

Is There Room for Left-Wing Politics in a Right-Wing Religion?

Is There a Jewish Political Identity?

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What are Left-Wing and Right-Wing?

1. Neil Irwin, *The Pandemic Is Showing Us How Capitalism Is Amazing, and Inadequate*, NY Times 11/14/20

After Pfizer announced highly successful preliminary results for its coronavirus vaccine, Trump administration officials said the good news reflected the success of their Operation Warp Speed program to accelerate vaccine development. Pfizer executives stressed the opposite, noting the company had developed the vaccine with its own resources, not government grants.

That was true, but not the whole story. Over the summer, Pfizer had reached a \$1.95 billion “advance purchase” agreement with the United States government, ensuring it would be well compensated for eventually delivering 100 million doses of vaccine. In other words, though the government did not directly fund the drug development, it created the groundwork in which the pharmaceutical company could spend research dollars with abandon, knowing that success would be financially rewarded.

It may seem like a trivial case of a company and an administration each claiming credit for some happy news. But it speaks to a deeper reality the pandemic has revealed — both what is amazing about capitalism, and how the free market alone comes up short in solving enormous problems.

The nine months of the pandemic have shown that in a modern state, capitalism can save the day — but only when the government exercises its power to guide the economy and act as the ultimate absorber of risk. The lesson of Covid capitalism is that big business needs big government, and vice versa...

2. Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, *Liberalism* (emphasis added)

[C]lassical liberals treat the leveling of wealth and income as outside the purview of legitimate aims of government coercion...

What has come to be known as ‘new’, ‘revisionist’, ‘welfare state’, or perhaps best, ‘social justice’, liberalism challenges this intimate connection between personal liberty and a private property based market order (Freedman, 1978; Gaus, 1983b; Paul, Miller and Paul, 2007). Three factors help explain the rise of this revisionist theory. First, the new liberalism arose in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, a period in which the ability of a free market to sustain what Lord Beveridge (1944: 96) called a ‘prosperous equilibrium’ was being questioned. Believing that a private property based market tended to be unstable, or could, as Keynes argued (1973 [1936]), get stuck in an equilibrium with high unemployment, new liberals came to doubt, initially in empirical grounds, that classical liberalism was an adequate foundation for a stable, free society. Here the second factor comes into play: just as the new liberals were losing faith in the market, their faith in government as a means of supervising economic life was increasing. This was partly due to the experiences of the First World War, in which government attempts at economic planning seemed to succeed (Dewey, 1929: 551–60); more importantly, this reevaluation of the state was spurred by the democratization of western states, and the conviction that, for the first time, elected officials could truly be, in J.A. Hobson’s phrase ‘representatives of the community’ (1922: 49)...

The third factor underlying the currency of the new liberalism was probably the most fundamental: a growing conviction that, so far from being ‘the guardian of every other right’ (Ely, 1992: 26), property rights foster an unjust inequality of power. They entrench a merely formal equality that in actual practice systematically fails to secure the kind of equal positive liberty that matters on the ground for the working class...

3. Prof. Michael Oakeshott, *Rationalism in Politics* (1962)

To be conservative, then, is to prefer the familiar to the unknown, to prefer the tried to the untried, fact to mystery, the actual to the possible, the limited to the unbounded, the near to the distant, the sufficient to the superabundant, the convenient to the perfect, present laughter to utopian bliss...

4. Prof. Jeanne Kirkpatrick, *Defining a Conservative Foreign Policy*

The conservative brings to reflection about policy - foreign and domestic - an irreducible respect for individual freedom, a suspicion of government that distinguishes him (or her) from liberals, and an irreducible commitment to citizenship that

distinguishes him from libertarians. The conservative understands that the tensions between individualism and patriotism, between self-love and love of country, between realism and idealism, are permanent.

5. A (helpful?) table

	Left-Wing	Right-Wing
Gov't fighting climate change	Yes; believe in progress	Suspicious; intervention is limited
Redistribute wealth to aid needy	Yes; believe in progress	Suspicious; intervention is limited
War against non-threatening fascist countries	Yes; believe in progress	Suspicious; intervention is limited
Taxation to support a government agenda	Yes	No; gov't should be limited
Freer immigration	Yes; promote freedom and rights	No; protect the established community
Freedom of religion	Suspicious; religion may be an establishment opposing progress	Yes; trust established institutions
Free trade	Suspicious; controlling trade may help with progressive policies	Yes; intervention is limited
Subsidize public education	Yes; promote freedom and rights	Yes; but also enable private education
Criminal justice reform	Yes; promote freedom and rights	Yes; reduce government

Why might one think of Judaism as right-wing?

6. Talmud, Shabbat 112b

אם ראשונים בני מלאכים או בני אנשים, ואם ראשונים בני אנשים או כחמורים - ולא כחמורו של רבי חנינא בן דוסא ושל רבי פנחס בן יאיר, אלא כשאר חמורים.

If the early ones were sons of *malachim*, we are human beings. And if the early ones were people, we are as donkeys – and not the donkey of Rabbi Chanina ben Dosa or of Rabbi Pinchas ben Yair, but as other donkeys.

7. Devarim 17:14-20 (JPS 1985 edition, courtesy Sefaria.org)

כִּי תָבֹא אֶל הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר ד' אֱלֹהֶיךָ נָתַן לָךְ וּיְרֻשָׁתָהּ וַיִּשְׁבָּתָהּ בָּהּ וְאַמְרַתְּ אֲשִׁמָּה עָלַי מֶלֶךְ כָּכָל הַגּוֹיִם אֲשֶׁר סְבִיבֹתַי: שׁוּם תָּשִׂים עָלֶיךָ מֶלֶךְ אֲשֶׁר יִבְחַר ד' אֱלֹהֶיךָ בּוֹ מִקֵּרֵב אֲחֵיךָ תָּשִׂים עָלֶיךָ מֶלֶךְ לֹא תוּכַל לָתֵת עָלֶיךָ אִישׁ נָכְרִי אֲשֶׁר לֹא אֲחִיךָ הוּא: בַּקֹּדֶשׁ לֹא יִרְכָּה לּוֹ סוֹסִים וְלֹא יֵשִׁיב אֶת הָעָם מִצְרִימָה לְמַעַן הִרְבּוֹת סוֹס וְנֹד' אָמַר לָכֶם לֹא תִסְפּוּן לָשׁוּב בְּדֶרֶךְ הַזֶּה עוֹד: וְלֹא יִרְכָּה לּוֹ נָשִׁים וְלֹא יִסּוֹר לִבּוֹ וְכֶסֶף וְזָהָב לֹא יִרְכָּה לּוֹ מְאֹד: וְהָיָה כְּשִׁבְתוֹ עַל כִּסֵּא מַמְלָכְתּוֹ וְכָתַב לּוֹ אֶת מִשְׁנֵה הַתּוֹרָה הַזֹּאת עַל סֵפֶר מַלְפָּנַי הַכְּהֻנִּים הַלְוִיִּם: (יט) וְהָיְתָה עִמּוֹ וְקָרָא בּוֹ כָּל יְמֵי חַיָּיו לְמַעַן יִלְמַד לִירְאָה אֶת ד' אֱלֹהָיו לְשֹׁמֵר אֶת כָּל דְּבָרֵי הַתּוֹרָה הַזֹּאת וְאֶת הַחֻקִּים הָאֵלֶּה לַעֲשֹׂתָם: (כ) לְבַלְתִּי רוּם לִבִּי וּלְבַלְתִּי סוֹר מִן הַמִּצְוָה יְמִין וּשְׂמָאוֹל לְמַעַן יֵאָרִיךְ יָמָיו עַל מַמְלָכְתּוֹ הוּא וּבָנָיו בְּקֶרֶב יִשְׂרָאֵל:

If, after you have entered the land that the Lord your Gd has assigned to you, and taken possession of it and settled in it, you decide, "I will set a king over me, as do all the nations about me," you shall be free to set a king over yourself, one chosen by the Lord your Gd. Be sure to set as king over yourself one of your own people; you must not set a foreigner over you, one who is not your kinsman. Moreover, he shall not keep many horses or send people back to Egypt to add to his horses, since the Lord has warned you, "You must not go back that way again." And he shall not have many wives, lest his heart go astray; nor shall he amass silver and gold to excess.

When he is seated on his royal throne, he shall have a copy of this Teaching written for him on a scroll by the levitical priests. Let it remain with him and let him read in it all his life, so that he may learn to revere the Lord his G-d, to observe faithfully every word of this Teaching as well as these laws. Thus he will not act haughtily toward his fellows or deviate from the Instruction to the right or to the left, to the end that he and his descendants may reign long in the midst of Israel.

8. Rambam (12th century Egypt), Mishneh Torah, Hilchot Melachim 2:6

כדרך שחלק לו הכתוב הכבוד הגדול, וחייב הכל בכבודו, כך צוהו להיות לבו בקרבו שפל וחלל שנאמר "ולבי חלל בקרבי", ולא ינהג גסות לב בישראל יתר מדאי, שנאמר לבלתי רום לבבו מאחיו. ויהיה חונן ומרחם לקטנים וגדולים, ויצא ויבא בחפציהם ובטובתם, ויחוס על כבוד קטן שבקטנים. וכשמדבר אל כל הקהל בלשון רבים ידבר רכות... לעולם יתנהג בענוה יתירה, אין לבו גדול ממשה רבינו והוא אומר "ונחנו מה לא עלינו תלונותיכם", ויסבול טרחם ומשאם ותלונותם וקצפם כאשר ישא האומן את היונק, רועה קראו הכתוב, "לרעות ביעקב עמו (תהלים עח:עא)", ודרכו של רועה מפורש בקבלה "כרועה עדרו ירעה בזרועו יקבץ טלאים ובחיקו ישא וגו'." (ישעיה מ:יא)

Just as the Torah assigned great honour to the king, and all are obligated to honour him, so the Torah instructed him to keep his heart humble and low within himself, as was written [by King David], "And my heart is low within me." He may not act with undue arrogance toward the nation, as it is written, "lest his heart become elevated above his brothers." He must be generous and merciful for small and great, he must exit and enter at their desire and for their good, and he must care for the honour of the smallest of the small. When he speaks to the community at large he must speak gently... He must always act with a surfeit of humility. We have none greater than Moshe Rabbeinu, and he said, "And what are we? Your complaint is not upon us." He should bear their labours, burdens, complaints and anger as a nursemaid bears a nursing. The Torah calls him a shepherd, "To herd his nation Jacob," and the shepherd's way is explained by tradition as, "As a shepherd herds his flock, directing them with his arm, gathering in the ewes, carrying them in his arm, etc."

9. Rambam (12th century Egypt), Mishneh Torah, Hilchot Melachim 11:4

ואם יעמוד מלך מבית דוד הוגה בתורה ועוסק במצוות כדוד אביו, כפי תורה שבכתב ושבעל פה, ויכוף כל ישראל לילך בה ולחזק בדקה, וילחם מלחמות ד', הרי זה בחזקת שהוא משיח. אם עשה והצליח ונצח כל האומות שסביביו ובנה מקדש במקומו וקבץ נדחי ישראל הרי זה משיח בודאי. ואם לא הצליח עד כה או נהרג בידוע שאינו זה שהבטיחה עליו תורה והרי הוא ככל מלכי בית דוד השלמים הכשרים שמתו.

And if a king were to arise from the house of David, speaking Torah and involved in mitzvot like his ancestor David, following the written and spoken Torah, and he would compel all Israel to follow it and strengthen it, and he would fight the wars of Gd, he would be presumed to be Mashiach. If he were to act and be successful and defeat all of the nations around him and build the Temple in its place and gather the scattered of Israel, then he would definitely be Mashiach. And if he would not succeed to that extent, or he would be killed, it would be known that he was not the one promised by the Torah. He was like all other kosher and complete Davidic kings, who died.

10. Rambam (12th century Egypt), Mishneh Torah, Hilchot Sanhedrin 1:1

מצות עשה של תורה למנות שופטים ושוטרים בכל מדינה ומדינה ובכל פלך ופלך שנאמר... שופטים אלו הדיינים הקבועין בבית דין ובעלי דינין באים לפניהם, שוטרים אלו בעלי מקל ורצועה, והם עומדים לפני הדיינים, המסבין בשווקים וברחובות ועל החנויות לתקן השערים והמדות, ולהכות כל מעוות. וכל מעשיהם ע"פ הדיינים, וכל שיראו בו עוות דבר מביאין אותו לבית דין ודנין אותו כפי רשעו.

There is a biblical command to appoint judges and officers in every land and area, as it is written... *Shoftim* are the judges who are fixed in court, with litigants coming before them. *Shotrim* are the wielders of the staff and lash. They stand before the judges, [and] they circulate in the markets and streets and stores to fix the prices and measures, and to strike all who are corrupt. All of their deeds are at the word of the judges, and when they see impropriety in a person then they bring him to court, and judge him according to his wickedness.

11. Rabbeinu Nisim (14th century Spain) to Nedarim 28a

וכתבו בתוספות דדוקא במלכי עובדי כוכבים אמר דינא דמלכותא דינא מפני שהארץ שלו ויכול לומר להם אם לא תעשו מצותי אגרש אתכם מן הארץ אבל במלכי ישראל לא לפי שא"י כל ישראל שותפין בה

And Tosafot wrote that it is specifically regarding non-Jewish kings that we recognize the law of the empire, because the land belongs to him, and he can say, "If you do not follow my laws, I will evict you from the land." But Jewish kings cannot do this, for all Israel are partners in the Land of Israel.

12. Rabbi Asher Weiss (21st century Israel), Minchat Asher 1:101:2

נראה דכל שזה דרך המסחר והתפתחות טבעית של הכלכלה אינו יכול לעכב. ויש בזה הרבה דוגמאות בחיי המעשה, דאטו נימא דאם היינו נשאלים אם מותר לפתוח צרכניות וסופרמרקטים מחשש שבעלי מכולות וחנויות קטנות יפסידו פרנסתם היינו אוסרים? ואטו היינו אוסרים לייצר מכוניות משום שהעגלונים רוכבי הסוסים יפסידו פרנסתם? ואטו היינו אוסרים את פיתוחו של המחשב משום שעל ידו המוני כתבנים יפסידו פרנסתם ושוב לא יהיה בהם צורך? וכך גם בכל המצאה חדשה אטו נאסור על פיתוחו שמא יתקיים על ידו "ישן מפני חדש תוציאו" ויפגע פרנסתם של רבים?

It seems that [despite the limitations on competition in halachah], anything which is normal business and natural development of the economy cannot be prevented. There are many examples of this in practical life. Would anyone say that if we were asked if one may open convenience stores and supermarkets, because of the concern that the owners of groceries and small stores would lose their livelihood, we should forbid it? Would we forbid creating cars because wagon drivers who ride horses would lose their livelihood? Would we forbid the development of computers because it would cause many typists to lose their livelihood, as they would no longer be needed?! And the same is true for every invention – should we forbid its development because through it we will fulfill, "And you shall clear out the old to make room for the new" and damage the livelihood of many?!

Why might one think of Judaism as left-wing?

13. Menachem Begin, *Basic Outlines of our Life-Worldview and National Outlook* (1951)

Israel's prophets and seers, from whom we have inherited the aspiration for justice that guide our repose, elevated visions that are very difficult to realize. There were those that introduced the vision of social justice, to "repair the world in the Kingdom of G-d" and those that highlighted the vision of world government: "and everyone will make one association". That gave mankind the vision of world peace: "and nation will not raise sword against nation". However, they did not delude their generation or the coming generations; they admitted that the realization will be difficult and saw it only "at the end of days". They made their vision a sort of "guiding star" by whose light man wandering in darkness will proceed and find his path and even reach his objective.

14. Rabbi Aharon Lichtenstein, *Rav Soloveitchik's Approach To Zionism* (2002)

In the Rav's essay "*Ma Dodekh Mi-Dod*," a eulogy for his uncle Rav Yitzchak Zev (Velvel) Soloveitchik, he explains that what was generally understood as R. Velvel's anti-Zionism was not so much opposition to Zionism, as an inability to place it within a halakhic category. He contrasts his uncle's view with that of "some who say," and the latter position seems to represent the Rav's own. Note that the Rav does not present a political doctrine to oppose his uncle's position; rather, he presents a different view of the relationship of the Halakha to the world:

Indeed, there are some who say that the Halakha – which is all-inclusive and all-encompassing and all-penetrating, which is concerned with every detail of existence... – does not remove itself from the [concrete] event, and even rebels against it. Halakha is courageous and full of strength. It knows nothing of disappointment, nor does it accept the mastery of the event. It storms it time and again, and will not cease until it succeeds in establishing the superiority of the Divine ideal over it... Even if the kingdom of secularity is iron-hard and of awesome strength, Halakha does not tremble or despair, but rather besieges it with a mighty flow of volcanic spirit, alive and giving life, until it is subdued...

15. Rabbi Aharon Lichtenstein, *Rav Soloveitchik's Approach To Zionism* (2002)

The Rav had no patience for philosophies that glorified passivity and reliance on miracles. At the beginning of the 1960's, a few years after the launch of Sputnik, I had occasion to talk with the Rav about those people who claimed that man should not reach out for the heavens, for "the heavens are the heavens of G-d," and only "the earth is given to human beings." The Rav heaped scorn upon them. One of those present jumped up to protest: "But Rabbi, the Ramban in *Bechukotai* (*Vayikra* 27:11) speaks about how a person should have faith in the Holy One, and not to delve into matters that are too wondrous for him." The Rav replied, "I heard from my father, in the name of my grandfather, that the Ramban never uttered that statement!"

16. Rabbi Avraham Yitzchak Kook, *Orot haTeshuvah* 5:3

העולם מוכרח הוא לבוא לידי תשובה שלימה. אין העולם דבר עומד על מצב אחד כי אם הולך הוא ומתפתח.

The world is guaranteed to come to complete repentance. The world does not remain in one place; it perpetually evolves.

17. Talmud, Sanhedrin 2b-3a

והאי דלא בעינן מומחין משום דרבי חנינא, דאמר רבי חנינא: דבר תורה, אחד דיני ממונות ואחד דיני נפשות בדרישה ובחקירה, ומה טעם אמרו דיני ממונות לא בעינן דרישה וחקירה - כדי שלא תנעול דלת בפני לווין.

We do not require experts, because of Rabbi Chanina's principle: Biblically, both financial and capital matters should require extensive interrogation of witnesses. Why did they say that financial matters do not require extensive interrogation? To avoid locking the door before borrowers.

18. Rabbi Avraham Gombiner (17th century Poland), Magen Avraham 242:1

אם הערלים מיקרין השער דגים נכון לתקן שלא יקנו דגים וראיה ממשנה ספ"א דכריתות (צ"צ)

Should the non-Jews elevate the price of fish, it would be good to enact that they not purchase fish [for Shabbat]...

19. Rambam (12th century Egypt), Mishneh Torah, Laws of Gifts to the Needy 9:3

מעולם לא ראינו ולא שמענו בקהל מישראל שאין להן קופה של צדקה...

Never have we seen or heard of a Jewish community which lacked a tzedakah fund!

20. Rashi to Sotah 45b

לא בא לידינו ופטרנוהו - בגמ' מפרש בלא מזונות והיינו ידינו לא שפכו לא נהרג על ידינו שפטרנוהו בלא מזונות והוצרך ללסטם את הבריות ועל כך נהרג.

"He did not come to our hands and we sent him away" - The Talmud explains: Without food. Meaning, our hands did not spill it, he was not killed due to us, that we sent him away without food and he needed to attack people and was thereby killed.

21. Rabbi Eliezer Waldenberg (20th century Israel), Tzitz Eliezer 15:40:6-7

ועד כדי כך היה פשוט הדבר להפוסקים ז"ל שישנו חיוב כזה [לשלם לרפואת חולה-מ.ט.]. על כל הסובבים את החולה עד שדנים בהיכא שהוציאו הוצאות עבור כך מבלי לשאול את החולה באם מחויב החולה אח"כ להחזיר להם ההוצאות, בהיות ומחויבים ועומדים על כך... עפ"י האמור, ברור ופשוט הדבר כי הממשלה אשר בריאות הציבור צריך ומחויב להיות בראש דאגותיה, מחובתה גם היא להקציב תקציבים כספיים כדי לעזור למניעת ההתפתחות של מחלה זו היא קוצר-ראיה בהגשת טיפול דרוש באמצעות צוות רופאים מומחים...

It was so obvious to halachic authorities that there is such a duty [to pay for an ill person's treatment] upon all of those around the ill person, to the point that they debated the case in which the community had spent for this without asking the ill person – is the ill person obligated to repay them for their expenditures, since they were obligated to do this...

Based on what has been said, it is clear and simple that the government, which must have the health of society as its top concern, must also allocate funds to help prevent the development of this disease of nearsightedness, by providing the necessary treatment via expert doctors...

22. Rabbi Moshe Isserles (16th century Poland), Choshen Mishpat 369:11

לא אמרינן דינא דמלכותא אלא בדבר שיש בו הנאה למלך או שהוא לתקנת בני המדינה, אבל לא שידונו בדיני עובדי כוכבים, דאם כן בטלו כל דיני ישראל

We do not recognize government law other than in matters that benefit the king, or that benefit the citizenry, but not to judge by the laws of idolaters; that would cancel all of the laws of Israel.

A Jewish Political Identity?

23. Rabbeinu Nisim, Derashot haRan 11

על דעתי הוא כך, שהם רצו שעיקר המשפט במה שבין אדם לחבירו יהיה נמשך מצד המלכות, והוא אומרו (ש"א ח ד - ה) "ויתקבצו כל זקני ישראל ויבואו אל שמואל הרמתי ויאמרו אליו הנה אתה זקנת ובניך לא הלכו בדרכיך עתה שימה לנו מלך לשפטנו ככל הגוים," ופירושו אצלי הוא כך, שהם ראו שמה שצריך לסידור המדיני, יהיה מתוקן כשימשך מצד המלכות משימשך מצד השופט, ולכן אמרו "הנה זקנת ולא תוכל לשפט עוד," ובניך אינם ראויים שיחול בנו השפע האלקי על ידיהם, כי אינם הולכים בדרכיך, ולכן ראוי שיהיה לנו מלך, ושיהיה משפטנו על פיו, והוא אמרם "שימה לנו מלך לשפטנו ככל הגוים..."

ואילו שאלו להם מלך בסתם שיאמרו "שימה לנו מלך," או שיבקשוהו לסיבת תיקון מלחמותיהם, לא ימצא להם בדבר הזה עון או חטא, אבל מצוה. אך היה חטאתם באמרם "שימה לנו מלך לשפטנו ככל הגוים," שרצו שיהיו משפטיהם נמשכים מצד המלכות, לא מצד שופטי התורה. ויורה על זה מה שכתוב אחריו (שם ו) "וירע הדבר בעיני שמואל כאשר אמרו תנה לנו מלך לשפטנו," לא אמר "כאשר אמרו תנה לנו מלך" בלבד... ומפני זה אמר ד' לשמואל "לא אותך מאסו כי אותי מאסו ממלוך עליהם" (שם ז), כי הם בוחרים בתיקון ענינם הטבעי, משיחול בהם ענין האלקי.

In my opinion it is this: They wanted basic justice between parties to come from the throne, as in Shemuel I 8:4-5, which I take to mean that they thought that national order would function best when it flowed from the throne, as opposed to from the Shofeit. Therefore they said, "You have aged and you can no longer judge," and your children are not suited

to cause Divine benefit to be manifest upon us for they do not follow your ways. Therefore, it would be appropriate for us to have a king, and for our judgment to happen through him. Thus they said, "Place a king upon us to judge us, like all of the nations"...

Had they asked for a king in general, saying, "Place a king upon us," or had they asked for the sake of battle, there would have been neither guilt nor sin in this, but a mitzvah. Their sin was only in saying, "Place a king upon us to judge us, like all of the nations," wanting their judgment to flow from the throne, not from judges of Torah. We see this in 8:6, in which it did not say, "As they said: Place a king upon us" alone... And therefore Gd said to Shemuel, "They did not reject you, but they rejected Me from reigning over them," for they chose natural running of their affairs, as opposed to Divine control.