

Baltimore's Jewish institutions, and its diverse ethnic community bringing them to life in a way that is unique to Baltimore. *On Middle Ground* is a foundational work that uses Baltimore as a historical case study to analyze some of the influential culminations of American Jewish life.

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**Adi Gordon, *Toward Nationalism's End: An Intellectual Biography of Hans Kohn* (Waltham, MA: Brandeis University Press, 2017), 328 pp.**

Toward the end of *Toward Nationalism's End*, Adi Gordon's new intellectual biography of the pioneering scholar of nationalism, Hans Kohn (1891–1971), Gordon muses about how different Kohn's legacy can look in the light of different historical circumstances. Had this book been released in the early- to mid-1990s, Kohn might have been seen as a prophet of the triumph of the liberal-democratic West. He would also have been a seer of the inevitability of the accommodation of Zionism and the State of Israel to Palestinian human rights and national claims, an early champion of European economic and political unity, and a forerunner of the then-contemporary boom in "nationalism studies," taking for granted the historically constructed nature of all national identities. Fast forward one generation, however, and the picture looks quite different. Liberal democracies have again lost confidence, threatened from within and without by renewed attempts to redefine the rights of citizenship as privileges of ethno-national majorities. Israeli-Palestinian peace talks have repeatedly broken down, with maximalists

feeling emboldened. Europe is in danger of fragmenting in the wake of Brexit, as right-wing populist campaigns capitalize on the migrant crisis and on the failures of free-trade regimes to deliver shared prosperity. And scholars of nationalism are skeptical of the power and even the validity of Kohn's World War II-era category of "civic nationalism," intended to name a rational, Enlightenment-oriented tendency to root national identity in a galvanizing political idea of liberty and equality, rather than in blood and soil.

This brief, compelling thought experiment is very much in the spirit of the biography as a whole, throughout which Gordon deftly explicates Kohn's changing political views against the background of his tumultuous times. Gordon has written a true intellectual biography: This is the story of Kohn's ideas, far more than of his personal life. Gordon traces those ideas closely and carefully throughout Kohn's many publications, showing how some are dropped while others are newly embraced; some are transformed into their opposites, while others remain a steady through-line in Kohn's long career. Yet the real value of Gordon's work lies not just in its contribution to Kohn scholarship but in its ability to maintain focus on the fluid interaction of ideas, personality, and circumstances. As such, it should be of interest to any intellectual historians, and not only to those with special interests in interwar Habsburg thought, Zionism, or U.S. Cold War ideology.

Of course, *Toward Nationalism's End* is first and foremost a contribution to Kohn scholarship, and in that regard it tells a clear and powerful story. Gordon divides Kohn's life and work into three major parts: youth in Prague, interrupted by service in the Great War and imprisonment in Siberia; interwar adulthood, which Kohn largely spent in Palestine in conflicted service to the Zionist movement; and later adulthood, when Kohn moved to the United States and developed his reputation as a foremost scholar of nationalism. Each of these is interesting in its own way, as Gordon places Kohn into conversation with friends, colleagues, and critics of various kinds.

In Part One, young Kohn becomes a Zionist, and Gordon vividly evokes the late-imperial Habsburg context (a pleasant surprise given the intellectual focus: In keeping with its biographical format, *Toward Nationalism's End* offers no shortage of photographic documentation of

its protagonist, including some dapper shots of young Kohn in sailor getup and Central European finery). The constellation of influences that produced the unique spiritual Zionist orientation of the Prague Bar Kochba Society is given clear expression here, from its rejection of “Westernness” to its ambivalence about land to its valorization of the ethical and communal potential of national unity; all are accounted for as emerging from the Austrian, Czech-German-Jewish context in a logical manner that makes this now most distant of perspectives seem reasonable and powerful.

In Part Two, Kohn puts to the test his thesis that “Messianism and anarchist socialism will turn Palestine into Zion” (82) and finds that the Zionist movement (rather than his thesis) fails the test. The spiritual Zionism of the prewar period now had to contend with the British Mandate and the Balfour Declaration, as well as with a professionally and politically savvy Zionist leadership cadre invigorated by the new circumstances. This meant placing renewed emphasis on opposition to the nation-state, which Kohn saw as a principle on the wane. *Cuius regio, eius nato* (whose realm, his nationality) was a mere doomed echo of its post-Westphalian forebear, *cuius regio, eius religio* (whose realm, his religion), and Zionism had an opportunity to be the first national movement to build its common life on a different principle entirely. For Kohn, this was not only a good idea but also expressed the real essence of Judaism itself, of what he called “the political idea of Judaism” (120).

Of course, this dream was not to come true, and Kohn came to see his participation in the Zionist movement as a decades-long mistake. Nationalism could never be spiritual, there was no way around the state, and ethno-nationalisms in particular could only lead to barbarity and crime. Part Three tells the story, beginning in the early 1930s with Kohn’s move to the United States and continuing over the next four decades, of Kohn’s transition from leftist Zionist rebel to liberal American Cold Warrior. Only America, Kohn now believed, could represent civic nationalism against the dangers of fascist and communist totalitarianism. Kohn regarded fascism as a horribly exaggerated nationalism gone wrong, evidence of the folly of basing citizenship on nationality. He had a more ambivalent relationship to the Soviet regime, whose nationality policy he initially supported as cutting edge; eventually, however, he

came to see Russian imperialism as continuous from the czarist era to the communist one. From his time among bi-nationalist socialist Zionists like Martin Buber, Hugo Bergmann, and Robert Weltsch, Kohn now rubbed shoulders with men like George Kennan, Walter Lippmann, and Henry Kissinger. Gordon also highlights Kohn's ambivalent relationship to the American Jewish community. On the one hand, Kohn considered the relative social mobility and cultural acceptance of American Jews to be a clear sign of the superiority of the U.S. model of civic nationalism. On the other hand, he was frustrated by the seeming disinterest among American Jews in actually stepping up to assume leadership of the world Jewish community, as well as by what he dismissively referred to as their "Zionist fellow-travelling" (an epithet he applied specifically to the leadership of the American Jewish Committee). Like many *Yekkes*, he never truly felt comfortable with American social norms and mores.

What Gordon conveys throughout this epic narrative is the consistent importance of Kohn's concerns and his willingness to learn from anyone who would think with him at the level of global order (including conservative German geopolitical thinkers and Austrian economists). "What is fascism? What does it want? What brought it about? What explains its survival, global spread, and success? How can it be stopped and ultimately eradicated" (180)? Kohn answered his questions differently as his circumstances changed, but anyone interested in them will benefit from Gordon's incisive, sympathetic, yet critical presentation of his trajectory. Especially since, as Gordon trenchantly concludes, "His Sisyphean struggle with nationalism is now ours" (256).

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