constraints on choice and because the information required to make the choice rational is not available.

This is not to say that religious choices are irrational, as Stark alleges the other approaches must assume. Here, as in so many other elements of his approach, Stark enhances the plausibility of his approach by falsifying the alternatives. In fact, the other explanations for religious behavior simply have a broader notion of what counts as sensible grounds for belief (such as having been taught certain things by parents and others one trusts and having found them a sufficient guide to a pleasant life). Indeed, a very general criticism of Stark’s work is that he does not deal fairly with scholars who disagree with him.

For example, he repeatedly summarizes the secularization thesis (which supposes that various features of modernization in certain settings combine to reduce the plausibility of religious ideas and practices) with the same quotation from an undergraduate textbook written in 1966 by an anthropologist, Marx is cited to stand for the work of hundreds of us who have never been influenced in the least by the man. Scholars are routinely parodied or assigned views they have clearly disavowed. I am cited, for example, as believing that religion in Northern and Western Europe is “soon to disappear.” I certainly believe that mainstream and liberal denominations are in severe trouble, but I have also written extensively on the survival of sects, the appeal of the expressive spirituality of the New Age, and the continued vitality of religion where it is part of contested religio-ethnic identities. Bryan Wilson, like David Martin, if forced to choose one key cause of secularization, would probably cite our modern concern with engineered change and our purported mastery over our fate. He would not, as Stark claims, suggest that “it is science that has the most deadly implications for religion.”

Science is not even mentioned in Wilson’s two classics, Contemporary Transformations of Religion and Religion in Secular Society.

What is more, Stark is unable to admit he has learned from his critics. For example, his early versions of the supply-side propositions permitted no serious qualifications to the centrality of individual choice. After enough of us had said it often enough, he came to accept that many people’s ability to economize in religious behavior is indeed heavily constrained. But this concession was slipped into yet another list of propositions with no recognition that its initial absence had any implications for the virtue of the general theory.

These ad hominem criticisms of Stark would be out of place were it not for that fact that his sectarian insistence on dividing the world of serious students of religion into his people and the rest severely limits the value of his scholarship. These essays give us a very clear notion of what Stark thinks, some of which is useful, but we can learn very little from the vast range of sources he cites because we can have little faith in his accounts of the work of others.

A final thought. Stark sees himself as disproving the claim that most modern societies are patently less religious than they once were. Yet if we ask ourselves what sort of society it would be in which people switched readily between religions as they sought to maximize their utility, the answer would have to be a society in which religion did not much matter.

What’s Best for the Jews?


Reviewed by David Novak

“Why should the Jewish state exist at all?” Until quite recently, there was a ready answer to the basic question. Yoram Hazony raises at the beginning of this provocative book: the Jewish state needs to exist in order to provide a homeland for homeless Jews in the world. Indeed, from its very beginnings in late-nineteenth-century Europe, the Zionist movement made its main appeal to Jews and others based on the perpetual vulnerability of the Jewish people. This appeal is epitomized in a famous speech delivered at Madison Square Garden in New York City in 1945 by the late Rabbi Abba Hillel Silver.

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leader of the American branch of the world-wide Zionist movement. Before a huge audience that had just recently learned of the Nazi Holocaust, Rabbi Silver eloquently proclaimed that this unprecedented tragedy could not have happened were it not for the homelessness of the Jewish people. From that time on, Jewish opposition to Zionism was confined to a fringe of religious fanatics on the right and assimilationists on the left. Survival seemed to be reason enough for the existence of a Jewish state. Only anti-Semites could argue against it.

Much of that has now changed. In many places there are still Jews who are in danger, yet one cannot locate any longer a major Jewish community that is in danger of annihilation or cultural extinction. Indeed, despite the lingering Palestinian problem in the land of Israel, no one thinks that the State of Israel is in the type of danger that existed when Egypt and Syria were armed to the teeth by the former Soviet Union. Added to that, one must consider how well Jews are doing in North and South America and Western Europe. There is even a new diaspora—a significant number of Jews who have emigrated from Israel (the Israelis call them yordim, roughly, "deserters"). Since fewer Jews now have to live in Israel, Jews today have to decide why they want to live in Israel (or why they want other Jews to live in Israel for them).

With the old survivalist reasons no longer readily at hand, Hazony is certainly correct in characterizing his fellow Israeli Jews as "an exhausted people, confused and without direction." In Israeli parlance, there are two questions: Is the State of Israel to be a state of the Jews (medinat yehudim) or only a "state of its citizens" (medinat israelim) whoever they happen to be? But if the State of Israel is to be a state of the Jews, can it finally become a "Jewish state" (medinah yehudit), that is, a state whose character is determined by Judaism and not just a state most of whose citizens happen to be Jews?

Hazony, who directs the Shalem Center, a new think tank in Jerusalem, writes so clearly and powerfully that one might have expected him a solution, or at least the outline of one, to Israel's existential dilemma. Ultimately, however, The Jewish State disappoints. Hazony devotes most of his book not to solutions but to an almost paranoid polemic against the culturally prominent Israeli intellectuals whom he sees as traitors to the idea of a Jewish state for Jews.

Hazony reductively traces virtually all that is wrong with Israeli intellectu-
al life to its first principles in "German-Jewish anti-Zionist philosophy." This dangerous philosophy, according to the author, was imported to Jewish Palestine (that is, Israel before 1948) by the philosopher Martin Buber (who immigrated in 1938) and his still influential disciples, especially at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, a.k.a. "Israel's Harvard."

Those familiar with Israeli history and culture will recognize how skillfully Hazony exploits a persistent Israeli prejudice against Jews of German-speaking origin, who are still called, popularly, "yekkes," from the German Jacke, meaning a short jacket preferred by westernized German Jews in Europe to the longer, more recognizably Jewish, caftans of the East European Jews. These German Jews have been held in suspicion because the vast majority of them, it is said, really did not want to come to Israel to build a Jewish state, but only did so because they had to flee Nazi persecution after 1938. Many Israelis assume that the majority of Austrian and German Jews in pre-Hitler times wanted to assimilate, and were opposed to Zionism because it offered (for them anyway) a dangerously seductive alternative to assimilation. This assimilationist mentality is thought to explain the "blindness" of German Jews that led so many of them to remain in Europe until it was too late to escape their annihilation.

Hazony plays off this suspicion of German-Jewish assimilationism to suggest that these Jews are intent on making Israel into an ordinary Western state, based on a social contract between autonomous and anonymous individuals. He reduces every major German-speaking thinker who ever addressed the "Jewish question" to this cultural stereotype, which is false in many particulars. For instance, Gershom Scholem, Hugo Bergmann, and Ernst Simon, three of Hazony's targets, came to Israel long before 1938—and for the most idealistic reasons. Hazony lumps together German-Jewish thinkers as philosophically disparate as Hermann Cohen, Franz Rosenzweig (both of whom died long before the establishment of the State of Israel), and Hannah Arendt (who never lived or wanted to live in Israel), simply because they are both German and Jewish.

One would think, given their alienation from Zionism, that these Jews would be rather marginal in Israel. Yet, Hazony argues, these Jews, heirs to the more passive "cultural" Zionism of the Russian Jewish thinker Ahad Ha'Am, became far more
prominent than their numbers would suggest. That is because, as Hazony
with rare objectivity admits, these
highly educated and philosophically astute thinkers offered a vision of the
State of Israel that appealed to a sig-
nificant number of intelligent young
Israelis who had grown tired of the
seemingly mindless romanticism of
their pioneering Zionist parents. The
erlier generation of Zionists, in the
eyes of many of their most sensitive
and intelligent offspring, seemed to
provide only ethnic myths when polit-
cal ideas were clearly called for. Mar-
tin Buber and his followers provided
the ideas for which the emerging
Israeli elite hungered. Hazony rec-
nizes the shortcomings of romantic
Zionism, but he finds that the ideas
provided by these German Jews are
antithetical to the idea of a truly Jew-
ish state.

HAZONY SEES THIS WHOLE GERMAN-JEW-
ISH outlook—which he implies bor-
ders on cultural, even if not immedi-
ately political, treason—to have led
directly to what is known in Israel
today as “post-Zionism.” Some Israeli
intellectuals argue that Israel, in
order to become a truly “normal”
society (ironically, the goal of the
early Zionists themselves), should
minimize its connection to the world-
wide Jewish people and to the Jewish
tradition—which is, of course, insepa-
rabale from Jewish religion.

In its more radical manifestations,
post-Zionism advocates a total break
with the Jewish people and with
Judaism. Thus the Israeli author
David Grossman advocates (in
Hazony’s words) “a complete with-
drawal from entire regions in our
soul . . . such as being . . . a “chosen
people.”” The most powerful and
influential of these post-Zionists in
Israel today is, in Hazony’s view,
Aharon Barak (not to be confused
with Prime Minister Ehud Barak),
the Chief Justice of Israel’s Supreme
Court. Barak regards the Jewish tra-
dition, even the Jewish legal tradition
(the most developed part of the Jew-
ish tradition), as being little more
than a cultural relic, one that is useful
only when it affirms “the views of the
enlightened community in Israel . . .
whose values are universalistic.”
Here post-Zionism provides no
answer whatsoever as to why there
should be a Jewish state. Were this
view to be followed, Israel would
sever its connection to world Jewry,
whose spiritual and material support
more than anything else—even
more than American financial sup-
port—has enabled the State of Israel
to survive this long.

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The epitome of this radical break with the Jewish people, which Hazony views with legitimate alarm, is the suggestion by some post-Zionists that Israel’s “law of return” be repealed. This law, the first law ever passed by the Israeli parliament, guarantees citizenship in the State of Israel to any Jew from anywhere. More than anything, it has been the basis of the amazing loyalty of world Jewry to the State of Israel. It proclaims to every Jew needing refuge from anti-Semitic persecution that Israel will take him in—unconditionally. To repeal this law would break what might well be the most authoritative covenant among Jews in the world today. I, along with many other Jews, share Hazony’s outrage that such treachery is even being suggested by some Israelis.

Hazony is right to expose the danger of this type of Jewish nihilism. But his historical analysis of its origins is simplistic and erroneous, and he is either without the will or the ability to propose something more philosophically adequate. But what are the alternatives available to Israelis and Jews in dealing with the question of the raison d’être of the State of Israel?

As Hazony explains, there are three basic options: liberal democracy, nationalism, and theocracy. If any of these options were to be fully adopted, it would have to incorporate major features of the others. Thus, liberal democracy would have to take the historical background of Jewish nationalhood into consideration, and it would have to deal with the fact that Jewish nationalhood and Jewish religion are inextricably bound (the “theological-political” reality of which Spinoza spoke). This, as we have seen, is what Hazony accuses the liberals of not doing. The advocates of theocracy, on the other hand, have shown that they take Jewish nationalhood quite seriously (having abandoned the anti-Zionism held by many Orthodox Jews before 1948), but when it comes to liberal democracy, especially its emphasis on individual rights, the theocrats have proven to be as anti-democratic as the Muslim clerics who now rule Iran. More than anything, this explains the hostility to religion of most secular Israelis. Hazony himself is neither a liberal democrat nor a theocrat. He seems to be a nationalist, often pointing to David Ben-Gurion as his hero. The same question faces him: How can he include theocratic and democratic elements in the Jewish nationalism he advocates?

No Jewish political theory today can ignore the appeal of democracy both to the world and to the Jewish people. Jews’ only positive political experience in modernity has been with democracy. Even theocrats and nationalists are forced to make their arguments using democratic rhetoric (however cynically). Yet Hazony is quite vague about the role of democracy in his nationalist project, speaking only of “a noble, uniquely Jewish character and civilization” that makes a contribution to “mankind.” I assume by “noble” he means something that would be morally impressive to the world at large. It is hard to see how that civilization could avoid a strong emphasis on personal rights without being taken for one of the many repulsive nationalisms that provoked Israel’s creation.

Whereas Hazony’s nationalism is vague about democracy, it is downright odious when it comes to religion. Here the original fault lies not with Hazony himself but, rather, with Theodor Herzl and David Ben-Gurion, Hazony’s historical heroes. Herzl realized that Jewish nationalism could not dispense with religion. As Hazony puts it, “He assumed religion would have a formal role to play in the Jewish state,” and alongside the military, religious authorities...
would have “important and legitimate functions in the state, so long as they do not usurp the political decision-making process.” Indeed, Herzl saw religion in his imagined Jewish state (he died in 1904) as functioning much as religion functioned in Austria and Germany. But in these pre-World War I societies religion was not a yes man, not a transcendent and independent source of moral authority. Recall the automatic “Gott mit uns” (“God with us”) religious endorsement of the regime, whatever its moral worth. As the Israeli philosopher Yeshayahu Leibowitz (another Hazony target) pointed out quite dramatically to Ben-Gurion’s face, this was like the religion of the “court prophets” of Judah and Israel, religious leaders whom the true prophets Amos and Jeremiah found to be little more than glorified prostitutes speaking in the name of God.

In their own way, Buber, Bergmann, Simon, Judah Magnes, and the other German-Jewish thinkers whom Hazony so vilifies and distorts in this book had a religious vision of Jewish polity, however politically ineffective it may have been in their time. Indeed, that vision might very well have been conditioned by their experience with the unholy alliance of religion and nationalism in imperial Germany, not just Hitler’s Germany.

These German Jews knew the dangers of religious nationalism far better than Polish Jews like Ben-Gurion. Their vision of a transcendent religious criterion whereby the state can be both inspired and judged is a good deal more attractive than that of the current religious establishment in Israel. That religious/rabbinical establishment, in return for official status and financial support (which Ben-Gurion offered them from the very beginning in return for their votes and their compliance), has been more than willing to become the religious advocate of the most bellicose nationalism in Israel today. By its self-serving narrowness, it has proven to be the very opposite of the morally inspiring vision of the ancient biblical prophets. Even Hazony has to admit that these rabbis “turned their backs on idea-making.” Instead, they simply enhanced their own power over official rituals, and many of them became convinced that conquest of the whole land of Israel is a religious imperative more important than actually creating a morally attractive religious society for all Jews.

There is no question that Israelis, indeed all concerned Jews, have to continue to work out a Jewish public philosophy that truly justifies a Jewish state in the land of Israel. Hazony could have made a partial contribution to that necessary enterprise, but instead he wastes his time and ours in a sustained diatribe against a largely phantom enemy, and in the end has virtually nothing better to offer. As an offense to truth, this book can only further deter the just solution of the question of the Jewish state, a solution desperately needed by both the Jews and the world in which they are such important participants.

Beware of Counterfeit

NATURAL AND DIVINE LAW: RECLAIMING THE TRADITION FOR CHRISTIAN ETHICS. By JEAN PORTER. Eerdmans. 359 pp. $28.

Reviewed by Joseph W. Koterski

Like the special threads the U.S. Mint implants by which genuine dollar bills are distinguished from counterfeit, there is a mark that distinguishes a genuine theory of natural law from false ones: the insistence that there are some moral truths rooted in human nature that we all really do know and that we simply cannot fail to know. Out of self-interest, or perhaps from loss of nerve, we may choose to deny these truths, but interiorly we still know them and we will eventually have to deal with the pangs of conscience that their violation generates.