Prophets and Peoples, 121.
100 Kohn, Prophets and Peoples, 131.
101 Kohn, Prophets and Peoples, 133.
irreconcilable and the man who felt such deep regard and pity for sinners showed not the slightest toleration for political adversaries. Dostoevsky’s hatred of the West was fueled by his conviction that liberalism and individual liberty led to immorality and the rejection of God. Yet what god was the West rejecting? According to Kohn, Dostoevsky’s god was Russia itself. The apotheosization of Russia’s nationalist program was, for him, Dostoevsky’s greatest sin. In addition to opposing the liberalism of the West, Dostoevsky opposed the universalism of the Western church. He idealized Russia as an imperial force which could subdue Asia and fight the West as an immense empire. Dostoevsky’s ideal of racial unity would never be fully realized, yet he succeeded, in the end, in defeating the influence of western ideals among Russian intellectuals. After his death, Dostoevsky’s hopes would be realized and many of his prophecies fulfilled. Kohn concludes:

A new generation of intellectuals ignorant of, and unattracted by, the lure of Western liberty and the masses met in the fulfillment of a destiny which Dostoevsky had prophesied: for without the intellectuals, the masses could not perceive their mission of renewing humanity; without the masses, the intellectuals could not utter the new word to the world. In its awakened masses, the great Eurasian empire found the strength for the mission which Dostoevsky had envisioned for Russia.

Along with Dostoevsky, Russian Pan-Slavs are located by Kohn on the illiberal pole of the prophetic spectrum. He makes a distinction between Slavophilism and Pan-Slavism. Though the latter emerged from the former movement, pan-Slavism was different in that it not only stressed the fundamental difference between the Western Germano-Latin civilization and

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102 Kohn, Prophets and Peoples, 134.
103 Kohn, Prophets and Peoples, 134.
104 Kohn, Prophets and Peoples, 146.
the Byzantine-Russian civilization, but it posited the belief in the inevitable conflict between the two worlds of Europe and Russia, out of which Russia and the Slavs would emerge victorious. The intellectual father of the pan-Slav movement, Nicolai Danilevsky, holds a place similar to that of Dostoevsky in Kohn’s thought and, in so far as he was an historian, bore similarity to Treitschke. Significantly, Kohn points to the actual political import of the pan-Slav movement’s ideology. Nicolas Ignatiev, Ambassador to Constantinople and a major figure in the court of Alexander III, was a convinced pan-Slav and helped orient Russian policy toward support for the Balkan wars of liberation.

Against Dostoevsky and Danilevsky, Kohn presents Vladimir Solovyev, in whose work Slavophilism reached its spiritual sublimation. Solovyev is a prime example of a middle prophet in Kohn’s thought. Though Solovyev believed that through the Russian people the final unity of mankind and its faith would achieve both actualization and integration, he eschewed the violent eschatology of the pan-Slavists. Rather, for Solovyev, though the Russian people would lead mankind to the kingdom of God, they would not do so through force. The task would also require sacrifice. Kohn points to Solovyev’s belief that Russia’s true mission was the union of Europe and of the churches through an act of sacrificial renunciation. This messianic-humanistic goal, however, would also require Russia to renounce her self-sufficiency and her fundamentally pagan nationalism. 

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108 Kohn, Pan-Slavism, 176.
109 Kohn, Pan-Slavism, 177.
Kohn's exploration into the ideological origins of nationalism, East and West, through its national prophets presents a clear picture of the spectrum that exists within his normative dichotomy of identities in the Age of Nationalism. The West along with Eastern prophets such as Ahad Ha-am, Thomas Masaryk and Vladimir Solovyev each navigated both a localized and broader tension between the universal and particular. Yet they all held individual liberty, reason, and humanism as the highest ideals. The nation existed for these ideals and drew its validity from its support for them, in the past and in the present. In this respect, the West, along with Eastern intellectuals who found a universal, ethical focus represent good nationalism in Kohn's model. Nineteenth-century Imperialism is also subject to this interpretation in Kohn's thought. Here intentionality and potentiality are central to his judgments. English imperialism in India, for instance, gave its native people the vocabulary and conceptual tools to proclaim liberty for themselves.

Eastern nationalism as exemplified by Treitschke and Dostoevsky held the state as an end in itself. This constituted, for Kohn, bad nationalism. Its imperial program sought not to liberate native people with western values, but used them in an attempt to halt the progression of western liberalism. In its worst incarnations, eastern nationalism made the nation into an idol, an absolute which could not be tempered by any higher values.

What is also important about Kohn's presentation, especially given the post-war context in which he wrote, is his attention to various realities that national prophets really public intellectuals confronted. Eastern prophets especially needed to appeal to the historical roots of their people. While Kohn believed that the future-oriented nationalism of the United States was preferable, he understood the need to ground national existence in history and myth. Kohn did not understand national mythology as categorically detrimental. Rather, as we have seen,
especially in the case of Masaryk, national myth could be useful if it grounded the people in a tradition of liberty and respect for human values. This spectrum was of vital importance for Kohn in the post-war context. As an advocate of a federation of nations that championed liberal democracy, he needed to demonstrate that, though some may be preferable, there were many valid paths to liberty.
Chapter Five

The Waning of a Jewish Intellectual: Jewish Questions in America

Returning from his first visit to the United States, Hans Kohn wrote to Henry Hurwitz on December 25th, 1931, describing his first impressions. Having seen America in the grip of the Great Depression, he was not optimistic about its immediate future. Even more discouraging to Kohn was the poverty of Jewish leadership that he observed. Not yet in command of the elegant English style for which he would later be recognized, he wrote:

There may even come a day when America's Reform Rabbis (and socially they alone count) will not be shy to speak on God and on Judaism (I mean: on Judaism, not on present day Jewish politics as what they mistake for it) instead on [sic] new plays on the Broadway, on books of the day (and not longer than a day) or on business. Then perhaps even in American Jewry the true position of a Rabbi will not be measured by the salary he gets or the niceties of his golf or bridge, but by the sanctity of his life and the power of his message of God. But those times which will come shall America not be entirely lost seem still far away. And in this preparation, in the de-Americanisation of American Jewry, which thus could lead the way to the birth of a cultural conscience and life in America, The Menorah Journal has a big task to fulfill.¹

Just over thirty years later, in his autobiography, Kohn reflected on the impact of American culture on his son, Immanuel:

Through its history, the United States has exercised a strong assimilative power upon the children of immigrants. We saw this process at work in our son, Immanuel, who was seven years old when we came to the States. Immanuel was educated entirely in New England at Deerfield Academy, which has become one of the leading

preparatory schools in the country. After that he entered Harvard, and after time out to serve in World War II, was graduated summa cum laude in Political Science in 1949.2 Far from pursuing the path of de-Americanization which Kohn once deemed necessary for the cultural conscience of American Jews, he raised his son in the New England establishment and came to celebrate the Americanization of his own family.

This chapter serves as a contrast. Thus far, we have explored the waxing of Kohn’s universal concerns in response to the radical particularism of fascism and the potentially dangerous universalism of the Soviet Union during the post-war period. Yet when we first encountered Kohn at the beginning of this study, the main thrust of his life and work was a search for a redemptive, humanistic Jewish nationalism. After his abrupt departure from Palestine and Zionism, how did he see himself as a Jew in America?

In this chapter I argue, in opposition to a recent influential study, that Kohn’s Jewish involvement in the United States was contingent upon whether Jewish organizations could reflect the overall balance that he came to advocate.3 Following World War Two, the establishment of the State of Israel, and the rise of ethnic consciousness among the American Jewish community and its organizations, Kohn became almost completely alienated. He thus offered, in America, no constructive statement on Jewish existence or continuity. The Jews as a people, he came to believe, were best served by the balance of the universal and particular that he advocated on a global scale.

Kohn did occasionally publish on Jewish questions immediately before and after settling in the United States, but the majority of his contributions were taken, almost verbatim, from his

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2 Kohn, Living in a World Revolution, 157: Kohn seems to have embraced the Jeffersonian version of the melting pot, that he cites in the Idea of Nationalism, for his own family. Rather than pursuing a specifically Jewish or European milieu for his son, he placed Immanuel among those in the established New England community.

3 Pianko, Zionism and the Roads not Taken.
earlier writings. Indeed, there are few extensive compositions on Jewish matters that Kohn wrote primarily in America. His response upon receiving a copy of Koppel Pinson’s new edited volume of the writings of the Jewish Diaspora nationalist Simon Dubnow is indicative of this significant shift: “It recalls to me the older days long gone by when I read and wrote on the history of Jewish nationalism.”

This change in priorities does not mean that Jewish questions completely evaded Kohn in America. Though they remained, at most, of secondary importance in the larger context of his life and work, he did address questions concerning events in Palestine and the newly formed State of Israel, as well as relationship of Jewish nationalism to the Jewish ethical tradition. Kohn also pursued roles in a variety of Jewish organizations. These observations notwithstanding, almost immediately following his arrival in the United States, Kohn not only permanently abandoned Zionism, but he ceased to be a Jewish nationalist of any kind. In this chapter we will attempt to chart this radical transition. We shall also examine the various Jewish dimensions of Kohn’s life in the United States, both with regards to his intellectual activities and his broader organizational involvement.

**The Menorah Journal**

Prior to his permanent arrival in the United States, Hans Kohn published a series of articles in *the Menorah Journal*. In fact, these articles constitute his very first American publications. It is significant that Kohn would have been drawn to the Menorah Association, its journal, and the personality behind it, Henry Hurwitz. It could not have eluded Kohn, who often complained of the poverty of American Jewish intellectual life, that the Menorah Association

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4 Letter from Hans Kohn to Koppel S. Pinson, 17 March, 1958, in Archives of the Leo Baeck Institute, New York, New York. Koppel S. Pinson Collection [KPC]; AR 4310; Box 1; Folder 1/1A; Emphasis is mine.
bore a great deal of similarity, *mutatis mutandis*, to the Prague *Bar Kochba* Society. Founded by Hurwitz along with a group of Harvard students in 1906, the Menorah Association sought to provide a forum for the furtherance of Jewish intellectual discourse among, mainly elite, university students. In 1915, the Association published its first issue of the *Menorah Journal*, under Hurwitz’s editorship. The Association, would eventually confront financial problems, and was in many ways overtaken by both the more welcoming and Jewishly diverse campus Hillel organizations and, in the case of the journal, *Commentary*, which received ample funding from the American Jewish Committee. Nonetheless, the Menorah Association continued into the early 1960s, only ending with the death of Hurwitz himself.

Kohn’s history with the journal dated back to his time in England in the 1920s. Kohn, who acted as an agent of sorts for Martin Buber, along with Sir Alfred Zimmern, who served as a translator, tried to have some of Buber’s more prominent essays published in the United States. Upon learning of Kohn’s intentions to resettle in the United States, Hurwitz tried to bring him more actively into the Menorah project and also arranged various lectures on his behalf in addition to advertising for his forthcoming English publications. He wrote to Kohn in 1933, “You see I have become something of a *promoter* of yours—or your impresario.”

In addition to a short column on the Jews of Saloniki in 1929, Hurwitz published a series of Kohn’s articles on Zionism and Jewish nationalist thinkers during the very early 1930s. It is somewhat difficult to gauge the significance of these pieces in the context of Kohn’s intellectual transition during this time. Aside from an article on the thought of Martin Buber

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6 *Henry Hurwitz to Hans Kohn, 27 Oct, 1933,* in HHP; Box 26; Folder 9, MSi 2.

from 1938, Kohn’s other articles were published between 1930 and 1932. They were, however, largely excerpts from texts that Kohn had composed prior to his departure from the Zionist movement in 1929. Yet, Kohn did indeed have them republished. This fact, along with his correspondence with Henry Hurwitz, with which we began, demonstrates that Kohn, though no longer a Zionist, did not immediately embrace Americanism, or what he understood as the assimilative tendencies of American Jews.

Kohn’s first significant piece in the *Menorah Journal*, *The Jew Enters Western Culture: Escape and Return in the Nineteenth Century*, is, in fact, a thorough critique of Jewish emancipation and assimilation. It is also a defense of Jewish particularity that reflects, in a historical narrative, the sentiments that he had expressed to Hurwitz.

Throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, Kohn posits, the stagnant Judaism of the Ghetto declined into petrifaction. By the turn of the nineteenth century, the prospect of political and social emancipation unleashed a series of radical reactions: Assimilation swept through Jewish life like a veritable hurricane. One purpose seemed to animate Jewish life: to escape from Judaism, to become like the gentiles. Kohn includes Reform Judaism, elements of the Haskalah and political Zionism in this set of stormy, internal forces. In the wake of the Enlightenment, Western European society, which was the catalyst for this embrace of alien values, was reoriented toward individualism. With the consolidation of nation states, Kohn claims, one could only hold value in society as an individual citizen of the body politic. Thus,

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9 Most of these essays were already collected and published by Kohn and Robert Weltsch in *Zionistische Politik*.

Judaism as a political entity disappeared; its place was taken by the citizen of France or England of the Jewish persuasion.\textsuperscript{11} Among the results of this unprecedented engagement with European culture, was generational conflict. Sons turned against fathers. Rapprochement was impossible, for in the heat of dialectics perspective played no role.\textsuperscript{10} For the younger generation, everything in Judaism was offensive, despicable, moribund, whereas outside in the wide world everything appeared beautiful, noble and remarkably alive.\textsuperscript{12}

This critique of emancipation bears a great deal of similarity to that of Simon Dubnow, who worked out his theory of Diaspora Nationalism in his \textit{Letters on Old and New Judaism}.\textsuperscript{13} We can especially point to Dubnow\textsuperscript{14} criticism of Jewish proponents of emancipation who while advocating liberal principles themselves paved the way for these principles\textsuperscript{15} violation by rejecting their internal, national \textit{freedom} in favor of foreign \textit{tyranny}.\textsuperscript{14} Kohn\textsuperscript{14} essay thus constitutes a history of the rejection of national freedom on the part of modern, assimilated Jews. Not surprisingly, he begins with Moses Mendelssohn, widely regarded as the father of modern Judaism.

According to Kohn, Mendelssohn, despite his efforts to combat widespread Jewish ignorance, ultimately reinforced this sense of shame. As he puts it, "the Mendelssohn Bible undeniably abetted the process of assimilation by its use of the German language and avoidance

\textsuperscript{11} Kohn, \textit{The Jew Enters Western Culture},\textsuperscript{10} 293: While here Kohn writes quite negatively of this designation of Jewish identity, he would later adopt it himself. He later wrote of Benjamin Disraeli, \textit{whose parents were of Italian descent and of the Jewish faith} \textsuperscript{10}(See Kohn, \textit{Nationalism and Realism}, 54).

\textsuperscript{12} Kohn, \textit{The Jew Enters Western Culture},\textsuperscript{10} 294.

\textsuperscript{13} Dubnow\textsuperscript{10} Letters were written between 1896 and 1906 and published in the Russian-Jewish journal \textit{Voskhod}. For a thorough analysis of Dubnow\textsuperscript{10} intellectual development see Robert M. Seltzer, \textit{Simon Dubnow's New Judaism: Diaspora Nationalism and the World History of the Jews} (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2013).

of the ordinary speech of Eastern and Central European Jews. The Yiddish language soon became despised along with all the other institutions of the Ghetto. Early reformers such as Gabriel Riesser and Samuel Holdheim adopted western culture to such an extent that it often reached a point of complete loss of self-respect. Kohn writes somewhat more appreciatively of Abraham Geiger and more moderate \textit{Liberal Judaism}, but his true hero of this period is Samson Raphael Hirsch. Not only did Hirsch emphasize a clear mission for the Jews as a separate, unique nation, but he spoke of an \textit{inner unity} in dispersion. Further, Kohn appreciated Hirsch\'s affirmation of an active, uniquely Jewish, role within emancipated society: \textit{It is of more importance to elevate the times to the height of Judaism than to lower Judaism to the level of the times.}

Despite the renewed self confidence that Hirsch contributed to emancipated Jewry, Kohn points to a more reactionary Orthodoxy that turned back to the Ghetto. It was from this Orthodoxy, as Kohn would have it, that a religious proto-Zionism emerged. The central figures of this movement, Tzvi Hirsch Kalischer, Elijah Gutmacher and Chaim Lorje, who Kohn designates as a \textit{pathological personality}, tried to organize colonization in Palestine based on

\footnote{\textit{Kohn, The Jew Enters Western Culture}, 295. Kohn\'s analysis here is highly polemical, but it is worth noting that the legacy of Mendelssohn is still highly contested. For a useful survey of these debates see Micah Gottlieb, \textit{Between Judaism and German Enlightenment: Recent Work on Moses Mendelssohn in English}, \textit{Religion Compass} vol. 4, issue 1 (2010), 22\textendash{}38.}

\footnote{\textit{Kohn, The Jew Enters Western Culture}, 296\textendash{}297: Kohn asserts that the lack of self-respect inherent in early, radical Reform Judaism \textit{led} to Baptism; to the final disappearance and submersion of Judaism in its environment.}

\footnote{\textit{Kohn, The Jew Enters Western Culture}, 298.}

\footnote{\textit{Kohn, The Jew Enters Western Culture}, 298.}
mystical, redemptive assumptions. This movement, however, was short lived, which Kohn attributes to the extremism of Lorje.\(^{19}\)

Interestingly, it would be an inspired half-Jew, according to Kohn, who functioned as the true precursor to a viable Zionism. Joseph Salvador, who though a Catholic was of paternal Sephardic lineage, understood the indebtedness of the Enlightenment to biblical ideas, but he believed that these ideas were incomplete in their modern incarnation.\(^{20}\) What was need, according to Salvador, was a "new Jerusalem" which would bridge East and West and renew Judaism as a necessary vitalizing force.\(^{21}\) Salvador, an early "prophet" in Kohn's pantheon, would inspire Moses Hess, and his central idea found new expression in many of the thinkers that Kohn admired, such as Aaron David Gordon and Ahad Ha-am.

This essay, which affirmed a unique, particular role for Jews in the world, was in many ways a swansong for Kohn. Within only a few years after its publication, he actively embraced many aspects of American Jewish life that this essay decried.

\(^{19}\) Kohn, *The Jew Enters Western Culture*, 300. Lorje (also spelled Lurie) was the organizational force behind the Jewish Organization for the Settlement of the Holy Land, which he founded in 1860 in Frankfurt. As Kohn notes, it was largely a failed project.


Entering American Jewish Life

In addition to political activities, Kohn was involved with the founding of the journal, *Jewish Social Studies*, along with Morris Raphael Cohen, Salo Baron and Koppel Pinson, who initially solicited his involvement and support, in 1937. While Kohn appears have taken his role as one of the primary editors seriously, tensions developed between the editors as to the focus of the journal, its title, and the respective roles of the various co-editors. In a letter to Koppel Pinson, Kohn insisted that he would be “very happy” to resign from his position as an active editor if it would help put an end to what he called the “Baron affair,” and simply serve as a member of the journal’s editorial board. Nevertheless, Kohn continued as one of the co-editors Jewish Social Studies from 1937 until 1941, after which time he served as a mainly symbolic chair of the journal’s editorial board. Already by 1939, Kohn emphasized to Pinson that Jewish Social Studies was not a personal priority, explaining that the JSS editorial board had become too much of a time burden and that the only reason he had initially agreed was because he believed it would help Pinson in his capacity as managing editor.

A letter from Pinson to Kohn on the tenth anniversary of the first issue of *Jewish Social Studies* reveals Kohn’s distance from both the journal and Jewish intellectual life. After inviting

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22 *Jewish Social Studies* was initially supported by the Conference on Jewish Relations. Morris Raphael Cohen served as president of the conference at the time of the journal’s founding; Salo Baron was a vice president.

23 See Robert Liberles, *Salo Wittmayer Baron: Architect of Jewish History* (New York and London: NYU Press, 1995), 230–235. The details of this “affair” are rather mundane. Liberles notes that while Baron was away in 1937, Hans Kohn was appointed as a co-editor. Though he expressed great respect for Kohn, he felt his presence was redundant and further confused both the journal’s social scientific orientation and the division of labor among editors.

24 “Letter from Hans Kohn to Koppel S. Pinson, 29 August, 1937,” in Archives of the Leo Baeck Institute, New York, New York. KPC; Box 1; Folder 1/1A.

25 “Letter from Hans Kohn to Koppel Pinson, February 6, 1939,” in Archives of the Leo Baeck Institute, New York, New York. KPC; Box 1; Folder 1/1A.
Kohn to a panel on “The Jewish Catastrophe of 1939–45,” Pinson tried to preempt Kohn’s rejection, knowing that you are busy and I also know that your initial reaction to this request might be “no.” But I should like you to do me a great personal favor and accept. Pinson acknowledged Kohn’s lack of recent involvement with the journal, but, aware of Kohn’s views toward the intellectual state of the American Jewish community and the new State of Israel, he appealed to their mutual frustrations, and the initial shared goals that had led them to start the journal: I need not tell you that Jewish scholarly undertakings, not devoted primarily to combatting antisemitism [sic] or helping Israel, are not having a too easy time of it these days.

Aside from his relatively brief position with Jewish Social Studies, Kohn served on the board of directors of YIVO and the Leo Baeck Institute, where he delivered the second annual Leo Baeck Memorial Lecture on the life and thought of Heinrich Heine. In his memoir, Kohn writes admiringly of the mission of the Leo Baeck Institute, and especially its former director, Max Kreutzberger. Yet Kohn presentation of the Institute’s mission is also telling as to his shift in priorities: The emancipation and assimilation of the Jews in Central Europe started with the toleration of the Enlightenment but was never complete. [T]his assimilation, for all its problems and tensions, greatly intensified cultural life in Central Europe and made possible the contributions to German and European culture of many great intellects, from Heinrich Heine and Karl Marx to Sigmund Freud and Arnold Schönberg. Hitlerism put an end to this process of


creative assimilation. To recall and reconstruct this past, the Leo Baeck Institute has been founded in New York.29

Kohn was also an active board member of the Judah Magnes Foundation. Dedicated to Magnes’ binational ideals, the foundation sought to uphold his humanistic legacy following his death in 1948. It is significant that Hannah Arendt was also actively involved in the foundation’s endeavors. As Noam Pianko has pointed out, Hans Kohn and Hannah Arendt shared a number of affinities in their respective approaches to Zionism. They also began to collaborate together with other members of the Judah Magnes Foundation on a memorial volume for Magnes, who was also, informally, involved with the Brit Shalom circle and was the founder of its successor organization, Ihud.30 These endeavors notwithstanding, Kohn’s deepest Jewish affiliations seem to have been with the American Jewish Committee.

During the mid-1930s, Hans Kohn became an enthusiastic member of the American Jewish Committee (AJC). Kohn, who upon settling in the United States declared to Martin Buber “My son will be an American,” felt at home in the largely acculturated, German-Jewish AJC. The AJC’s members, as Henry Feingold puts it, “were usually more concerned with their Americanism and viewed their Jewishness in religious rather than ethnic terms. They would have preferred to see the second generation meld as quickly as possible into the American mainstream.”31 This orientation among the membership and leaders of the AJC informed their primarily non-Zionist position. Of those among the Committee’s leadership who did appreciate

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29 Kohn, Living in a World Revolution, 183.
30 See Pianko, Zionism and the Roads Not Taken, 175: There are important similarities between Kohn and Arendt, but their correspondence is not particularly extensive and the planned memorial volume, sloppily compiled in the mid-1950s and entitled Peace in the Holy Land, does not seem to have come to fruition.
certain elements of Zionism, many shared in Kohn’s concern about Arab-Jewish relations and in his opposition to statehood.\footnote{A number of influential leaders of the AJC, among them James Marshall, Frank Sulzberger and Elliot Cohen, were also active board members of the Magnes Foundation.}

It is telling that the nature of Kohn’s anti-fascist campaign mirrored the modus operandi of the AJC during the crisis in Europe. This approach represented a larger issue for Jewish intellectuals and Jewish organizations during those years. While the AJC, like Kohn, kept its message as universal as possible, the overtly ethnic, pro-Zionist, American Jewish Congress was far more aggressive in bringing the specifically Jewish element of the crisis into view. As Naomi Cohen explains, \textquote{The new American Jewish Congress, like its predecessor, preached Jewish national consciousness and ethnocentrism\ldots This stance, apart from the psychological attraction for those who felt impelled by Nazism to stand up and be counted as Jews, was also very much in keeping with the principles of cultural pluralism then becoming popular. However, this philosophy was still alien to the AJC leaders, who defined Judaism as primarily a spiritual legacy and shuddered at any intimation of dual loyalties.}\footnote{Naomi W. Cohen, \textit{Not Free to Desist: The American Jewish Committee 1906–1966} (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1972), 221.} This very practical concern was a major factor in the AJC’s public outcry against Nazism. Prior to the outbreak of war in Europe, the AJC had focused on exposing the threat of Nazi ideology. Once the war began, however, \textquote{the committee substituted a \textquote{prodemocracy}\ldots campaign, which contrasted democratic institutions with their totalitarian counterparts.}\footnote{Cohen, \textit{Not Free to Desist}, 228\textit{ff} 229.}

As a member of the AJC, Kohn chaired the Subcommittee on Protection of Human Rights which included, among others, the historians Salo Baron and Jacob Salwyn Schapiro and
lawyer and activist James Marshall. Following the end of World War II, Kohn co-wrote the section of the AJC’s post-war program, *To the Counsellors of Peace*, that detailed the organization’s stance on the future of human rights. The Subcommittee proposed an international declaration of human rights with the appropriate “machinery” to back up the principles expressed. Referring back to the settlement of 1919, they highlighted the problems with the initially well intended minority rights treaties in the context of inter-war Europe. Too often, they argued, complaints regarding minority rights were brought before the League of Nations by one state in order to strike at an enemy nation. The Jews, they emphasized, were more often than not unprotected under that system due to the fact that they did not constitute a majority in any nation, and thus had no real vehicle to file complaints. The universal element of such a declaration was particularly stressed as evidenced in the statement, “The best protection for Jews is the security of all human beings and the enforcement of their fundamental rights.”

The establishment of the State of Israel in 1948, and the war of independence that ensued, marked a largely definitive defeat of the binational vision that Kohn had once strongly advocated. As the AJC began to reconcile itself to imminent Israeli statehood, Kohn became more aggressive in pushing the Committee to use its influence as a tool of critique. In May of 1948, Kohn seemed to vacillate between hope and disappointment. He was encouraged by the meeting of the AJC Executive Committee that he had attended in early May, and especially heartened by the commitment of Committee President Joseph Proskauer to prioritizing an Arab-

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35 James Marshall (1899–1986) was the son of Louis Marshall, a prominent member of the American Jewish Committee, among other Jewish organizations, and a prolific writer on law and politics.

36 See Cohen, *Not Free to Desist*, 270: Cohen points out that the section authored by Kohn, J. Salwyn Schapiro and Arthur Kuhn focused on ideals rather than specific rights “in order to avoid controversy.” Instead they advocated a UN bill of human rights that would detail freedoms and liberties and provide procedures for enforcement.

37 To the Counsellors of Peace: Recommendations of the American Jewish Committee (New York: The American Jewish Committee, March 1945), 22.
Jewish rapprochement. He wrote to John Slawson the following day and declared that the proceedings had made him proud to be part of such a Jewish organization. Soon, however, in the immediate aftermath of the independence of the State of Israel, Kohn was let down by what he considered the AJC’s less than resolute stance on the Arab-Jewish problem. Responding to what he considered to be a weak and platitudinous AJC resolution on Arab-Jewish relations, Kohn wrote to John Slawson only a week after the new state was declared, I cannot see the slightest reason why the AJC should repeat at this moment all the old Zionist arguments, including the myth of an overwhelming testimony that in the everyday lives of the people of Palestine there has been close and friendly Jewish-Arab relations to a marked degree. Nobody who has lived in Palestine will believe it. I could understand it, though I would deeply regret it, if the AJC had not the courage to resist the overwhelming trend of Jewish mass opinion at the present time.

In the years that followed, Kohn’s alienation became only more pronounced. Writing to James Marshall in January of 1950 he insisted, Dr. Weizmann was entirely right, that the world will judge the Jewish State by what it does to the Arabs. The world is judging it, and in my opinion entirely rightly holding it responsible for all the things happening there. That is the reason why the decisions in the United Nations will no longer be favorable to Israel.

Kohn’s final break with the AJC came in the context of the Suez Crisis and Israel’s invasion of the Gaza strip and the Sinai Peninsula. Not only did he believe that Israel’s military invasion...
involvement and eventual occupation of Egyptian territory would only strengthen Arab nationalism, but the invasion by Britain and France in an attempt to unseat Nasser threatened to turn Egypt towards a Soviet alliance. Kohn was also extremely worried about the future of the NATO alliance. He wrote to the New York Times in the autumn of 1956, criticizing Britain and France: "their strange and precipitate ultimatum, followed by an invasion of Egyptian territory has created a situation which, whatever its immediate success, may ultimately weaken the West."

Irving Engel, then president of the AJC, met with Secretary of State John Foster Dulles, whose convictions reflected the Eisenhower Administration's rather cool approach toward the State of Israel. Though Engel was privately critical of Israeli actions, Naomi Cohen emphasizes that, when speaking with Dulles, he appealed to recent history, arguing that dictators (in this case Nasser) should be taken at their word. He pushed for recognition of Israel's existence as a precondition of American negotiations with other nations, the reestablishment of free passage through the Suez, and provisions for defensive arms to Israel. Following the public relations debacle of Israel's invasion of the Sinai, the AJC issued a letter calling for the United States to propose a permanent peace settlement through UN negotiations. Naomi Cohen sums up the meaning of the organization's involvement: "The Sinai episode revealed a new maturity in the AJC's public stance, reflecting the pluralism of mid-century American society as well as the confidence of American Jewry."  

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43 Kohn, "Franco-British Attack," 322.  
44 Kohn, "Franco-British Attack," 324.
For Kohn, however, this level of "maturity" confirmed that the AJC had lost its moral compass and had sacrificed principle for popular trends. He wrote several letters to the AJC’s leadership urging them to take a moral stance against, what he considered, Israel’s excessively belligerent policy. Irving Engel, the president of the AJC, respected, and seems to have shared some of Kohn’s concerns. He objected strongly, however, to Kohn’s suggestion that Israel return the Gaza Strip to Egypt: "To return the Strip to Egypt, under the present circumstances, would be little less than a crime."45

Frustrated by the inability of Engel, and the unwillingness of the AJC, to issue any official criticisms of Israeli actions, Kohn submitted his resignation on April 2, 1957. While this letter contains no specific grievances, Louis Lempel, the regional director of the AJC, wrote to Kohn requesting a reason for the resignation. Kohn replied that nothing could then be done to bring him back to the AJC. All of his reasons, Kohn emphasized, were connected with the attitude followed by the American Jewish Committee towards the State of Israel: "I am deeply convinced that the attitude of the American Jewish Committee runs counter to the real interests of the Jews in the State of Israel, and ultimately to the good conscience of American Jewry."46

**Kohn on Zionism: Two American Essays**

During his time as an active Zionist, in Europe and Palestine, Kohn authored several essays, articles, and books concerning Jewish issues and ideas. In America, he published only a few substantial essays on the nature and history of Zionism, most of them adaptations of his

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45 *Letter from Irving Engel to Hans Kohn, 7 January 1957,* in HKC; Box 3; Folder 10. Engel agreed that Israel should not continue to occupy Gaza, but advocated a United Nations takeover of the territory.

46 *Letter from Hans Kohn to Louis Lempel, 7 April, 1957,* in HKC; Box 3; Folder 10.
earlier work. Two of Kohn's more original essays, which treat the Zionist movement as a whole, and which were composed in the United States merit our attention. Separated by almost twenty years, *Zionism* (1939) and *Zion and the Jewish National Idea* (1958) share some basic material, yet the way in which Kohn framed the discussion of the movement's history, its thinkers, and its relation to contemporary affairs reflects his differing attitude toward the pre-State British Mandate and the decade old State of Israel.

The 1939 essay, *Zionism*, was published as a chapter in Kohn's war time collection, *Revolutions and Dictatorships*. He begins this treatment by defining the movement and its nature. Zionism, Kohn explains, *is* the Jewish national movement which aims at the reestablishment of Palestine as a Jewish nation-state. It is a national movement, he continues, that is *unique* in history, unique as the situation of the Jewish people and as that of the tiny land on the shore of the Mediterranean. The implications of Zionism are far reaching in time and space. All the historical traditions of Judaism, reaching back thousands of years, and the future hopes of many Jews in their world-wide dispersion, are centered upon Palestine.

Having acknowledged the centrality of the Holy Land to the consciousness of the Jewish Diaspora, Kohn frames the ultimate, contemporary conflict: though this tiny land on the shore of the Mediterranean, had been the focus of the Jewish and the Christian religious imagination for thousands of years, the Arab population, who have inhabited and tilled the land since the early Middle Ages regard it as a most important part of their patrimony, which they defend with all the fervor of a newly awakened patriotism.

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47 Kohn, Revolutions and Dictatorships, 299. *Zionism.*
48 Kohn, Revolutions and Dictatorships, 299.
49 Kohn, Revolutions and Dictatorships, 299.
While Palestine, like many other parts of the Near East, was undergoing a complicated process of modernization, this was made even more difficult by the presence and goals of Zionism. Writing in 1939, Kohn acknowledges the additional strain on an already intractable conflict, “the Palestinian problem is unique in its complexity among all the nationalist and imperialist conflicts—unique also in its tragic implications, which grow more and more so with the unprecedented catastrophe inflicted upon central European Jewry and with the rapid awakening of the Arab masses to full national consciousness.”

While Kohn points out that the political form of Zionism originated among the Jews of Central Europe, “the intellectual and spiritual background as well as the support of the movement came from the Jews of Eastern Europe, who, even at the beginning of the twentieth century, were not yet legally emancipated and continued to live under special restrictions in a situation reminiscent of the medieval ghetto.”

While, in Kohn’s formulation, Hasidism acted as a “democratic force,” among the lower classes, the Haskalah provided a window to western European ideas of Enlightenment and individualism. These two movements, in Kohn’s view, set the initial stage for a modern national movement. Further, “The terrible economic poverty, social misery, and political humiliation among many parts of Jewry strengthened the romantic impulse toward Zionism.” Additional upheavals at the turn of the century, especially in Eastern Europe, reinforced the turning toward nationalist solutions, “The First World War marked a decisive turn in Zionism.” The Balfour declaration was endorsed by the allied powers and became an integral part of British Near

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50 Kohn, Revolutions and Dictatorships, 300.
51 Kohn, Revolutions and Dictatorships, 300.
52 Kohn, Revolutions and Dictatorships, 303.
53 Kohn, Revolutions and Dictatorships, 316.
Eastern policy, just as the situation of east European Jews began to deteriorate. The White armies perpetrated pogroms far worse than those of 1905. 54

Kohn is quick to note that other forms of Jewish nationalism developed in response to these problems. In fact, we might expect Kohn to embrace these alternatives given his alienation from Zionism. Yet he does not do so. Rather, Kohn points, if sympathetically, to the weakness of such alternatives: Diaspora nationalisms never exercised as powerful an attraction as did Zionistic nationalism. They lacked the power of appeal which Zionism drew from the whole Jewish past and from its promise of a fulfillment of the messianic longing. 55

Despite the fact that Kohn struggled against the totalitarian forces that put the Jews of Europe in great peril, he very rarely mentions Jews in his writings of this period. In this essay, however, while Kohn does not retract his conviction that the Arab question would come to haunt the movement, he actually speaks to the specifically Jewish element of the current crisis. Kohn writes:

The situation of the Jews in Palestine has recently become the concern of increasingly vast circles outside of Palestine. The year 1938 has been the most disastrous year in modern Jewish history. The deprivation of the most primitive civic and human rights, the spoliation of all their fortune, the denial of all means of earning a living, violent abuse and the danger of massacre, have put the Jews in central Europe in a position worse than that of any other people in modern times. Even in their own long history of suffering and persecution nothing has ever equaled their present plight, as regards the number involved and the systematic cruelty of the means employed. 56

54 Kohn, Revolutions and Dictatorships, 316.
55 Kohn, Revolutions and Dictatorships, 316.
56 Kohn, Revolutions and Dictatorships, 327–328.
In this passage, Kohn offers a rare but powerful acknowledgement of Jewish suffering, yet the solution to this problem, in Kohn’s view, was not through Jewish means. Rather, the fate of the Jews, he insists, was bound up with the larger struggle against radical, violent nationalisms: “as long as the common descent and destiny of all men, the universality and objectivity of law and truth, charity and humility as rules of conduct are vehemently and contumaciously attacked by Fascism... there is no hope for the solution of the Jewish problem, nor of any other problem. The hope of Israel cannot be dissociated from the hope of humanity: no isolated solution or liberation is possible today for any one people or any one problem. More intimately, more painfully than ever, the Jewish problem is bound together with that of all mankind.”

In 1939, Kohn had no way of knowing that the present plight of European Jewry would become far worse. As we have seen, the Nazi Holocaust eventually consumed members of Kohn’s family. Yet, in the aftermath of World War II, Kohn did not alter his views of Zionism or Palestine. Rather, it seems he became more committed than ever to questions of universal human rights and the preservation of tolerant, liberal nationalisms.

Against the backdrop of his immense anger at the policies of the new Israeli State, Kohn contributed an essay entitled “Zion and the Jewish National Idea” to the 1958, Autumn-Winter issue of the Menorah Journal. As opposed to his earlier essay, here Kohn presents his readers with a story of unheeded prophets—a genealogy of tragedy.

Kohn commences this essay with what can best be described as a homily. Taken, in part, from his discussion of Ancient Israel found in the Idea of Nationalism, Kohn presents his readers

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57 Kohn, Revolutions and Dictatorships, 330.
with a brief account of the tension between the spiritual and material in Jewish history. This tension, as Kohn presents it, was embodied, since biblical times, in the concepts of the Chosen people and the Promised Land. Both, as described by Kohn, are particularistic concepts: the first involves a single people having been called "preeminently" by "God or History" to serve a Cause, often the greatest and ultimate Cause.\(^{59}\) The second concept, the Promised Land, involves a part of this earth being singled out by destiny and mystery to be owned forever by the one people.\(^{60}\)

While a Jewish state or states existed for a relatively brief period of Jewish history, and solely in ancient times, Kohn identified three high points in the relationship of ancient Judaism to the State.\(^{61}\) The first, the transition to kingship that involved the Hebrew elders asking Samuel to appoint a king over them, is interpreted by Kohn as a request for something 'natural' to be a people like all other peoples, to have a government like all other governments, a state with all its paraphernalia.\(^{61}\)

The second high point, the rise of the Hebrew prophets, was a response to the vicissitudes and injustices that were normal in the very existence of states.\(^{62}\) Drawing on the prophet Amos, Kohn attempts to demonstrate that the concept of the Promised Land, became reinterpreted as meaningless without the fulfillment of the Israelites duty as the Chosen People,

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\(^{59}\) Kohn, *Zion and the Jewish National Idea*, p. 18: It is strange that the word "cause" is capitalized here. While it is entirely possible that it is simply an editorial oversight, Kohn's mention of "God or History," and the secular tone of the essay's conclusion suggests that Kohn is conflating "God" and the spiritual and earthly demands of the biblical covenant.

\(^{60}\) Kohn, *Zion and the Jewish National Idea*, p. 18.

\(^{61}\) Kohn, *Zion and the Jewish National Idea*, p. 18. While it is not technically incorrect to refer to the "state" or the "government" of Ancient Israel, Kohn also uses the term "state" in the *Idea of Nationalism*, but there is alternated with "kingdom," and appears less frequently. His constant usage here is likely meant to evoke the present, which he turns to after this brief foray into ancient times.

swollen with confidence and pride, the Israelites were made to hear that to be chosen does not imply the assurance of victory or prosperity; being chosen brings only the burden of more severe punishment for normal unrighteousness. ĉ63

The third high point was the destruction of the Second Temple. As the zealots fought the Romans, Yochanan ben Zakkai, who Kohn identifies as the leading representative of the Judaism of the day, abandoned the cause of the Jewish state. The state perished. Judaism survived. ĉ64

Though much of this discussion is a condensed version of Kohn's treatment of Ancient Israel from his earlier works, his analysis of political and spiritual elements here is largely derived from an essay by Ahad Ha-am, Flesh and Spirit, that Kohn would include in an edited volume three years later. ĉ65 By adopting Ahad Ha-am's paradigm, Kohn was able to extend the Zionist prophet's critique and apply it to past and present Zionist thought. Before continuing our analysis of Kohn's essay, we will briefly survey the essay to which he was largely indebted.

In his essay from 1904, Ahad Ha-am criticized both radical ends of his contemporary spectrum by analyzing the balance of the Political-Material (flesh) and transcendent (spiritual) aspects of Jewish life from biblical times to the modern age. Through this analysis he sought to demonstrate that Jewish history is characterized by a search for the harmonious balance of these two poles of existence and that radical adherence to either one had never sustained or strengthened the Jewish people.

63 Kohn, Zion and the Jewish National Idea, 19: The prophet Amos was also highly significant for Martin Buber, who in 1939 exhorted the members of Ichud to be children of Amos in order to challenge the hegemony of the state. See Martin Buber, Children of Amos, in A Land of Two Peoples, 258.

64 Kohn, Zion and the Jewish National Idea, 19.

65 Ahad Ha-am, Nationalism and the Jewish Ethic, ed. Hans Kohn (Schocken, New York, 1962).
In the biblical period, we do not, according to Ahad Ha-am, find many examples of extreme asceticism or extreme materialism. There is, however, one case of radicalism that he points out in this early period. While for most of the people, there was harmony between the demands of flesh and spirit, the aristocratic party, who were the entourage of the king, the military leaders, and most of the priests, subscribed to a material view of the world. The goal of these leaders, who knew comparatively little of the misery of those who they ruled, was to make the body politic dominant above all other interests, to win for the Jewish State a position of honor among its neighbors and to secure it against external aggression. It was against these powerful elite that the Prophets protested. Ahad Ha-am emphasizes that though some modern scholars have judged the Prophets as anti-material and politically ascetic, they were in reality heroes who fought to uphold the proper balance of the material and spiritual. This battle would continue until the destruction of the First Temple in 586 BCE.

Later, in the period of the Second Temple, the Pharisees, the Sadducees and the Essenes, despite their divergent world views, all largely continued to uphold this ideal balance. It was with the destruction of the second temple, however, that the Pharisees, in particular, would be forced to maintain the balance of flesh and spirit in the absence of an autonomous Jewish polity. This, according to Ahad Ha-am was the genius of the rabbis that succeeded in maintaining a healthy Jewish community up until the modern age:

They [the Pharisees] succeeded in creating a national body which hung in mid-air, without any solid foundation on the solid earth, and in this body the Hebrew national spirit has had its abode and lived its life for two thousand years. The organization of the Ghetto, the foundations of which were laid in the generations that followed the

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66 Ahad Ha-am, Nationalism and the Jewish Ethic, 200.
destruction of Jerusalem, is a thing marvelous and quite unique. It was based on the idea that the aim of life is the perfection of the spirit, but that the spirit needs a body to serve as its instrument.\textsuperscript{67}

In addition to his borrowing of Ahad Ha-am\textsuperscript{\textregistered}'s framework in analyzing the development of ancient Judaism, Kohn\textsuperscript{\textregistered}'s discussion of various Zionist thinkers clearly reflects both Ahad Ha-am\textsuperscript{\textregistered}'s general critiques of political-material trends in nationalism, and the small but decisive place of the Arab problem in his thought. As we will see, it is primarily due to this latter issue that Kohn elevated Ahad Ha-am as an ideal liberal Jewish prophet, and seems to relate personally to his struggle.

Quickly progressing to the modern period, Kohn ties the life of the Jewish diaspora to the greater changes in European society: "When the Age of Emancipation dawned for Europe in the eighteenth century, it dawned for the European Jew. The fate of the Jewish communities in the nineteenth century coincided with the strength of the general forces of intellectual Enlightenment and political emancipation in the various countries.\textsuperscript{68}

Thus, the spectrum that characterized European political and economic modernization was also reflective of the various Jewish communities within Europe. The Jews of Eastern Europe, particularly Russian Jews, yearned for emancipation as did various other groups and classes within Russian society. However, despite some limited prior progress, the year 1881 marked a cruel setback for them, as for all the hopes of emancipation in Russia. It is understandable that the Eastern European Jews reacted to this shock of disillusionment, which made their present even more unbearable, in two ways: by starting a mass emigration to countries of the West, where they could find emancipation\textsuperscript{\textregistered} and

\textsuperscript{67} Ahad Ha-am, Nationalism and the Jewish Ethic, 204.

\textsuperscript{68} Kohn, Zion and the Jewish National Idea, 20.
by a renewed longing for the Promised Land, a hope for the restoration of a past seen in historical transfiguration.\textsuperscript{69}

Various groups within the Russian Empire began to form national movements, and therefore, in Kohn\textsuperscript{70} view, it was “only natural,” that the Jews who were latecomers to this endeavor would do the same. Like other groups swept up in the "Age of Nationalism," the Jewish national movement looked for its historical foundations, its justification and its promise for the future, to the distant past which it reinterpreted in the light of the desires and aspirations of the modern movement.\textsuperscript{70}

Leo Pinsker, who responded to the dark years Russia lived through from 1881 to 1904, with his call for Auto-Emancipation was the first to set forth a program that embodied the major attributes of nineteenth century nationalism: common language, customs and land along with an emphasis on "redemptive manual labor." Yet Kohn points out that aside from Pinsker's small circle of enthusiastic followers (the \textit{Hovovei Tzion}), the movement had at best a minimal impact. Rather, it was the central European Theodore Herzl who, through the power of his personality and through indefatigable labor \textsuperscript{71} succeeded in creating the first worldwide international political Jewish movement.\textsuperscript{72}

Kohn continues by explaining at some length the "profound analysis" of Herzl\textsuperscript{72} worldview by Dr. Hannah Arendt\textsuperscript{73} that anti-Semitism constitutes a perpetual immutable force which the Jews must learn to use to their own advantage. Thus, for Herzl, Arendt believed, \textit{any} segment of reality that could not be defined by anti-Semitism was not taken into account.

\begin{footnotes}
\item[70] Kohn, \textit{Zion and the Jewish National Idea}, 22.
\item[71] Kohn, \textit{Zion and the Jewish National Idea}, 23.
\end{footnotes}
and any group that could not definitely be classified as anti-Semitic was not taken seriously as a political force.\textsuperscript{73} Herzl\’s goal, therefore, was not the revival of a Jewish culture in Palestine, but simply \textit{to give to the people with land a land without people.}\textsuperscript{74} It was only through his contact with eastern Zionists that it became clear to Herzl that the settlement of Palestine needed to be the goal.\textsuperscript{75}

As we have noted, Hannah Arendt shared many of Kohn\’s disillusionments with the Zionist movement. Yet Kohn\’s essay on the Zionist movement in certain ways reflects a more flexible approach than that of Arendt. The life and legacy of Theodore Herzl are an important case in point. As we have seen, Kohn from the time of his earlier writings, distinguished between the Herzl of \textit{The Jewish State} and the Herzl of \textit{Altneuland}. Though he thought Herzl was far from \textit{heroic},\textsuperscript{75} Kohn still asserted that Herzl\’s thought embodied the liberalism of the time and eschewed militarist solutions. Arendt, on the other hand, mainly calls Herzl to task for his naïve approach to anti-Semitism. She contrasts him negatively, for example, with Bernard Lazare who sought Jewish emancipation through revolution from below and could find no place in the movement of Herzl which functioned through higher diplomacy.\textsuperscript{76} Further Arendt, though equally as hostile as Kohn towards Revisionism, was far quicker to fault the practical policies of Chaim Weizmann, despite her belief that only Weizmann stood in the way of complete domination of the Zionist movement by the revisionist agenda.\textsuperscript{77}

\textsuperscript{73} Kohn, \textit{Zion and the Jewish National Idea}, 24. Kohn is drawing from Hannah Arendt\’s article, \textit{The Jewish State: Fifty Years After, Where have Herzl\’s Politics Led?} \textit{Commentary} 1 (1945–1946).

\textsuperscript{74} Kohn, \textit{Zion and the Jewish National Idea}, 24.

\textsuperscript{75} This was, in reality, a far more heated debate that threatened Herzl\’s leadership of the Zionist movement in the last years of his life.


\textsuperscript{77} \textit{Zionism Reconsidered}, in \textit{The Jewish Writings}, 348.
Despite Herzl’s ignorance of tradition and disregard for Jewish spiritual revival, Kohn points to the important ways in which the liberal values of Herzl’s Viennese context are embodied in the vision of a future state that he puts forth in _Altneuland_. The society described in _Altneuland_, Kohn emphasizes, is not a new ghetto, living in seclusion from the world and animated by a feeling of hostility to its environment. Rather, Herzl presents his reader with an open society, characterized by a spirit of pragmatic cooperation and mutual respect between Jews and Arabs.

While Kohn does not resort to a simple categorization of Herzl’s personality or leadership, he leaves no doubt as to the nature of Herzl’s legacy: fifty years after Herzl wrote his testament to the movement, the reality turned out to be the opposite of the hope he had expressed. Nowhere in the world was a Jewish community regarded with the hostility, distrust, and fear directed at the Jews in Palestine. The aspect of Herzl’s thought, driven by the specter of perpetual, endemic anti-Semitism, embodied in _The Jewish State_, would become the Zionist movement’s primary inheritance.

While, as Kohn emphasizes, Herzl was more a product of his nineteenth century liberal context, an age when traditional ethical and humanitarian values survived in secularized form as a living force, than a radical pan-nationalist, other thinkers would emerge, who were influenced by the radical intellectual movements of the early twentieth century, especially the oft misunderstood Nietzsche.

Under the influence of Nietzschean thought Micha Joseph Berdychevski turned the message of the narrative of Jewish history with which Kohn began on its head. In reality, in

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78 Kohn, _Zion and the Jewish National Idea_, 25.
80 Kohn, _Zion and the Jewish National Idea_, 28.
Berdychewski’s formulation, the prophets and rabbinic sages had sapped the vitality of the Jewish people that had been embodied by the sinful kings, and the men of the soil, and the nationalist zealots of ancient Israel and Judah whose statesman like wisdom and heroic deeds equaled those of other people. Saul Tchernichowsky was even more extreme in his revival of Hebrew paganism. Against these prophets of primitivism, Kohn reiterates the message of many of his early writings: Judaism did not arise in the gods of nature, of soil and blood, which the primitive Hebrew tribes may have adored as did their contemporaries. It was as a religious ethical insight that Judaism began. Without this there may be Hebrew tribes as good or as bad as other primitive peoples, but no Judaism.

The more extreme views of Berdyechewski and Tchernichowsky influenced the Russian-Jewish journalist, Vladimir Jabotinsky. Here, Kohn contrasts the approaches of Jabotinsky and Chaim Weizmann as two competing trends in twentieth-century Zionist thought that sought to define the movement’s course.

Like Berdyechewski and Tchernichowsky, Jabotinsky sought to revive the heroism of ancient Jewish zealots. Kohn notes that Jabotinsky revived the names of Bethar and Massada. He strove to reawaken pride in military deeds, in combat and arms. He held up those who died fighting the Arabs in Palestine as models to be ever present in the minds of the youth. As we have seen, Kohn’s move to Palestine and involvement in Brit Shalom was largely a reaction to the increased influence of Jabotinsky and his Revisionist party. Decades later, Kohn rehashed many of his earlier criticisms. He points out, for example, that Jabotinsky advocated, in the immediate aftermath of World War I, a colonial-imperialist model of rapid Jewish settlement in

81 Kohn, Zion and the Jewish National Idea, 28.
82 Kohn, Zion and the Jewish National Idea, 29.
83 Kohn, Zion and the Jewish National Idea, 29.
Palestine which was designed to create a Jewish majority. As with Herzl, Kohn contextualizes Jabotinsky’s thought within contemporary European ideas. Yet, for Jabotinsky, these ideas were those which gloried more in biological vitality than in ethical rationality, and, Kohn argues, were similar to the trends which embraced fascism.

By contrast, Chaim Weizmann, though a fervent Zionist, was at the same time a true realist and a liberal. Fearing the alienation of world opinion, and recognizing the moral implications of expelling the Arabs, Weizmann would not proclaim a Jewish state as the ultimate aim of the movement. These concerns went unheeded in the post-World War I climate of strident nationalism and fascism, and Weizmann quickly lost influence within the movement.

As the leadership of David Ben-Gurion, and the vision of Jabotinsky, through the Biltmore program, came to increasingly define the movement and its push toward statehood, something extremely vital, in Kohn’s view, was lost: the movement’s Jewish core. He judges the outcome harshly: Military victory created the new state; and, like Sparta or Prussia, on military virtue it remained based. The militarization of life and mind represented not only a break with humanist Zionism, but with the long history of Judaism. As in the biblical conflict over kingship with which Kohn began his article, The Zeitgeist had won out over the Jewish tradition.

As of 1958, there was no doubt, as far as Kohn was concerned, about which trends in Zionist thought and leadership had captured the spirit of the decade old state. In the second half of his article, Kohn seems to offer a requiem for the movement’s unheeded prophets.

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86 Kohn, "Zion and the Jewish National Idea," 32.
Not unlike the prophets of old, Ahad Ha-am, Kohn’s hero among Zionist thinkers, found himself increasingly opposed to the popular political nationalism which the people embraced. This was the case, beginning with his earliest essay “This is Not the Way,” and especially in his essays and correspondences concerning the Arab question. Kohn emphasizes that as early as 1891, it was clear to Ahad Ha-am that Palestine was not an empty land, and that immigration to Palestine could not take place in the form of an ingathering of biblical proportions. Kohn summarizes: “To confound Messianic hopes with political potentialities must lead of necessity to moral and ultimately physical disaster.” Though he was one of the most well-known Zionists, and perhaps the greatest Hebrew writer of his time, Ahad Ha-am’s later years were filled with despair over the moral state of the movement and its settlers. The great voice of spiritual Zionism died, Kohn informs his readers, “a lonely man, in a Zion which he did not recognize.”

Kohn points his readers to other men who upheld Ahad Ha-am’s insistence on quality rather than numbers, and on regard for the rights and human dignity of the Arab people. Hugo Bergmann, Martin Buber and Judah Magnes, all of whom Kohn worked with and knew intimately, are included in this group. Kohn also points to Moshe Smilansky, a frequent correspondent of Ahad Ha-am, and Reb Binyomin, who attempted in vain to call attention to the humanitarian crisis caused by the Arab refugee problem. Kohn cites and agrees with Reb Binyomin’s own admission that most of his warnings fell upon deaf ears. For the youth in the

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87 Kohn, Zion and the Jewish National Idea, 32.
88 Kohn, Zion and the Jewish National Idea, 33.
89 Kohn, Zion and the Jewish National Idea, 39.
90 Kohn, Zion and the Jewish National Idea, 41: In reality, the Arab question was much less central to most of Ahad Ha-am’s writings than Kohn would have.
91 Reb Binyomin was the pen name of Jehoshua Redler-Feldman. He was a prominent member of Ihud, and editor of its newsletter, Ner.
new state, Kohn laments, "the old hopes and dreams of the early Zionists have meant little."

Kohn concludes on a rather defeatist note: "It should never be forgotten that there were men in Israel who raised their warning voices for Zion."

Since the Jewish state, in Kohn’s view, had embraced force over compromise and ignored the humanistic challenge of prophetic Judaism, we might assume that Kohn would turn to Diaspora nationalism as a viable alternative. A recent study that attempts to locate Kohn among other thinkers who opposed statehood but maintained a vision of Jewish national particularity, has argued that, if Kohn’s legacy is connected to a dichotomy, it should be one that differentiates between counter-state and statist conceptions.

This, however, was not the case at least at this point in Kohn’s development. Kohn does express some admiration for Diaspora nationalists such as Simon Dubnow and Nathan Birnbaum, but as in his earlier essay he gives short shrift to these alternatives: Dubnow and Birnbaum, whatever the validity of their theories, testify to the variety and depth of Jewish life throughout all the ages and in its many homelands. Its unifying link has been a spiritual conception which, fundamentally ethical, has found expression in changing forms.

These "changing forms," in Kohn’s opinion, made it impossible to present any one ideal of Jewish life, and therefore, since as long as they live there will be a Jewish problem, no solution could address the manifold expressions of the Jewish experience. It is an oversimplification, Kohn asserts, to believe that there exists one solution to the Jewish problem. The Jewish problem is not the same in various ages, in various countries, nay, even in various individuals. The form of modern Jewish life in the context of East-European society

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92 Kohn, Zion and the Jewish National Idea, 43.
93 Pianko, Zionism and the Roads Not Taken, 176.
94 Kohn, Zion and the Jewish National Idea, 46.
with its theories of ethnic nationalism and national minorities was and will be different from Jewish life in the West, above all in the United States.\(^95\) Thus, Kohn concludes, "ultimately the Jewish problem is but part of the human problem\(^\). Enlightenment and Emancipation have to be revitalized and defended everywhere and at all times. This is the difficult task of modern life of which the Jews form a part. As a result of their history, they are, wherever they live, in an exposed position. For wherever Enlightenment and Emancipation are rejected or scorned, they will be endangered, morally or physically, more than others.\(^96\)

### A Failure to Defend?

In May of 1961, Rabbi Joachim Prinz, then president of the American Jewish Congress, read Hans Kohn\(^\) assessment of the reconsiderations\(^\) of Arnold Toynbee and sent an indignant letter to *the New York Times*.\(^97\) Acknowledging Toynbee\(^\) important retraction of his characterization of post-biblical Judaism as a "fossil," Prinz nevertheless complained that Toynbee\(^\) assessment of the modern Jewish condition was far worse. Not only did Toynbee maintain that the biblical concept of "the Chosen People," was the equivalent of the Nazi idea of "Aryan" racial superiority, but he also insisted, "In the Jewish Zionists I see disciples of the Nazis.\(^98\)

Himself a refugee from Nazi Germany, Prinz protested, "It is serious enough when a historian of Toynbee\(^\) reputation ignored the true essence of the Chosen People concept\(^\) But

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\(^95\) Kohn, *Zion and the Jewish National Idea*, 46.

\(^96\) Kohn, *Zion and the Jewish National Idea*, 46.


\(^98\) Prinz, "Letter to the Editor."
it is nothing less than horrifying when he in effect places the butchery of six million Jewish men, women and children on a moral level with the admittedly grave hardships of several hundred thousand Palestinian Arab refugees who are alive on the soil of their kinsmen. He concluded pointedly, in these two instances at least, it is difficult to discern the charm of Toynbee's personality and work which your reviewer, Hans Kohn, finds in A Study of History.

This case study brings Kohn's priorities at that time into relief. His article, A Hopeful Vision for Humanity, published two weeks prior to Prinz's response, praised Toynbee, as an historian with sweeping vision whose erudition enabled him to pursue the panoramic view that Leopold von Ranke understood as the end goal of the historian's pursuit. He acknowledged that such a macro-narrative was likely to be highly flawed, yet compared Toynbee's work favorably to other, clearly nationalistic historians such as Nicolai Danilevsky and, especially, Oswald Spengler. Unlike Spengler, who took a decidedly negative view of modern civilization and understood history as a primarily determined process, Toynbee believed that history is not a determined process but an open road. Toynbee shows no bias in favor of the civilization to which he belongs, but he does not believe in its doom.

Though Kohn had known Toynbee since his time in England in the early 1920s, and continued to correspond with him sporadically, it is unlikely that personal loyalties were behind Kohn's failure to criticize him with respect to Jewish issues. He acknowledged Toynbee more

99 Prinz, Letter to the Editor.

100 Hans Kohn, A Hopeful Vision for Humanity. New York Times, May 7, 1961, BR1. Kohn both admired Toynbee and struggled with the drawbacks of his birds-eye view of history. In a review of A Study of History from four years earlier, Kohn made the point that Toynbee is not primarily a historian. He is less and more than the average historian: less, because expert historians of nations or epochs may take exception to several of Toynbee's sweeping generalizations; more, because he faces up to the great problem of the 1950s, and has anticipated it--the need for viewing mankind and its history for the first time as a whole. See Hans Kohn, A New View of History in The Saturday Review, March 9, 1957, 18.

101 Kohn, A Hopeful Vision for Humanity.
mature view of Jewish history in the Diaspora, and after referring to the transformative dialogue of his friend Jacob B. Agus with Toynbee, Kohn asserted that, "the Jewish Diaspora was an immensely fertile period, from Philo and the Babylonian Talmud to Hassidism and the astonishing productivity of emancipated European Judaism. Toynbee writes now in memorable words of the vitality and significance of the Diaspora."

As we have seen, Kohn did not identify the historical concept of "the Chosen People" with racist inclinations, but with higher, ethical behavior. Yet what was in all likelihood most important to Kohn about Toynbee's view of history was his affirmation of the ethical autonomy of individuals as historical actors, and, insofar as Jews were concerned, his acknowledgement of their past and present ability to contribute to the societies in which they lived.

In Palestine and the United States, Hans Kohn's involvement with Jewish organizations was characterized by gradual alienation and bitter resignations. It is clear that by the mid-1930s, he became convinced that in the "Age of Nationalism," the actions of any one nation or people had universal implications. His abandonment of Zionism also signaled his rejection of any kind of redemption through particular, national means. While Kohn could have drawn on the theories of Simon Dubnow, or in an American context, Mordecai Kaplan in constructing alternative solutions to the Jewish problem that eschewed statism but sought to preserve Jewish particularity, he did not do so. Aside from his critique of the Zionist movement's spiritual condition, and his attempt to reintroduce Ahad Ha'am to an English speaking public, Kohn offered no positive solution to problems of Jewish life or Jewish continuity. It is unlikely that

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102 Kohn, "A Hopeful Vision for Humanity."

such matters, insofar as they related to the inner workings of Jewish communal life, concerned him. Though Kohn, as he expressed in his 1929 letter of resignation, understood his Jewishness as an intrinsic part of his being this did not translate to an overt concern with peoplehood in his later phases. It is likely that he would have agreed with the sentiments of Hannah Arendt who, responding to the accusation by Gershom Scholem that she lacked a love of the Jewish people (Ahavat Yisrael), asserted ʻI am not moved by any ūoveūof this sortē  I have never in my life ūovedūany people or collectiveē The only kind of love I know of and believe in is the love of personsē Secondly, this ūove of the Jewsūwould appear to me, since I am myself Jewish, as something rather suspect.ʻ104

Like Arendt, Kohn believed, as he clearly stated in the conclusion of his 1958 essay, that the Jewish problem was intrinsically bound to the problems of persecution that arise in any state that prizes force and violence. If Kohn understood himself as an advocate of Jewish causes, it was as a champion of the legacy of the Enlightenment which, in Palestine and the world as a whole, held the key to the safety and dignity of all people, including Jews and Arabs.

104 Arendt, The Jewish Writings, 466–467.
Conclusion

Hans Kohn lived and wrote in an age of ideological and political extremes. Accordingly, this dissertation has explored his thought in several different contexts. We have seen that Kohn’s ideas shifted significantly in the early 1930s in response to the crisis of fascism and its “gospel of violence.” Rather than simply exposing these bellicose ideologies, Kohn presented American audiences with a call to action rooted in his interpretation of their own traditions. He continued to do so during the World War II, arguing that an enlightened ethos was essential to the morale of the American people, and to the ethical standing of the United States. In the post-war period, Kohn believed that the United States needed to lead, less by action and more by example. It would need to join the other nations that also espoused principles of liberal democracy. This federation, to Kohn’s mind, ought to be based on spiritual unity, rather than military exigencies.

Despite Kohn’s idealization, and even love, of the United States, he did not believe that any nation or people was possessed of a “fate” or determined future. The history of Western Civilization, as he tried to show in his Idea of Nationalism, was defined by and played out within the matrix of tension between the poles of universal and particular needs and affinities of human beings. Drawing on Karl Jaspers, he argued that the balances of the stoics in ancient times, and that of the modern European Enlightenment represented “axial times” in human history.¹ As one who affirmed the autonomy of the individual and the “open road” of history, Kohn believed that the answer to the problems of the twentieth century, and the dawn of the nuclear age, was

¹ Kohn, The Age of Nationalism, 37. Here Kohn defines the “essence” of modern civilization as “the concept of a free man and of a free mind in an open society” He is also explicit that this essence was centered in the North Atlantic.
nothing less than a full restoration of the balance found in the Enlightenment in the context of the Age of Nationalism. As we have seen, during the 1930s and early 1940s, Kohn downplayed the threat of Soviet communism in relation to Nazism. Both believed in the oneness of their cause. Both sought unity and the expense of multiplicity. Yet Kohn believed that the Soviet Union, whose unity was based on a belief in the universal rights of mankind, could potentially transcend its oppressive nature. Further, even after the war, Kohn rarely mentions the USSR’s suppression of cultural expression. Rather, he was far more concerned with the oneness pursued by the Nazis who through their radical, racial particularism were driven to eliminate all others, regardless of individual choice or intention.

We must ask, drawing upon our treatment of his thought, how did Hans Kohn see himself? Further, what convictions about history and the time in which he lived informed his points of view and drove his activism?

As we have seen, an age or era, in Hans Kohn’s view, is defined by the circumference of sympathy within which human beings understand and interact with the world around them. In the twentieth century, Kohn forcefully argued, nationality had become the dominant form of self-understanding throughout the globe.

Kohn’s conviction that nationalism was the driving force of his time was, ultimately, the most consistent element of his intellectual journey. In his early essay, Nationalismus, Kohn asserted that since the French Revolution the dominant faith of the era had become national identity. This had combined with the political sphere and yielded a dangerous state nationalism. The horrific result of this unholy union, he believed, had been the Great War. Yet, in 1921 Kohn foresaw a new era in the wake of the war’s destruction. Just as the Thirty Years
War had given rise to the Age of Enlightenment, the human cost of World War I would steer mankind to a new Enlightenment.

World events would, of course, subvert Kohn’s optimism concerning the immediate future. The Great War led not to a new Enlightenment, but in many cases to even more violent and bellicose ideologies and radical nationalisms. Further, the Zionist movement, which he hoped would form the center of a new, redemptive humanism, did not follow the “higher” path that Kohn had envisioned.

Though Kohn gives the impression in his memoir that his turn to American democracy came directly out of his rejection of Zionism, in reality it represented a somewhat more protracted break. As we have seen, Kohn was initially repelled by the rather unintellectual tenor of American culture, and was highly critical of what he saw as the vapidity of the American Jewish community and its rabbinic leadership. During a brief period, from 1929 to 1933, it is possible to argue that, though no longer a Zionist, Kohn remained a Jewish nationalist, albeit with a diasporic focus. This came to the fore in his harsh criticisms of Jewish emancipation and assimilation in nineteenth-century Europe, and his lack of faith in the vitality of the largely acculturated American Jewish community that he first encountered.

Yet this transitional stage was a very brief one. It seems that it was Kohn’s physical move to the United States, and his first secure academic position at Smith College that reoriented his critical view of the United States. Though he did not actually become an American citizen until 1941, Kohn quickly identified with the foundations and ideals of American democracy and expressed intense faith in its future promise. As one who affirmed the centrality of American democracy to the future prospects of the Enlightenment legacy, Kohn presented his American audiences with stark dichotomies, especially in the 1930s and in his wartime writings. These
reflected the very real crisis that he and other liberals came to realize was posed by the astonishing success of fascism and especially Nazism, a crisis he held was dangerously underestimated by his peers. The heart of the crisis was an ideology that consolidated power under a one-party state. His writings were a polemic designed to shock his American audiences out of their isolationist apathy and, later, to support the cause of the United States in World War II.

Kohn’s position papers of the 1930s and early 1940s also differed in several other ways from his earlier work. They were far more direct, devoid of the vagaries of Central European thought. In both spirit and style, Kohn began to write as an American. Notably, it was also during this time that he reached a far greater public than ever before. His books were published by Harvard University Press, and he quickly became acquainted with, and respected by, some of the leading American intellectuals of the time.

Kohn’s *Idea of Nationalism* also marked a new stage. Thoroughly researched and heavily footnoted, it demonstrated the remarkable range of Kohn’s linguistic, analytical and literary abilities. The *Idea of Nationalism* was also an intellectual exercise for Kohn. In tracing the genealogy of the national idea, he engaged the expanse of Western thought up until the dawn of the French Revolution. As we have seen, Kohn traces and charts various figures, movements and thinkers within the matrix of tension between the universal and particular that defined Western civilization and one might even say human history as a whole. Composed during the highs and lows of the Allied efforts in the Second World War, Kohn’s *Idea of Nationalism* is not an overtly political book, but Nazi Germany and Kohn’s deep concerns over the future of liberal democracy are often lurking in the background. Our close reading of Kohn’s magnum opus shows that he, in fact, displayed a great deal of tolerance for and understanding of a variety of
divergent views. His tolerance was rooted in his belief that the various tensions of Western civilization placed checks on one another within the broader context, or matrix, in which its development took place. Fascism and Nazism, unlike any other movements in history, shattered this matrix of tension. Their focus on the all-encompassing particularity of race and destiny terrified Kohn, moved him to exhaustive action, and ultimately consumed members of his family.

By the end of the war, Kohn was even more convinced that the fate of humankind depended on the ideal balance of particular identity and universal dignity, with its regard for human rights that characterized the spirit of the Enlightenment and its arch prophets among them Jefferson, Rousseau and Kant.

Kant, as Kohn would later do, understood that political divisions and localized allegiances were a part of human nature. Yet to preserve the ultimate rights of all human beings, Kant proposed a federation of states whose purpose was to avoid war. In his essay, Perpetual Peace, Kant rejected war as both an instrument of international relations and as a possibility within a moral world. Reason, Kant argued from the throne of the highest morally legislative power demanded an absolute condemnation of war. Further, peace, which was a moral duty, would require a kind of pacific league. This Kantian federalism would ultimately depend on a series of republics that would enter into a continually growing and developing state of nations.

It is significant that Kohn did not compose any extensive studies of the Soviet Union during this period. Though the totalitarianism of the Soviet Union was anathema to him, he was...

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3 Kant, Toward Perpetual Peace, 328.
careful to distinguish, as he did during the war years, between the Soviet regime and the Nazi regime. Convinced that, despite its internal horrors, the Soviet Union was unlikely to attack the United States in a new age of thermonuclear war, Kohn advocated a rather dovish policy of containment. As we have seen, his political activism and scholarly work did not coincide to the same extent in the post-war years. Yet he remained sensitive to overriding issues as indicated by his interest in problems of supra-national federation. This was exemplified, as we have seen, by his advocacy of the North Atlantic Community. Kohn’s focus on national prophets from a variety of traditions is also significant. Aware that NATO needed to achieve a firm common ground amidst diverse histories and perspectives, Kohn sought to demonstrate the role of prophets or, more appropriately for our analysis, public intellectuals in articulating critical ideas. While thinkers such as Mill and Dostoevsky represented the extreme poles of Kohn’s prophetic-intellectual spectrum, he made room for a variety of approaches. Not all were ideal, in his view, but many of them still led their people, however circuitously, to the preeminence of human dignity – for him the ultimate priority.

While East and West represents the most common bifurcation in Kohn’s thought, it is not the only one. Contrasts such as Mission and Messianism and Force or Reason complemented and sometimes corresponded to the East-West dichotomy that increasingly corresponded, in Kohn’s mature thought, to concrete political realities.

The tension between the universal and particular, I have argued, is a far more revealing way to examine Kohn, but unlike his more concrete distinctions, these poles were, for Kohn, normative in nature. Kohn was indeed a universalist in contrast to the many radically and violently particularistic movements and states about which he wrote. However, analyzing Kohn’s thought through this particular contrast yields a more nuanced understanding of his
general vision of human civilization and the development of nationalism. The very nature of nationalism precludes any absolute universal. While Kohn prized, above all else, universal human dignity, he was, in his various studies, attentive to the fact that people, even before the age of nationalism, felt tied to particular communities and narratives of the past. Thus, having acknowledged the innate nature of particular identity, Kohn sought to affirm a realistic and ideal balance of these two inherent, and necessary, attributes of human existence. Against intolerance, war and death, and in the spirit of the Kantian, cosmopolitan ideal - his own "Archimedean point" - Kohn forcefully advocated a new North Atlantic Enlightenment that, he hoped, would send forth its light in the "Age of Nationalism."
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