

EXPLORING IDEOLOGY

Zionism: The Real Enemy of the Jews, by Alan Hart. Atlanta: Clarity Press, 2009. Three volumes. Vol 1: The False Messiah, 336 pages; Vol 2: David Becomes Goliath, 303 pages; Vol 3: Conflict without End, 391. \$48.63 paper.

Reviewed by Oren Ben-Dor

These three wide-ranging, highly readable, and extremely well-informed volumes are a real gem that should be read by every politically- and historically-minded seeker of truth, justice, and enduring peace in historical Palestine. Alan Hart, a former ITN and BBC Panorama correspondent and a biographer of Yasir Arafat, gives us a seminal work whose great sophistication is matched by its moral courage and conviction. The scale and ambition of the work is all-embracing, unlike many books on Palestine which focus on one aspect of the conflict at the expense of the panoramic insights and grasping of larger trends. Hart's own personal encounters with key players in the conflict make for highly engaging reading that gives a sense of firsthand involvement with history as it happened. He also shows us the unknown and intimate sides of the politicians—the main actors in Hart's books—while providing the reader many insightful anecdotes. Personal accounts are very well-informed by contemporary research and complimented by scholarly narration of early Zionist involvement.

Broadly, Hart sets out to achieve three interlinked objectives. First, he attempts to give a multi-perspective *historical* and *political* account of political

Oren Ben-Dor is a professor of law and philosophy in the School of Law at the University of Southampton in the United Kingdom. He is the author of *Constitutional Limits and the Public Sphere: A Critical Study of Bentham's Constitutionalism* and *Thinking About Law: In Silence with Heidegger*, and editor of *Law and Art: Justice, Ethics and Aesthetics*.

Zionism and its transformation into a militarist state that maintains its unity by constantly provoking violence against itself despite many opportunities for peace and compromise with its neighbors. He shows that what began as a movement to solve Europe's "Jewish problem"—through the establishment of a Jewish national home in Palestine—became a complex mission to gain great power-recognition of Jewish statehood. He exposes the exploitation of the Holocaust which has ensured both Israel's survival and the continuous rationalization of its militarist righteousness and expansionist behavior.

Second, Hart maintains an unambiguous *moral* criticism of political Zionism by exposing the oppressive core of the settler-colonial project that continues to take place in Palestine. Hart shows how the partition of Palestine, the seeds of which were sown into the thinking and words behind the Balfour Declaration, played into the hands of political Zionists for the last century. Perhaps Hart could more greatly emphasize the fact that international resolutions only address Israeli *actions* and not Israel's *nature*, although the two are linked. The only way of complying with all these resolutions (i.e., ending the occupation and allowing for the return of the refugees) would require the replacement of the partition logic, and the resultant Jewish state, with an egalitarian, non-sectarian polity.

Third, and crucially, as the title conveys, Hart hammers home the message that there is no connection between Jewish *being* and *thinking* on the one hand and political Zionism on the other. Additionally, he contends that political Zionism is, arguably, the worst enemy of the Jews. Hart investigates Jewish opposition to political Zionism, arguing that anti-Zionist thought does not threaten Jewish thought. He argues, if political Zionism entails the exploitation of the Holocaust and sheer tribal pride in Israel's military 'successes' it should not enjoy Jewish support. Hart accounts for how Jewish nationalism was opposed by both orthodox and modern Jews in Europe, Britain, and the United States for reasons ranging from pragmatic petitions to deep historical and philosophical convictions.

The tragedy is that through their political maneuvers and monopoly over Holocaust memory, political Zionists have managed to disempower opposition to political Zionism from within Judaism. Hart only condones Zionism that is spiritual in nature—one that espouses a focal point from which Jews around the world may adopt values and practices (Ahad Ha'am)—or simply advocates living in Palestine in full equality with indigenous Palestinians (Arendt, Magnes, Buber).

Those who historically advocated for these strands of Zionism prophetically saw the kind of state Israel would become, alongside the rise of Palestinian nationalism. Volumes two and three provide detailed political commentary on how Israel's internal politics have become increasingly hawkish and suppressive of any moderate voices calling for peace and reconciliation, essentially arguing that, indeed, David has become a Goliath. Hart's masterful account points to the uncanny unity of 'no choice'—the anxious righteousness that caused this oblivious drop in compassion effectively unites the seemingly more moderate Zionists with revisionist, right-wing Zionists.

The first volume accounts for the tactics to obtain political support for a Jewish state by Russian politicians, as well as allies in complicity with the imperial sentiment which led to the gaining of the Balfour Declaration. He shows how British and Zionist leaders deceive Hashemite Hussein through insincere promises of Arab independence and managing to keep President Wilson's opposition to Zionism at bay. The declaration of a totally illegal mandate on Palestine was followed by an increased Zionist influence on the British Mandate. This followed the outbreak of the Arab Revolt and the British White Papers of the 1930s which sought to limit Jewish immigration to Palestine. Following the Holocaust, Zionism tragically achieved a prominent place in world politics and within Jewish hearts despite its incompatibility with Jewish values.

In the second volume, Hart exposes, in detail, the horrors Zionism has inflicted on the indigenous Palestinians—from their massive expulsion (carried

out in order to enable the establishment of the Jewish state) to the daily horrors of military occupation suffered by Palestinians since 1967. In this volume, Hart follows the aftermath of the establishment of the Jewish state. He portrays how the Zionist project grew into a militarist state that subverts, manipulates, and marginalizes the moderate voices within it.

In the third volume, Hart continues to highlight the pathology of Israel: Its flagrant violation of UN resolutions and its near absolute control of U.S. policy by the pro-Zionist lobby in the United States, in addition to providing an overview of the Palestinian nationalist movement.

The main objective of the books is to encourage and strengthen opposition to Zionism by “good Jews.” For Hart, to be a good Jew means opposing political Zionism and doing away with the very ethos of the colonial and entrenched, separatist ideology of the Israeli state. He calls for seeing the Holocaust for its universal humanist message, and for overcoming the victim-based mentality of anti-Semitism that is paradoxically nourished by the very Zionism that attempted to respond to it. One of the book’s central claims is that the tragedy of political Zionism ultimately encourages anti-Semitism, and/or anti-Jewish violence (namely violent opposition to Jewish support for what is being done to Palestinians in the name of the Jews on a daily basis). Hart shows that not only is Israel *not* a haven for Jews, it has, in actuality, become the instigator of violence against Jews worldwide.

At some point, the books equivocates between a realist acceptance that Israel is here to stay—that it merely has to get its actions right—and another voice which unequivocally calls for the replacement of Israel with a more egalitarian polity. These volumes, filled with Israeli politics, attempt to highlight the moderate and liberal Zionist voices existing in the hawkish state.

I am sure that Hart is a committed anti-Zionist, but the manner in which the story is told helps mask—or perhaps, does not highlight—the key distinction between (1) recognizing Israel’s existence and believing that justice and

peace can be achieved by making it as good an egalitarian-Jewish state as it can be (as Chaim Gans called it in his recent book, *A Just Zionism*), and (2) demanding, with conviction, its replacement as the only possible way of redressing past injustices and ensuring future justice, egalitarianism, and enduring peace. The former is impossible, of course, because a polity, whose right to citizenship depends on whether or not an individual passes the test of being Jewish, can never be egalitarian.

But it is the central thesis of separating the Jewish and the Zionist question where the book hardly innovates and, to my mind, even lacks some rigor. This thesis succeeds only because the plausibility of this separation is never really debated and dwelled on. This is not so much a criticism of these great books but simply an attempt to turn their ambition into an invitation for further investigation of the relationship between Jewish being and thinking, and Zionism.

The title of the book begs an existential quandary, as well as an intellectual expectation that it never pursues—that the persistence of Jewish opposition to Judaism simply does not existentially mean that Zionism is the enemy of the Jews. My main issue with these volumes is that they assert a conclusive thesis which is never developed, for good reasons of political correctness. At no point does Hart clarify who or what, in particular, is the enemy of “Jewishness” or “Zionism.” Neither does he elucidate what qualifies those who object to Zionism in the name of Jewish thinking, to be labeled “good Jews.” Properly responding to the mighty challenge of its subtitle, the book would have to dwell on the existential problematics of being Jewish, and *from that perspective*, of founding a Jewish state. It would mean the contemplation of the very Jewish ethics that contradict Zionism, thus reflecting on Jewish separateness, that tribal sense of chosen-ness, and a victim-based mentality. There is a long path yet to be explored, which contemplates whether Zionism is NOT itself merely a symptom of a fleeting historical stage of a larger existential condition of the Jews. If the title of these volumes is to stand up to its

conclusiveness, the existential condition of 'being Jewish' must be explored. Perhaps this book is, paradoxically, a call for such further exploration. A proper inquiry would have to be existentially linked to the denial that characterizes all those 'moderate' Zionists who resort to a murderous 'no choice' mentality to justify the most brutal Israeli violence while simultaneously professing compassion and firm beliefs in fundamental rights and equality elsewhere in the world. Furthermore, how come so many ethical and enlightened people never found homes in Europe? How have they managed to come to the point of establishing a state whose righteousness holds nearly the entire world captive to a 'no choice' mentality of rationalizing the existence of an evidently apartheid state? By ruling out this deeper inquiry, Hart becomes, despite his noblest intentions, a player to the flute of those forces who would prevent the consideration of the possibility that an existential condition is preserved by Israeli violence—an existential condition that indeed opposes modern Zionism but which is still aggressive, non-territorial, and separatist all the same. Is there no sense of separateness that connects the 'spiritual mission' of Jews in the world, the ethical pariah-hood à la Arendt and the sense of separateness that has so ruthlessly, and arguably fleetingly, materialized in Palestine in the form of a Jewish state?

Furthermore, is not such an existential exploration needed in order to find connective tissue to highly traumatized collective forgetfulness and denial? Is not such connective tissue essential for any transformative experience that could overcome some essential separateness whose violence dictates the preservation of conflict and hatred? It is precisely the severance between Judaism and Zionism that Hart so brilliantly advocates that is music to Zionists' unconscious ears—and haven to the being and thinking that constitutes their denial. So politically correct for Jews and Palestinians alike, that it could become the very 'manager' preventing a much required existential rapture that connects to deeper waters—depths that are at the heart of explaining the righteousness that would

have to be encountered by any future egalitarian polity in Palestine. The militarist, racist, anti-Semitism that Hart wishes to avoid—indeed the one that he believes Zionists are tragically perpetuating—is essentially the same anti-Semitism that Zionists rely on precisely by being captive to a situation that must remain suppressed at all costs. But it is racist anti-Semitism which is itself a caricature, a promising service to the deeper existential powers that are in operation here.

These books do not keep *open* the question of whether Zionism is the enemy of the Jews and it would be infinitely better if the question was asked. The intellectual reflection on these issues is hasty and thus ought to be read, in my view, as a point of departure in order to ask existential questions which lurk unexplored from every chapter of the intricate politics that Hart follows so well. For all its informative qualities, Hart's book becomes a *magnum opus* of the simplistic and politically correct anti-Zionism that, *despite* being morally irrefutable, is existentially powerless for not perturbing Zionists about their deep existential fetters. This is what, evidently, orchestrates the fetters of world opinion of Jewishness (in general) and the Jewish state (in particular). Yes, Israel is an instantiation of settler colonialism, but colonialism and especially its rationalization, point to the existential matter at the heart of making the connection between Jewish being and thinking, and Zionism, question-worthy. The point is not whether Zionism is immoral or not, which of course it is not, but about the origin of righteousness that not only constitutes a tribal horizon of Israelis, their Jewish supporters, and those Jews who opposed Zionism—but also one which existentially operates to convince the 'enlightened' world to *rationalize* its *apartheid* core.