ANYONE WHO SETS out to study the history of the Jew concludes very soon that at all times the factors of both nationalism and religion were involved in the makeup of the Jewish community. Whether the unity of descent or the unity of faith was more dominant at any period is frequently a matter of judgment and controversy. But that both factors were involved in the structure of the Jewish mentality, the historian can hardly doubt. The point that students of the subject, however, are most prone to overlook is not the potency of either one of these factors but the paradoxical character of both of them, in human nature generally, and particularly in the historic consciousness of the Jew.

Manifestly, religion and nationalism cannot ever be separated completely. Those who have to fight for their religious beliefs, or to suffer for them, come to think of themselves as a people. Adolf Harnack points out that the Christians in the Roman Empire of the third century called themselves a “third race,” tertium genus.¹ Many of the sectarian movements in the Christian world reflected ethnic rivalries. Pure nationalism, without any tincture of religious faith, is a characteristically modern phenomenon. Our secular, democratic society is the result of developments in Western Europe, where people recoiled in disgust from the horrors of a previous all too tight union between “organized” religion and government. It is the Church and State as organizations that the modern West seeks to keep apart. But the Church is only a temporal, inadequate instrument of religion, and the State as a political institution reflects only partially
the complex dynamism of a living people. The two vital ideals subsisting behind their respective organizational facades cannot but be mutually related. For the human mind is one, and the goal of both ideals is the good life. Both ideals concern themselves with the character and destiny of a certain community; both appeal to the desire of individuals to merge their personal identity with that of a large entity, which stands above the vicissitudes of time; both are products of an inner tension and polarity.

To study the forces operative in Jewish history, we need to take account of the tensions within both of these ideals. As we shall see, both ideals are in themselves bi-polar. In addition, both nationalism and religion serve as organizing instruments, confirming society's structure which is vertical, rather than horizontal. The ideas and ideals of an elite or a dominant group become the cement of a pyramid, with the people at the base repeating the same formulae and slogans, as if they were myths and rites, without necessarily understanding them.

In the writing of Jewish history, we need to guard against a pervasive theological bias, since the character and destiny of the people of Israel form part of the Jewish, Christian, and Moslem faiths. Western liberals, cognizant of the long battle of progressive men and women against the oppression of the Church, are likely to introduce an anti-religious bias into the interpretation of Jewish history. All too often the resultant histories are inverted theologies or ideologies.

We do not expect the reader to credit us with supreme objectivity, but we can minimize the degree of distortion by revealing the weights and measures that we intend to employ. The reader will then be able to check the cogency of our discussion, step by step.

Our concept of religion is devoid of fixed dogmas. Religion is to us an ongoing quest, not a finished possession. We do not assume a certain number of true ideas or a body of revealed truths. As we see it, man's confrontation with the mystery of existence is the living core of faith. But this central event grows in meaning and scope with the expansion of man's knowledge and the refinement of his feelings.

Essentially, religion is a wave-like movement, a polar tension between the abiding Reality without and the ultimate self within. Since man is unable either to envisage the cosmos as a whole or to contemplate his own self, he is compelled to follow one or both of the following procedures. Either he understands the world in terms of images of the
self—ghosts, demons, angels, gods. Or he understands his own being in terms of the events of the outside world—stones, winds, material particles. Most commonly, the two alternatives interact and modify one another.

As the consciousness of religion deepens, these two orientations become philosophic alternatives. It is possible to see the entire universe in terms derived from the self contemplating itself. The entire universe is then interpreted either as the work of an Infinite Self, or as the reflection of that Infinite Being. The Cosmos is, then, a “macroanthropos.” On the other hand, man may see his own being in terms of what he conceives to be the components of the external world, so many atoms and electrons obeying universal and inexorable laws. Man is then a “microcosmos.”

These subjective and objective views have many ramifications, since they are essentially ways of thinking and feeling. In the objective orientation, man reduces the role of feeling to a minimum, though he cannot eliminate it altogether. He strives to reason; that is, to let his mind reflect the principles and the order that exist in reality. Rationality is a readiness to observe, to learn; ideas are employed as a kind of shorthand with which to describe experience. In this mood, man is able to see himself from the outside, as it were; hence, to criticize and to analyze the ideas in his own mind and in the group to which he belongs.

In his subjective orientation, man retreats from the world in the endeavor to be true to his own self. Rationality and criticism are then reduced to a minimum, while feeling, as fear, as generalized anxiety, or as a specific concern, as love or as hope, is steadily deepened and intensified. Since man cannot put his finger on the core of his own being, he tries to find his self either in an ideal “self-image,” or in the collective self of a historic group, or in the image of an envisioned Supreme Being. Usually, these three alternatives are followed at the same time. In this mood, man delights to surrender to God, insisting that the ordered world of rationality is somehow in a “fallen” state. Generally also, subjective pietists extol all that is associated with their group, its past, its metaphysical character, and its ultimate destiny.

Most people are familiar with these two basic approaches as mutually exclusive alternatives. In our generation, the Existentialists preempt the subjective way of thinking, in keeping with Kierkegaard’s slogan, “subjectivity is truth.” On the other hand, the champions of objectivity in philosophy generally describe themselves as Positivists, though few
would follow Auguste Comte, founder of French Positivism, in adopting the entire panoply of organized religion in behalf of their worldview. As is well known, Comte sought to organize a ritual, build a priesthood, ordain sacraments, and write a catechism, embodying the principles of his positivistic philosophy.

In our view, religion is the life of the soul; i.e., it is man's effort to orient himself to Reality. Hence, it necessarily contains both orientations of heart and mind. It follows that religion is a dynamic phenomenon; its life is the yearning of man to reach for firm anchorage; it is expressed in the hunger for truth, the longing for the sublime, the passion for righteousness, the outreaching for permanence and genuine worth. As a vital phenomenon, religion is never complete, never at rest, never finished. Progress in any one direction provides the challenge for adjustment and growth in all other phases of human life. Man seeks for the fullness of his life, by means of this rhythm, which brings all his powers into focus.

What is it then that we take to be the marks of growth in a living faith?

First, a living faith is one which is repeatedly and deeply internalized; i.e., it is a powerful subjective reality. Its practices and its dogmas are not merely external rituals and uninspiring formulae, but they bite deep into the souls of their worshipers. What is subjective cannot be fully susceptible of expression; it can only be characterized as a unique realm of experience, radically different from the faith of others. Internalization is essentially the standard of faith that the Existentialists offer. In Jewish thought, it was Bahya who gave the classic formulation to the thought that the dimension of inwardness is infinite in depth. The "commandments of the heart," reverence and love of God, trust in Him and utter devotion to His cause in the world, are indeed susceptible of numberless gradations. In the last two centuries of Jewish life, the Hasidic movement concentrated its mighty genius on this aspect of the faith, bringing fresh life and vitality to the Jewish religion.

Internalization is not easily captured in the official formulations of a faith. The extent to which it occurs at any one time and in the hearts of any people is always uncertain, for nothing happens more frequently in religion than the substitution of formulae for feelings. It is not possible to draw exact comparisons among different faiths, at least within those of the Judeo-Christian tradition, in respect to the intensity of religious feelings they arouse. In every tradition, there will be found
those for whom their faith is an empty formula or rite, and some for whom it is a powerful, inspiring reality. Even the persistent hammering away of some sects about the virtues of humility and genuine piety can itself degenerate into a pious posture. Such is the paradox of human nature that the ideal of humility is itself at times the slogan of the narrow-hearted, arrogant dogmatists. For to embrace an ideal is to take pride in it and to assume the inferiority of all who do not see the light. All whose faith is basically subjective assume that “others” are religious only in external forms. The usual Christian image of the Pharisee, and by implication, of the Jew is that his faith is only an empty shell, a matter of “dos” and don’ts,” of laws and actions, not principles and feelings. Schleiermacher, in his classic discussion of “religious feeling,” disparages the faith of the French, the Russians, and the English as well as the faith of the Jews. Each of these groups has returned the compliment at one time or another.

Students of religion are not apt to overlook the significance of emotional intensity in the life of religion, but they are quite likely to ignore the importance of the swing of the spiritual pendulum toward the pole of objectivity. The quest of rationality and objective truth is often regarded as a denial of faith or as a flight from God. The usual policy of scholars is to restrict the meaning of faith to the subjective moods of piety, when the soul retreats from the glare of the day to seek the calm of Divine communion in the comforting shadows of a revered tradition. But this very policy of confining religion to one phase of the soul’s activity leads inevitably to the dissolution of the bonds of meaning and relevance between faith and life. A one-sided religion is a meaningless one, for meaning is relatedness, the absence of a gulf; the undammed stream of thought in a rhythmic current flowing from the universal to particulars and then back again. To erect barriers within the soul is to invite frustration and futility.

Actually, the quest of religion is for the maximum of relatedness with the ultimate ground of reality. We could define religion as the quest for unity with God; but as a matter of psychological fact, God is not always envisioned as present at the goal, and unity with Him is unattainable. We speak then of a ground of reality and of a maximum of relatedness. Two ways present themselves to us, both together leading to this goal though separately they lead in opposite directions. In the one, we attain relatedness by looking at the universe; in the other, by letting our minds drift away from surface facts in order to feel part of its inner substance.
And we know that we are part of reality, while we look at any portion of it.

If we could know all about ourselves we would know the heart of the universe; yet, if we cannot know ourselves we can be ourselves, and to be part of reality is also somehow to know it.

In the objective as in the subjective orientation of the mind, we find ourselves at first submitting to an outer reality and then asserting that reality within us. Both self-surrender and self-assertion mark the posture of the soul as it seeks the maximum of relatedness, either by way of reason or by way of feeling. In the fervor of faith, man begins by surrendering to God. Tired of pushing elbows against the crowd, man acclaims God as the kindly shepherd, all-loving and all-knowing. Man sees himself as a lamb, willing to be led wheresoever the Shepherd wills. Yet, somehow, nearly every psalm that begins with the trustful mood of total surrender ends on a note of triumphant participation in the Divine Being. He accepts us as a part of Himself, and we accept Him as part of ourselves. As we yield in trust, we rise in strength. Thus, the twenty-third psalm, which sounds the note of total resignation in its opening lines, goes on to speak of being led in righteous paths “for His Name’s sake,” of “being anointed” for a high sacred purpose, and it ends with the confident assertion of being part of the Divine household, dwelling “in the house of the Lord forever.”

In most psalms, the submissive and the assertive aspects of the soul are placed side by side, without any particular sequence. Now the psalmist sings of the Lord as his strength, his light, his invincible protector; now he submits to Divine guidance in perfect trust. Erich Fromm points out that healthy love is of a double nature, containing both submissiveness and assertion. In faith as in love, self-surrender and self-realization are blended, as the bright flame and its dark underside. When we love, we are held in love.

“How shall we love the Divine Presence?” asks a sixteenth-century mystic. His answer: “To the point of finding it impossible to separate from it.”

It is this paradoxical unity of submission and assertion that we find also in the objective orientation. The quest of “clear and adequate ideas” is a heroic undertaking. The thinker subordinates all that is dear to him to the austere judgment of implacable reason. He can hide nothing that is precious from the cutting knife of reason; he cannot ask for favors; he can expect no personal consideration. Submission to the
rational process in all its ruthless impartiality is by no means easy. Yet those who like Spinoza follow this pathway of utter submission find that they are realizing their inmost selves in joy. For the light of reason, like the love of God, is within us as surely as it is beyond us. It was not the understandable bias of a philosopher but an indubitable truth of human nature that led Aristotle to assert that rationality is the essence of humanity. This truth is evident, however, only at certain times. Spinoza writes of an intuitive kind of reasoning, in which thought proceeds automatically. A point is reached when we no longer think our thoughts, but the process of thought, like a mighty stream carries us along. Who has not experienced this dual unity of rational contemplation? In thought as in faith and love, we win our self as we lose our self.

The rational quest is thus as much a part of religion as the pietistic-mystical yearning for the “nearness of God.” A rabbinic legend tells of an angel in heaven that in the daytime carries the word Emeth, truth, on its forehead and at night carries the word Emunah, faith. Both day and night form part of the cycle of the soul. The essential unity of man’s need for love and his quest of truth is reflected in the prayer of Socrates, “Beloved Pan, and all ye other gods who haunt this place, give me beauty in the inward soul, and may the outward and the inward man be at one.”

In his search for truth, man puts all that is subjective to the test. He criticizes the things that are so precious because they are “his own,” his own cultural tradition, his own religious heritage, his own people, his own convictions and prejudices. In the faculty of pure reason, he rises above himself as the empirical man of a specific time and place. Long and arduous is the path of self-criticism. Many are the idols to be demolished, many are the defenses to be shattered, many are the disguises of the naked soul, and agonizing beyond comparison is the task of penetrating them. But the rational quest for self-knowledge is as endless as that for knowledge of the world. And it is man’s destiny to be forever caught in the oscillation of the spirit from subjective faith to objective reason, from the nighttime quest for faith and peace to the daytime quest for clarity and action. The man of reason cannot and ought not escape his involvements in life. He needs to feel his unity within an ongoing tradition, to join with others in celebrating the mystery of life and its great values. He needs to use the “language” of faith, which consists of symbols and myths and rites, articulating the
unspeakable wonders of life. He will interpret and transform the creed and the ritual of his community, but he remains part of it, for reason is but one of the facets of man’s spirit. Religion is to reason as the mind is to the senses, not as the senses are to one another.

Our second criterion in the study of religions, then, is the extent to which they incorporate the objective, rational factor. More specifically, we need to inquire whether the quest for wisdom is recognized as a Divine commandment, whether the domain of objective thinking is uncircumscribed, whether the rites and dogmas of the tradition are subjected consistently to the rigorous examination of reason.

Finally, as our third criterion, we shall ask whether the extension of the objective approach is translated into a universal, non-parochial ethic.

An ethical philosophy of life is the creation of both subjective piety and objective thinking. Neither the feelings of empathy nor the critical acumen of logic can by themselves generate a truly ethical approach to the problems of life. For ethics is more than a complex of gentle feelings like piety, love, sympathy, courage, and loyalty. These feelings are as native to humanity as their opposites—cruelty, ruthlessness, callousness, and brutality. The instinctive equipment of man includes both sets of feelings. The predominance of either set of feelings in any phase of life depends on the structure of ideas in a given culture more than on any other factor. So soon as the curtain opens on the drama of human history, we encounter the gentle feelings of humanity, but they are limited in application to narrow circles—the family, the clan, the tribe, the social caste, the city, or the nation. And every forward step in the extension of the boundaries of ethical obligation and responsibility is achieved by means of rational criticism, which pushes forward the boundary stones set up by tradition. Every wall dividing the “in” group from the “out” group, with one set of morals for the former and another for the latter, is breached by the thrust of the soul toward greater objectivity. Romantic faith, on the other hand, cautions against the removal of any fences; it tends to draw the veil of sanctification over all that is traditional and characteristic of the “in” group.

By the same token, rational thought in itself cannot generate an ethical faith. From the summit of rationality, philosophers like Plato and Aristotle can devise ideal constitutions, which make for efficiency and justice. But the philosophers cannot plan the reactions of the individuals composing their utopian state. Constitutions may be set up, laws may be laid down, compliance may be efficiently assured. But the quality of
ethics is found not in law and administration as such, but in the motives and attitudes of the men and women in the state. Thus, the Greek philosophers already assigned to religion the task of educating the people for life in the ideal state.

The domain of ethics is the product of a dynamic synthesis of reflection and feeling. The ardor and zeal of generosity and self-denial derive from subjective faith, while reason imposes the universality of principle upon these protean feelings. In the search for objective knowledge, man eliminates himself altogether from the equation; in the sphere of ethics, a man inquires how he can best utilize the powers of his self for the overarching community. Hence, both a deep concern for self and personal destiny as well as the awareness of a series of concentric circles of society are the poles of the ethical ideal.

Hermann Cohen suggested that the ethical ideal could be employed as the sole index of maturity in the study of religions. From the vantage point of our analysis, we can agree that the ethical ideal depends upon the equilibrium between the two orientations of the soul and their intensities. Hence, it is an excellent index of maturity. But the ethics of any faith or culture is itself a dynamic, restless quality, bi-directional, multi-faceted, susceptible of a thousand subterfuges.

In the analysis of an ethical ideal, we must be prepared to recognize the diverse compromises between subjective bias and objective reflection. Beyond the level of the legendary and the primitive, no religion arises on the horizon of mankind which does not teach some form of love of neighbor. And the command of the Torah, "love thy neighbor as thyself," is a sublime synthesis of subjective feeling and the objective view of a community of neighbors. But the growth and maturation of faith will be manifested in the manner whereby limitations of the meaning of the term "neighbor" are progressively overcome. Limitations of clan and caste, of tribe and nationality, of sectarian orthodoxy and deviation, of collective prejudice and stereotype are more frequently obstacles to ethical progress than flaws in the formulation of ethical principles.

In sum, we have arrived at three criteria of the growth of religion: the intensity and depth of internalization of rites and dogmas, the consistency and extent of objective criticism embraced in the tradition, and the balance between the subjective and objective factors as it is demonstrated in the ethical standards of the community.
We need to indicate at this time why these criteria are more useful than those employed by other historians and philosophers. Without undertaking to survey all the philosophies in world literature we shall easily recognize the alternative criteria of growth as: first, dogmatic standards; second, either universality of concept alone or intensity of religious experience alone; third, philosophical ideas; fourth, orientations toward the future rather than the past.\footnote{7}

Dogmas of any kind we disavow as being of subjective and symbolic worth exclusively. Our analysis of faith ignores altogether the notion of preternatural revelation, because we assume that God reveals Himself to us in all ways. It would be arbitrary and arrogant to set aside only selected books, or certain experiences of certain people as being the sole content of revelation. We can see things only from the human point of view. Poets and mythologists may write from the standpoint of God. And the language of poetry and the symbols of mythology are indispensable to prayer. But they are useless to the sober task of exposition. On the other hand, Olympian impartiality and boundless universalism is a relatively easy stance for those whose inner life is pale and thin. Witness the Sophists of Greece. They could speak of humanity in general with great ease, because loyalties, private or universal, mattered very little in their lives. Philosophical ideas are by their very nature common to the thinking fraternities of any one age or culture. They are easily transferable to different contexts. Thus, the Medieval philosophies of Christianity, Islam, and Judaism employed the same ideas in diverse configurations. In a similar way, the religions of the Hellenistic-Roman period operated with the same discrete concepts.

For this reason, we did not set monotheism against polytheism as a criterion of progress. In the so-called great ages of faith, every monistic creed was in actual practice a skein of tensions between the ideals of monotheism and the multiple expressions of pagan polytheism. While the belief in One God is a great advance over the belief in many gods, from the ethical as well as from the logical point of view, the decisive inquiry is what kind of monotheism? Leaps toward monotheism were not rare in the ancient world.

Toynbee's criterion of progress—the change of the admired and imitated individual from the past to the contemporary scene—is from our point of view an external, one-sided standard. He would regard as a sign of progress every act of "breaking the cake of custom." This is formally true, insofar as progress is outwardly visible. But custom-
Religion and Nationalism

keeping and custom-breaking can both be acts of religious inspiration as well as deeds of desecration. It is the inner attitude of man that counts. In his subjective orientation, man turns to archaic forms and ancient heroes for inspiration. All religious revivals take the form of “returning” to an ancient, long-neglected truth. All practical movements are formally oriented toward the future. But no person is free from either of these orientations. Rationalistic-ethical religious reformers may be led to select ancient heroes as symbols of the transformation that they advocate, interpreting the revolution of the ancients in their own way. It is the content of religious teaching that matters, not its symbolic guise.

The most important reason for the usefulness of this analysis is the fact that it takes account of the paradoxical character of all religions. Religion is not simply a static complex of rites, myths, sacred institutions, and sacraments. Such a description can only capture a fleeting aspect of the living reality which is multi-faceted and ambivalent. As a dynamic field of tension, Judaism is likely to be articulated at any one time in radically different ways, by those who represent its objective-rationalistic genius and by those who reflect its subjective-romantic impetus. Generally speaking, the intellectual leaders are apt to cling to the pole of humanism and rationality, while the masses are certain to center their ardor on the emotional and the esthetic, the dogmatic and the mythical, the superstitious, and the ethnic phases of the tradition. But, this probable polarization is complicated by the well-known fact that any popular cause will never lack educated and eloquent spokesmen. There will always be a kind of elite, who devote themselves to the fortification of the popular faith, either because they have not outgrown the mentality of the people or because it normally pays to tell the people what they want to hear. Honest intellectuals are often misled by the spurious rationality of “common consent.” Therefore, we cannot be content with the distinction between “popular” and “official” aspects of a faith.

Also, as we noted, faith, like a tree, should grow in depth as well as in height. Often indeed, the advance of the human spirit in one direction results temporarily at least in the shrinking of other aspects of the faith. Have not rationalistic ages been notoriously insensitive to the deeper nuances of faith?

All ideals, tragically enough, cast a shadow even as they throw a beam of light into the Unknown. Like a flashlight suddenly directed at one
point, the brightness of illumination thus generated makes the darkness at its edges all the more impenetrable. Since religion constitutes the totality of idealism, this paradox affects its structure far more powerfully than it does other aspects of human culture. Hence, the importance of this threefold criterion.

In all our discussion of the nature of religion, we have not designated any ideas as being absolutes. We did not assume a concept of God, so true and perfect as to serve as a standard by which lesser conceptions are to be judged. Neither did we assume that certain revealed truths were from time to time injected into the course of history. Nor did we assert that the bi-polar orientation of the human spirit was bound to result in a steady and necessary pace of progress. Do we then propose a relativistic view of history? Is our perspective totally devoid of secure landmarks and guidelines that are rooted in the nature of things? By no means. We must distinguish between the idea of perfection and a perfect idea. In history, we recognize the aspiration to attain perfection as the noblest endeavor of man. The philosopher seeks the perfection of truth, the statesman the perfection of public ardor, the priest the perfection of man’s accord with the Ultimate, the prophet the perfection of the individual’s striving for ethical action. But this outreaching of the human spirit must not be identified with the fullness of possession. “Ye shall be holy, for I the Lord am holy”—while God is holy, man can only become holy. We cannot assume that we stand today at the final goal-post of human history, judging the faltering efforts and tragic travails of man from the peak of perfection. It is precisely this prideful dogma that we have to guard against, for it is the proximate cause of stagnation and sterility. We hear this note in the last gasp of Roman paganism, an edict of the Emperor Diocletian: “For it is the height of criminality to reexamine doctrines once and for all settled and fixed by the ancients.”

Do we then deny the reality of absolute truths? No. But we deny the human possession of these absolutes; at least, we do not affirm such absolutes as the axioms of our inquiry. Truth grows out of the clash and juxtaposition of data, whereby the correctness of tentative judgments is tested. When we set ourselves the task of judging the nature of the whole of being, we cannot maintain the absolute truth of any verdict, since all the relevant facts are not available. The Absolute is there, but any formulation of it is bound to bear the marks of time and the
stigmata of partiality. As to Divine revelation, we intend to set things down from the human point of view. All new insights, all successful breakthroughs either in the perception of truth or in the apprehension of moral and esthetic values can be described as data of revelation. Such a description is motivated by subjective needs, the language of feeling, the dialectic of imagination, or the logic of social necessities. In private prayer and in public worship, we naturally employ the symbolic language of man’s inner life. But, apart from poetry and prayer, we can only describe things from the human point of view, as insights, in which truth and folly are inevitably mixed, not as Divinely revealed truths.

The needs of our human situation require that we speak and act as if our highest ideals had independent existence. Rooted in the Cosmos, they compel our attention and demand the surrender of our self. This logic of the human imagination was recognized by John Dewey as a basic fact. The human imagination at its best is not arbitrary and loose. It too is subject to certain inherent necessities and regularities. This is the secret of good art. And the greatest Art of all is religion, the art of the good life. In order that the diverse goals and purposes of life be integrated and endowed with meaning, we need to project an all-embracing ideal into the Universe and then submit to judgment in the light of this Supreme Ideal. We have to live in the present as if the ultimate goal of man’s search were known. At the same time, we must not confuse the psychology of subjectivity and of a creative imagination with the logic of objectivity and the nature of the Absolute.

On this view, progress is never certain. Nor can the religious climate of any one age be easily assayed. Our three criteria of progress are likely to afford us contradictory testimony regarding the piety of any generation. The differences among individuals within the same polarized religious tradition are, from our standpoint, far more significant than the identity of external symbols and dogmas. Frequently, the so-called advance of man’s mind is only the record of development of a small elite, while behind the charade of changing intellectual fashions popular religion remains virtually the same. In any case, we cannot offer a clear dissection of periods and phases. Somewhat after the fashion of market-analysts, we shall strive to take account of the “depth” of facts and feelings as well as of their statistical frequency.

Nationalism, like religion, is in any one age a patchwork of compromise between the two orientations of the soul. Objectively we reason in
terms of the human family as a whole. But this concept is fleeting and
abstract. Man's imagination is hard put to endow the concept of man in
general with a solid anchorage and the feel of reality. Perhaps mankind
will not really attain a "clear and adequate idea" of itself, until "the little
men from Mars" lay siege to our planet.

Tragically enough, it is only by slow and painful stages that the
group-consciousness of people is broadened. Primitive man is governed
by clans. It takes a measure of intellectual tradition to create a tribe,
which is an association of clans. Through a similar development, an
association of tribes comes into being, cherishing a common past and
common religious objects of worship as well as a common language and
possibly a common government. An association of tribes may evolve
into a nation through the acceptance of an inner judicial and adminis-
trative system. The emergence of a United States of Europe presages
the concept of a "family of nations."

At each stage in their ascent from the clan to the great society of the
future, people have to resolve the tension between the subjective mood
which sanctifies the existing barriers and a modicum of increasing
objectivity. Clinging to all that is "his own"—clan or tribal custom—
primitive man tends to resist any objective criticism of tribal mores or
any widening of tribal boundaries. As far as historic memory goes, men
always treated those who were akin to them with consideration and
rough justice. But they were very slow in recognizing the rights of
"foreigners." Differences in sex and in social class were at one time
considered sufficient to exclude a person from the inner circle of kin-
ship. Thus, the patricians and the plebeians of early Rome were for
many centuries not allowed to intermarry. And the status of women in
ancient Rome was so low as to be only one notch above that of the
slave. Exclusion of "strangers" from all rights in the country was general
throughout the ancient world. Even philosophers like Plato and Aris-
totle maintained that only Hellenes were designed by nature to be free,
while "barbarians" were intended by nature for menial work and slav-
ery. So wise, liberty-loving, and tolerant a statesman as Pericles spon-
sored an Athenian law that prohibited an Athenian citizen from mar-
rying a Greek woman from another city.

The subjectivity of tribalism is overcome only in part by the dawning
of objective intelligence, for the bias of ethnicism is more resistant to
reason than the dogmas of faith. In large part, tribal allegiance is
overcome in sentiment and in imagination by the building up of a more potent and more radiant aura around the larger culture-sphere of the nation. Thus, during the nineteenth century, the vision of Germany became far more radiant than that of any of its component states, and during the twentieth century, the concept of a Teutonic race displaced for many the idea of the State. Similarly, Italy as a whole could appeal to more powerful, romantic loyalties than either Tuscany, or Venice, or Sardinia. The larger unit was endowed with an "image" so resplendent that all parochial and provincial loyalties were put in the shade.

The national "image" contains a blend of many objective values along with the subjective picture of the nation. It is maintained that the nation in question is a superior breed of humanity, more devoted than other breeds to liberty or to order, to democracy or to aristocracy, to religion or to science, to rationalism or to romanticism. Whichever of the two pairs of values is chosen by the prophets of nationalism at any one time depends on the ideal that happens then to be fashionable. And the various economic or social groups comprising the nation add the tincture of their particular, political faiths to the national "self-image."

It is important to realize that the boundaries of nations, in ancient as in modern times, were the result of accidental causes. No one today takes seriously the nationalist ambitions of the Scottish or the Welsh, of the Basques or the Burgundians, of the Prussians or the Swabians, of the Pisans or the Florentines. Yet these groups were at one time "nations"; they would still be "nations" today, had only a few purely political or military events taken a different turn.

We think of the Hellenes as a "nation." The language, faith, and culture of the Hellenes were indeed great and distinctive. In addition, they had some religious institutions in common. The association of twelve tribes in the Delphic amphictyony was the closest the Greeks came to the achievement of unity before Philip of Macedonia.

Nevertheless, the Athenians considered themselves a "nation," and they set out to establish an Athenian Empire with other Greek cities as their colonies. This ambition was not only due to a political ideal, namely, their infatuation with the concept of a Polis, a self-governing city, but also to their belief that they were a "treasure-people," "the educators of Hellas." They were not willing to accord to other Greek cities the privileges of freedom which they demanded for themselves.
Their Athenian "idealism" was so strong that they coldly condemned the entire male populations of conquered Hellenic cities to slaughter, and sold the women into slavery.

The "self-image" of a nation is partly the product of its political history and partly the product of a cultural tradition, and it depends as much upon the capacity to forget as upon the capacity to remember. The structure of the nationalist imagination requires the myth of an original, ancestral family out of which the nation emerged, as a complex organism grows out of a simple nucleus. This myth of common descent becomes in turn the focus of popular feeling and its so-called ideology. Blood and soil tend to shunt culture and ideals into the background. Biological nationalism is thus inherent in the nature of the movement, by reason of the romance and mystery, myth and magic that envelops all that is subjective. Once it becomes frankly biological, nationalism is launched on the slippery road toward the myths and idols of racism. Then the "purity" of the nation's blood is extolled with dogmatic zeal and jealously guarded.

But as we have seen the genius of nationalism contains a potent dose of objective idealism. Without the aid of this universal concept, the "self-image" of the nation would not have become strong enough to overcome the centrifugal forces of tribe and province. The inclusion of universal ideals is also compelled by the need to placate man's rational faculties. Within the domain of nationalism, accordingly, a perpetual tug of war ensues between objective ideals and sheer, blood-based ethnicism. This inner tension is articulated at various times, in the conflict between those who give primacy to the ideals of the nation and those who stress the supreme worth of the nation's life.

When people have grown civilized enough to be ashamed of sheer instincts, but not yet critical enough to view themselves objectively, they are quite likely to use universal ideals as the guise and disguise of their instincts. The initial step of Adam and Eve on their way to civilization was to cover their nakedness with a fig-leaf. Thus, once an ethnic group has acquired an idealized vision of the collective "self-image," its nationalism is far more potent than natural, unsophisticated ethnicism.

For such is the peculiar logic of human nature. Collective dedication to an ideal leads to collective self-glorification and the glorified self-image becomes the excuse for inflicting massive crimes upon the "unglorified" section of humanity. Thus, did the "liberty-loving" Athenians
of the Golden Age set out to deprive other Greek cities of their freedom. Similarly, the Israelites, newly consecrated as “a people of priests and a holy nation” proceeded with gusto to exterminate the Canaanites. The illustrations for this theme in our own day could fill a library.

The ambiguous loyalties of nationalism stand astride man’s progress toward a universal society. They are like a tunnel through which mankind must needs pass on its way toward a brighter horizon. Seen from the side of tribalized and feudalized societies, nationalism is a mighty movement of liberation and progress. It enables a backward population to overcome the stunting yokes of petty, parochial loyalties, which stand in the way of a united effort to mobilize its constructive energies. It provides the energy to batter down feudal privileges and to launch a nation on the road to economic progress. Only nationalism, whipped to a frenzy, can provide the enthusiasm and energy needed for the forced marches of the Asian and African “nations” toward a tolerable standard of living.

Neither in Russia nor in China could Communism muster the vast energies it needed without arousing the slumbering loyalties of a resurgent nationalism. Thus even so rigid and inflexible an ideology as Communism was compelled to make common cause with nationalism, though in theory the Communist faith is strictly internationalist.

In addition to its role as a liberating force in the backward areas of the globe, nationalism fulfills a cultural and humanizing function in the countries of the West. It erects walls which help the individual to feel at home in the vast and open space of a friendless world. It sets up a style of life and a heroic standard and it persuades the individual to submit to the charm and spell of the national virtues. For most people, the vision of humanity is still a vague abstraction, while the nation provides a concrete and vital image, which relates them to society. People can feel as leaves on the tree of life of the nation, but it taxes their imagination too much to see themselves as leaves on the tree of humanity. The domain of human culture is for the present a confluence of diverse and distinct streams of tradition, not a homogeneous ocean in which the salts of different cultures are dissolved. The national ideal is therefore still of vital importance in the total economy of man’s spiritual life, though the vision of an Atlantic Community or of a Western “family of nations” is already on the horizon.

At the same time, nationalism is the largest single barrier in the path
Religion and Nationalism

of an emergent universal society. It distorts the judgment of people quite as much as the dogmatism of a fundamentalist faith, and it leads inevitably to injustice and war. It will be overcome in the future by the very process that brought nationalism into being—namely the movement of the soul toward ever wider dimensions of objectivity and ever deeper layers of subjectivity. The perfection and well-being of the individual transcends the ideal of nationalism on the coordinate of subjectivity, while the emergence of the vision of a universal society transcends the parochial boundaries of nationalism on the coordinate of objectivity. Thus, nationalism, like religion, can be transcended and advanced by the same rhythm of spiritual alternation.

Idolatry in religion is the resistance of the soul to the dynamism of a living faith. When the mind refuses to proceed from the recognition of many gods to belief in One God, we have polytheistic idolatry. When an image that reflected a novel insight at one time is worshiped as the final vision of the Supreme Being, we have iconolatry. When a ritual act (not a dogmatic belief) is asserted to be the ultimate Will of God, we have an idolatry of action (orthopraxis as against orthodoxy). Whenever any system of thought is set up as the final summation of truth, we have the peculiar idolatry of ideologists and academicians. In each case, the footprints of man's progress are cherished rather than the direction of his advance.

The inability of a people to transcend their own national loyalties is the inherent idolatry of nationalism. The same resistance of the spirit is at fault in both politics and religion. When a people insists on sticking to the level of "know nothingism," or worse, using objective ideals for the purpose of sanctifying the collective egotism of the nation, we have the typical sin of idolatry in its nationalistic garb.

Progress in nationalism as in religion can be gauged by the same standards—the continuity of tension between subjective loyalties and objective ideals, the progressive deepening of the vision of the ideal individual, and the ideal society of mankind, the refusal of the people to idolize themselves and their readiness to submit their collective aims to objective scrutiny.

In certain circumstances, nationalism and religion tend to coalesce. Emile Durkheim, the French sociologist, overstated the degree of the relationship when he maintained that religion generally was simply the projection onto the metaphysical screen of the national group-
Religion and Nationalism

consciousness. But it cannot be denied that in primitive societies, the
 distinction becomes nebulous; even the so-called higher religions which
 address their message to all, nurture on occasion the feelings of national-
 ism, and derive strength from the ethnic consciousness of their people.

When a particular national group of a certain faith is involved in a
struggle against enemies of another faith, as well as of a different
nationalism, then the two ideals tend to merge. Thus, the Poles in
their national struggles against the Protestant Germans and the Greek
Orthodox Russians sought comfort and sustenance in their Catholic
faith. Similarly, the Irish Catholics could not be open-minded concern-
ing the arguments of the English Episcopalians and Presbyterians. Many
of the sectarian divisions in Europe reflected ethnic rivalries. Thus, the
Czechs flocked to the banner of John Huss and a number of the
German princes rushed to the standard of Martin Luther. In earlier
centuries, the Goths accepted the Aryan form of Christianity. The
native Egyptians and the Armenians embraced a Monophysite version
of Christianity and the Persians, overwhelmed by the Arab Moslem
invaders, sought shelter under the aegis of the heretical Shi'a sect.

To all the nations of Europe, the Christian faith came from an extra-
national source. Still, some of the European nations acquired their
national consciousness and their faith at one and the same time. The
Poles, the Russians, and the Hungarians remembered very little, if
anything, from their pre-Christian days. And the Christian Spanish
nation was forged in the fires of a continuous Catholic crusade against
the Iberian Moors.

When the loyalty of religion is reinforced by ethnic bonds, we may
expect redoubled tension between objective idealism and subjective
self-glorification in both domains of the human spirit. The idealistic
phases of nationalism are likely to be unfolded and illuminated, since
religion focuses attention on the individual and on objective human
ideals. On the other hand, the saintly aura of religion might bathe the
raw impulses of nationalism in a mysterious glow and raise them beyond
the reach of rational criticism. Similarly, the bonds of ethnic loyalty are
likely to furnish a powerful cementing force to the ritualistic phases of
religion, since ethnicism is essentially romantic, subjective, and conser-
vative. On the other hand, concern with the actual problems of a living
people is likely to prevent a religion from becoming totally other-
wordly, mystical, and rigidly dogmatic. Nationalism tends to direct the
fervor of religious devotion into the channels of the actual historic
community. It checks the flight of the mystic, restrains the fancy of the poet, assuages the ardor of the ascetic, and recalls the fanatical dogmatist to the realities of life.

In Judaism, the unity of ethnic awareness and religious loyalty is fundamental and of a peculiar intimacy. Accordingly, we may expect to find the usual tensions of ethnicism and faith magnified and intensified, with the surge of idealism reaching occasionally peculiar heights even as from time to time the pathos of sacred egotism may sink to the lowest depths. As we turn our attention to the formative period of the Jewish mentality, we find the heights of objective thought and universal sympathy conjoined with intensified feelings of ethnic pride and religious exclusiveness. Instead of the usual monolithic picture, depicting either nobility of soul or meanness of spirit, we find both extremes of the universal tensions of the human spirit. In Jewish experience, we see exemplified the basic tensions of humanity—only more so.

NOTES

4. Elijah de Vidash, Reshith Hochmo, Shaar Ahavah, Chapter 4.
5. B. Spinoza, Ethics, Book V.
6. Plato, Phaedrus, 279C.
7. Harnack, the historian of the early Church, attributed the decline of Christianity to its encounter with Greek philosophy, resulting in the substitution of dogmas for living experience. R. Sohn considered institutionalism to be the cause of decline. Adolf Harnack, Outlines of the History of Dogma (Boston, 1957).
8. Leviticus 11:44.