THEODOR HERZL
and Austria: a century later

an essay by STEVEN BELLER
The funeral procession with the hearse carrying Theodor Herzl’s coffin. Photograph published by Zion Publishing Company, 1904.
PREFACE

IN COMMEMORATION OF THE CENTENARY OF THE DEATH OF THEODOR HERZL

Throughout the year 2004, a number of events will explore the life and works of the man who created modern Zionism.

Herzl symposia will take place in Jerusalem, Vienna, Budapest, London and Paris; Herzl’s best-known newspaper Feuilletons will be published in a special commemorative edition; a commemorative stamp will be issued in Austria, Hungary and Israel; the Austrian newspaper “Die Presse” (formerly known as “Neue Freie Presse”) will honor the work of its famous correspondent and feuilletonist, etc.

For the Austrian Foreign Ministry, this anniversary presented a welcome opportunity to ask Steven Beller, a well known expert on Austrian history and Herzl biographer, to write an essay on “Theodor Herzl and Austria: a century later.”

The Austrian Federal Ministry for Foreign Affairs hopes that readers will enjoy this brochure, illustrated with some extremely rare photographs. The opinions expressed herein are, naturally, those of Steven Beller.
Theodor Herzl died a hundred years ago this year, at Edlach in Lower Austria, on 3 July 1904. His funeral in Vienna a few days later saw crowds of Jews from near and far come to mourn him. Many of those present had come to view Herzl, due to his role as founder and leader of the new Zionist movement, as the leader of the Jewish people, and his death, at the age of only forty-four, was a profound loss to them. It was also a cause of much grief for his colleagues at the *Neue Freie Presse*, where he had been for over a decade a star reporter and feuilletonist.

Herzl’s twin roles as leader of Jewish nationalism and Austrian literary figure have never appeared all that compatible, then or today. It is well known that the editors of his newspaper, both strong supporters of Jewish assimilation into Austrian society, forbade Herzl (or anyone else for that matter) from writing about or even mentioning in the pages of the paper his “other” career. It is often claimed that the only words the newspaper devoted to Herzl’s Zionism was a single mention in an otherwise comprehensive obituary. This is not true. A eulogy by a colleague was published in the newspaper on the day of his funeral “unter dem Strich”. It openly discussed Herzl’s Zionism, indeed described as “almost foolish” any attempt to talk of the man without mentioning it. It was Herzl’s pride, it claimed, that led him to champion his fellow persecuted Jews. “Messianic urgings” drove him to want “to lead his people from the desert of misery back to the Promised Land.” The eulogist, as a supporter of the full integration of Jews within modern European society, made his disagreement with Herzl’s strategy clear, but was remarkably perceptive about the grounds of Herzl’s own Zionist impulse:

“The rights of a thousand years, acquired in unspeakable suffering, were to be thrown away for the pursuit of a beautiful dream from the far Orient. Pride would have been better served, if not
more nobly, by a staunch defence of these rights. But our friend preferred the more refined attitude, the more handsome posture, as befitted his artistic nature. For he remained an artist, even in his quest for this shadow. He believed he could rebuild the state of the Jews as if it were an architectonic work of art. It was astounding with what tenacity he held to his dream.”

The eulogy ends with the words: “He was too proud, much too proud, not to be a good human being”.

What makes this essay, written three days after Herzl’s death, so remarkably prescient is the way that it anticipates what has become one of the main ways of linking Herzl’s role of Zionist leader and Austrian writer: Herzl’s persona as an artist. Several writers on Herzl have further claimed that the “artistic” approach that Herzl took to his Zionism arose from his background as a figure in the literary and cultural world of fin-de-siècle Vienna, with its emphasis on aestheticism, political irrationalism and the “politics of the new key”.

While it might appear deeply ironic for Austrians to want to commemorate a man whose life purpose came to be to achieve the evacuation of Jews from Austria (as well as the rest of Europe), an even deeper irony would have it that Herzl’s very Zionism had Viennese, and hence Austrian, roots. According to this view, it was not only Herzl’s career as a master of the feuilleton that marked him as a figure in Austrian modern culture, but also the style, and indeed content, of his Zionism. As Herzl is regarded as the father of the state of Israel, the implication would seem to be that Israel, the Zionist movement that brought it about, and hence the profound change in Jewish identity that resulted from this, are all, in some measure, a part of the Viennese, and Austrian, contribution to the modern world.

Many historians of Zionism would at this point object that Zionism as a movement was much more than the personal campaign of the Viennese journalist, Theodor Herzl; and they would be right. The wish
to establish, or re-establish, a Jewish homeland in Palestine (or Eretz Israel, as Zionists prefer to call it), had been the basis of a quasi-political movement among Eastern European Jewry long before Herzl came on the scene. Even the word “Zionism” had been coined before Herzl had his revelation about the solution to the Jewish Problem. Much of the intellectual and cultural tradition of Zionism also has little to do with Herzl, having far stronger and deeper roots in the “cultural Zionism” associated with Russian Jewish thinkers such as Ahad Ha’am. Zionism, before Herzl and after Herzl, was largely a project supported by, and eventually led by, Eastern European Jews. Nevertheless, for a crucial period in the 1890s and early 1900s, it was Theodor Herzl, and his Western and Central European Jewish supporters, who gave a kick start to the movement, and gave it the form and strategies that were eventually to lead to the founding of the state of Israel. Without Herzl, the assimilated Austrian “artist”, the history of Zionism might have turned out quite differently, if at all.

The question of the Viennese or Austrian roots of Herzl’s Zionism remains, therefore, of considerable significance when trying to understand the origins and success of Zionism more generally. This question has three main aspects. The first is the matter with which we started: how “Viennese” or “Austrian” was Herzl? How much was it his Austrian background that gave him his “artistic” approach to the world, and hence to the Jewish problem, if indeed his approach is adequately described as that of an artist? The second aspect would be the role of Austria and Vienna in making Herzl into a Zionist. Regardless of whether Austria shaped his character, was it his Austrian experience, or, as he was to claim, that in the Paris of the Dreyfus Trial, that revealed to him the need for a Jewish national movement, and a state for the Jewish people? Third, did Herzl’s Austrian background and his relationship to Vienna significantly shape his thought, and his visions of a Jewish state, and if so, how? Wrapped up in each of these questions is another that might appear at first sight a surprising one: where, if anywhere in all of this, was the Jewish aspect to Herzl’s thought and actions? Or are those
who have pointed to the “Austrian” character of Herzl’s Zionism right in also implying that not only was Herzl’s Zionism “Austrian”, it was also not “Jewish”?

How one answers these questions, it will soon become clear, depends as much on what we mean by terms such as “artistic”, “Viennese”, “Austrian” and “Jewish”, and how we see these terms in relation to each other, as it does on anything that Herzl himself said, wrote or did. That said, it would help us understand this complicated character, this great figure in modern Jewish history who was also an Austrian journalist, if a few of the more salient facts of his all too brief life were recounted.
The new synagogue in Tabakgasse (Dohány utcza) in Budapest. Photograph by György Klösz, c. 1890. The synagogue was built according to plans by the German architect Ludwig Förster, who contributed significantly to the planning of the famous Viennese boulevard “Ringstrasse”. The synagogue was completed one year before Theodor Herzl was born. Theodor Herzl’s birthplace can be seen to the left of the synagogue.
Herzl was born on 2 May 1860 in Budapest, to parents from the rapidly rising German-speaking Jewish middle class. Herzl grew up speaking both German and Magyar, and early on acquired the ambition to be a writer. It was only in 1878 that Herzl and his parents moved to Vienna,
with Herzl beginning his studies for a law degree at the Habsburg capital’s university in the same year. During his student years Herzl entered fully into university social life, in which sons of the liberal bourgeoisie such as himself often joined Burschenschaften. These dueling fraternities tended to be on the left wing of Austrian bourgeois politics, which at the time meant left-liberal German nationalism. Herzl’s Burschenschaft, “Albia” was no exception, and, although Herzl appears to have been on the more moderate end of student politics (declaring himself initially to be “Hungarian” rather than German in his student records), he seems for a time to have been carried along with the German nationalist tide in Vienna University student politics. His membership of “Albia” ended in 1883, however, when he resigned from the fraternity over anti-Semitic remarks by a fellow member, Hermann Bahr, at a dinner commemorating Richard Wagner.

THEODOR HERZL (right) as fellow student of the fraternity “Albia”, where Hermann Bahr, among others, also was a member.
Herzl graduated with a law degree in 1884, and set off to practice law in Salzburg. This only lasted for a year, though, perhaps due to what Herzl later claimed to be the consideration that, as a Jew, he could never get to the top of the legal profession in Austria. From August 1885 Herzl pursued a career as a freelance writer and playwright, garnering most success with his traveller’s feuilletons, reports on his many trips abroad. (From 1883 until his death he was often not in Vienna, either on trips to gather experiences for his feuilletons, in Paris as a correspondent, or, after 1895, crisscrossing Europe on his Zionist mission.) His success as a playwright in the late 1880s, though substantial, proved fleeting. *Wilddiebe* (The Poachers), which he co-wrote with the more established writer, Hugo Wittmann, was a smash hit on its premiere at the Burgtheater in early 1889, and later that year his solo effort, *Der Flüchtling* (The Refugee), was also performed at the Burgtheater. It was after this

success, which fulfilled one of his dearest ambitions, that he proposed to and soon married Julie Naschauer, the blonde, blue-eyed daughter of a prosperous Jewish family, also formerly from Hungary. Lasting success as a dramatist (and as a husband and family man) eluded him, however; it was his feuilletons of 1891, about his travels in the Pyrenees, especially that on Luz, which made him a star in the Austrian (Viennese) literary firmament. This success led to the *Neue Freie Presse* offering him the prestigious post of the paper’s correspondent in Paris, which Herzl accepted with alacrity.

*JULIE HERZL*, whose maiden name was Naschauer (1868-1907). Photograph, c. 1888.
Herzl’s time in Paris transformed him. He soon became disillusioned with French politics, which is as much to say that he began to understand how politics actually worked; at the same time he became a most effective journalist, and an even better feuilletonist. He also became increasingly concerned with the Jewish Problem. He had shown interest in this question in 1882-83, around the time of his falling out with his “brothers” in “Albia”, but it was only in the early 1890s, when he could witness the rise of anti-Semitism in both France and Austria, that he began paying the subject ever greater attention. In the autumn of 1894, Herzl wrote a play, Das Ghetto (The Ghetto), later renamed Das neue Ghetto, that described what for him was not only a social and political crisis for Austrian Jewry (the play is set in Vienna), but also the moral impasse in which assimilated Jews found themselves. It was in December, that is to say after Herzl had written this very bitter and pessimistic depiction of the crisis of assimilated Jewry, that the scandal about Captain Alfred Dreyfus broke. Herzl reported diligently on the Dreyfus trial in December and January, and in early 1895 tried to get his “ghetto” play performed anonymously, by having his friend, Arthur Schnitzler, propose it to various theatres, all without success.

Herzl was in Vienna at the end of March and the beginning of April, long enough to witness the startling, for Jews shocking, victory of the anti-Semitic Christian Socials in Vienna’s municipal elections. Herzl returned to Paris in a state of agitation, determined to do something about the Jewish Question. At the end of April he wrote a letter to Baron Maurice de Hirsch. A prominent Jewish philanthropist, Hirsch had funded Jewish settlements in Argentina. Herzl now proposed to go further and establish, instead of a mere settlement, a full-blown state for Jews. Herzl mailed the letter in mid-May, and Hirsch granted Herzl an interview shortly afterward. The meeting was a disaster, with Hirsch rejecting Herzl’s confused presentation out of hand. Yet Herzl left the meeting even more convinced that he had found the solution to the Jewish Problem. It was after he left his meeting with Hirsch, that very day, that Herzl began his diary “for the Jewish cause”. The day was 2 June,
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ALFRED DREYFUS. Photograph, c. 1890.
1895, which happened to be Whitsun. We know this for that is how Herzl noted the date in what was to become his Zionist diary.

For the next few weeks, and then months, Herzl worked feverishly on putting together what would become his book, Der Judenstaat: Versuch einer modernen Lösung der Judenfrage (The state for the Jews: an attempt at a modern solution of the Jewish Question). At first he wrote it in the form of a “Speech to the Rothschilds”, hoping to convince the Jewish grandees to support his plan. When this failed, Herzl went public, and published Der Judenstaat in early 1896. Its basic thesis was that the anti-Semites, objectionable though they might be morally, were right in their assertion that Jews were different. Jews were, as Herzl put it “ein Volk” (one people). In any case, the fact of anti-Semitism and its almost certain survival in the modern world meant that the Jewish hope for full social integration through assimilation was illusory. The only way in which Jews could truly hope for their true emancipation was by the establishing of a state of Jews, for Jews.

Der Judenstaat made an immediate impression on European Jewry, partly because it was such a surprise for Herzl, a well-known “Western” assimilated Jew, to reach this conclusion, and partly because there were already many Jews, mostly from the Russian Empire, who had much earlier made the same argument. Herzl did not so much create a Jewish national movement as provide the leadership for, and reinvigorate, a pre-existing one. He united a large group of mostly Russian Jewish nationalists, who had for years been involved in the “lovers of Zion” movement, with new, “Western” converts to the cause, such as himself, and his future right-hand man, Max Nordau. The reason for Der Judenstaat’s success was that it was more than just a book, it was the blueprint for a Jewish nationalist cause to which Herzl now devoted as much of his energy, talent, time and resources as he could spare from his job as journalist.
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Front page of the first edition of “The Jewish State”, dedicated to the poet Richard Beer-Hofmann by Theodor Herzl “so that he would be remembered kindly”.
His talents as a writer and journalist were well known, and he was adept at using these in the service of his cause. Yet he also displayed remarkable powers of organization. By 1897, Herzl was able to organize the First Zionist Congress in Basle and start the publication of a Zionist journal, *Die Welt*. While still a prominent fixture at the *Neue Freie Presse*, Herzl became in a very short space of time the leader of a far-flung, if not very deeply rooted, worldwide Jewish national movement. Indeed he showed great political adroitness in turning the considerable power and influence over Central European public opinion that his position in the *Neue Freie Presse* afforded into opportunities to plead his case for a state for the Jews to the high and mighty of Europe and the Middle East.

The Casino of Basle, - the building with the portico of pillars in the middle of the postcard -, served as the venue for the first Zionist Congresses. The plenary took place in the big Music Hall. Picture postcard, 1897.
"A Declaration by the English Government". Under this headline Herzl published the full text of a letter by Sir Clement Hill to L.J. Greenberg, Herzl’s intermediary in London, regarding the “Uganda Project” in “Die Welt”. 29 August 1903.
Herzl’s main strategy in the ensuing years was to achieve the establishment of a state for the Jews -- or, as the official Zionist aim agreed at the Basle Congress formulated it, “a home for the Jewish people in Palestine secured by public law” -- through diplomatic negotiations. Herzl established contacts with the Turkish Sultan, the British government, the Russian tsarist government, the Pope, the Italian government, and even the Austrian government (though this was not central to his plans). He even traveled to Palestine in 1898 to pursue what at the time seemed the most promising scheme, a Jewish homeland under the protectorate of the German Empire of William II. All of his efforts ended
in failure, and partly to compensate for his lack of success, and to boost the morale of his followers and sympathizers, Herzl in 1902 wrote *Altneuland*, in effect a second, more detailed version of his vision of a state for the Jews. When he did achieve a major diplomatic success in 1903, with the British government’s recognition of the need to do something to help the Jewish people, the British offer, of a parcel of territory in “Uganda” (actually in modern-day western Kenya), ended up sparking a crisis that almost destroyed the Zionist movement (and did eventually lead to a major split). Herzl’s proposal at the Sixth Zionist Congress to accept the Uganda offer set off a major revolt among the Russian Zionists. With their quite different intellectual and cultural background, the “Russians” were determined that the Jewish homeland could be in Palestine and nowhere else. They were suspicious of the idea that Uganda might be only, as Nordau clumsily put it, a temporary *Nachtasyl* (night shelter) for the desperate masses of Jews wanting to leave Russia and Rumania, before a permanent homeland in Palestine became available. They feared that a temporary solution would end any hope of the permanent one that they so fervently desired.

In the wake of this revolt, Herzl was able to achieve a “compromise”, really a *de facto* admission of defeat. The Uganda offer was in any case withdrawn. Under immense pressure and stress, and with a worsening heart problem, Herzl was forced to take rest cures, at Franzensbad and Edlach, but he died a few months after the Uganda crisis, on 3 July at Edlach, of heart failure. He was buried in Vienna on 7 July. In 1949, shortly after the founding of the state of Israel, Herzl’s remains were taken from Vienna to Jerusalem, where they now rest, on “Mount Herzl”.

This brief summary provides some indication of the great drama and many complications in Herzl’s life and career. It also provides a starting point for addressing the question with which we began, of Herzl’s relationship with Vienna and Austria.
Theodor Herzl’s unostentious black tombstone on the Herzl mountain in Jerusalem.
Let us start with the question posed above of how “Austrian” Herzl was in his general approach, as well as in his Zionism. Much of the recent literature on Herzl has emphasized his theatricality, his strongly developed sense of the aesthetic side of existence, and his understanding of the power of symbols. These “artistic” aspects have been attributed to Herzl’s Viennese and Austrian background. Herzl’s snobbery, his great admiration for the nobility and principles of chivalry, even dueling, have also been highlighted, and identified with the more conservative, “pre-modern” aspects of Austrian society. These traits were undeniably there, but it is unclear if it makes much sense to see them as specifically Viennese or Austrian.

Herzl was certainly given to the dramatic gesture. In 1893 he suggested that one way to solve the Jewish Question might be to arrange a mass conversion of Jews in St. Stephen’s Cathedral in Vienna, with the leaders of this historical event, Herzl among them, standing proudly on this side of the threshold, like Moses not themselves entering the Promised Land of complete assimilation and “racial miscegenation”. In 1897 he was very concerned to orchestrate the Zionist Congress in Basle to maximum dramatic effect. His Zionist diary notes also show a great awareness of the power of symbols, whether it be the flag of the new state, the yellow band of the new Jewish honorary Order, or the elaborately thought out ceremonial inauguration of the leader of the new Jewish state. Modeled on the coronation of the Venetian Doge, the ceremony would involve the leader entering in sackcloth only for him to change from this to an ornate uniform, more befitting the dignified leader of the Jews.

Herzl was quite aware of this “artistic” side to his Zionism. At one point he noted in his Zionist diary: “And actually I am in all this still the dramatist. I take poor, destitute people off the street, dress them in wonderful clothes, and have them perform before the world a marvelous play of mine.”2 This should, however, hardly surprise, as Herzl was, after all, a fairly accomplished playwright. Naturally, he thought dra-
matically. One could just as well describe this theatricality in Herzl’s attitude as coming from his Hungarian background as anything Austrian, and the most straightforward explanation is that this was how a middling playwright of the late nineteenth century would have thought, from whichever part of the European world he came.

Something similar could be said of Herzl’s snobbery. There was not much specifically Austrian about it. Herzl was simply displaying traits that were common, and remain so, in the offspring of parvenu families all over the developed Western world. Herzl’s fixation as a child with chivalrous knights and damsels in distress could just as well be observed in many of today’s children. When he was older, it is true, this fixation with nobility persisted, but it was not so much an admiration of Austrian nobility as of Prussian Junkers, and English gentlemen. It was Bismarck that he admired for his *raison d’état*, and the sympathetic nobleman in Herzl’s Utopian novel, *Altneuland*, who witnesses the success of Zionism, is Kingscourt, an Americanized Prussian Junker.

Herzl often displayed a preference for the “aristocratic” principle when thinking about the new state for the Jews. He once proposed that a Zionist group in London’s East End call itself the “Knights of Palestine”; he dreamed of creating a Jewish “aristocracy”; and it is clear that Herzl, as Zionist, was very suspicious of democracy, at least initially. He was far from alone in these views, however: many mainstream liberal thinkers and politicians of the time thought along similar lines, including the classic liberal thinker, John Stuart Mill. A society needed, in the view of such liberals, to recognize and reward merit, industry and talent. Their ideal was not complete equality but rather a system of meritocracy of the educated and the successful, an open “aristocracy”, literally the rule by the “best”. It was in this widespread, *liberal* understanding of “aristocracy” that Herzl wanted to apply it to his model state of the Jews. Democracy, on the other hand, was in this view dangerous, because it allowed the uneducated masses to dominate politics and introduce the “tyranny of the majority” of which Mill had warned. In any case, Herzl
was not completely wedded to “aristocracy” over “democracy”. When pondering the system of government for his model state, Herzl offered two solutions that were both feasible: the “aristocratic republic” and the “democratic monarchy”. Herzl preferred the former but would accept the latter. What we have here is not an aristocratizing snob, but rather, as Kalus Dethloff has pointed out, a former lawyer trying to provide his constitutional plans with a moderating balance between form and content, in other words a very rational, and liberal notion.

Herzl also wanted to introduce dueling into his model state for the Jews. This could be, and has been, interpreted as a survival of the sentiments of his student days as a member of a dueling fraternity with German nationalist sympathies. Yet Herzl explicitly states that he wants to have the duel in his state to provide the new Jewish society with a patina of French refinement.\footnote{3} Herzl’s admiration of nobility and aristocracy was for French, German, Venetian and English forms, anything, it seems, but the Austrian variant. Perhaps this love of foreign aristocracies is an Austrian and Viennese trait, but if it is, it is so rather indirectly.

Another trait in Herzl’s Zionism that has been associated with his Austrian, or at least Viennese, background is the “post-liberal” character of his politics. Carl E. Schorske, the doyen of the cultural history of \textit{fin-de-siècle} Vienna, controversially included Herzl along with the Christian Social anti-Semitic leader, Karl Lueger, and the German nationalist anti-Semitic leader, Georg von Schönerer, in his trio of practitioners of “politics in a new key”, with their irrationalist sense of the dynamic power of the new, mass politics. Herzl did indeed claim to “understand” the crowd, and, to add to the argument, he was also given to quoting in his diary the phrase from Virgil’s \textit{Aeneid} made famous by another Viennese, Sigmund Freud, about threatening to stir up the forces of the underworld against the powers that be: “\textit{Flectere si nequeo superos, Acheronta movebo.}” The sentiment included in this sentence would seem to be right in line with the idea of Herzl as a practitioner of irrationalist mass politics.
KARL LUEGER (1844-1910), Mayor of Vienna from 1897-1910
On the other hand, the quote links Herzl to Freud, rather than Lueger and Schönerer, a rather different part of the intellectual geography of Vienna. Moreover, the common source for the quote for both Herzl and Freud, apart from a shared grounding in the classics, was probably from the career of Ferdinand Lassalle, the German socialist leader admired by both Herzl and Freud, and like them Jewish. Lassalle also had little or nothing to do with Vienna or Austria, which points to the obvious fact that the practice of mass politics, whether irrationalist or not, was not confined to Vienna at the end of the nineteenth century. In that respect it is notable that Herzl drew examples of his new psychology of the crowd not from Austrian but rather from French politics and society, from the style and tactics of French socialists, and from the rationale behind the horse racing at Longchamps. One of his most extensive essays on how to shape and lead crowd behaviour claims as its role model none other than the American showman, P.T. Barnum. Herzl was nothing if not cosmopolitan in the sources of his political irrationalism.

Then again, Herzl’s insights into modern mass politics were anything but irrationalist in the sense of Lueger or Schönerer when it came to the desired outcome. For all his ability to wage, and understand, the “politics of noise”, Herzl usually tried to emphasize the legality, sobriety and rationality of his Zionist movement. He forced his deputy, Max Nordau, to wear white tie at the opening ceremony of the First Zionist Congress at Basle in order not only to create “solemnity”, but also, and more significantly, to provide a “measured tone” to the proceedings. Herzl’s aim, in other words, was anything but bringing about some overturning of society in the manner of extreme right-wing nationalists. Rather he wanted to use his “post-liberal” understanding of modern mass politics to create the sense of legality, responsibility, sobriety, rationality and order that he, in his liberal understanding, deemed necessary as the basis for a new national state. In this he much more resembled liberal, progressive nationalist leaders such as Thomas Masaryk and Charles Stewart Parnell (with whom he consciously compared himself) than he did Schönerer or Lueger.
DR. MAX NORDAU (1849-1923), who was also born in Hungary, lived and worked in Paris as a doctor and famous writer. As Herzl’s loyal friend and collaborator, he offered constructive criticism on some of Herzl’s ideas. Nordau also worked for the newspaper “Die Welt” and supported the Organization of Zionist Congresses. His speech at the First Zionist Congress in Basle was regarded by many as the most impressive of all lectures.
Herzl did conform to Viennese or Austrian type in his strong sense of the pleasures of life. He was determined that the “circenses” (circuses) of modern life be transferred from Europe to the new state for the Jews. He explicitly mentioned in this context the institution of the Viennese coffeehouse, and noted that, unlike a previous exodus, this time the Jews would be able to bring their fleshpots with them. He was intent on having luxury goods and high culture, proper, material Western civilization in the new state, which he summed up in the word “Kultur”. Even here though, the Austrian character of his approach is unclear: when he remarks on the necessity of having opera and its associated luxuries, it is the Paris Opera and not the Viennese Hofoper that is his model. It was a general, European, cosmopolitan high culture that he wanted the state for the Jews to inherit.

Herzl was especially “Viennese” as a feuilleton writer. His essays have a light, ironical, subjective tone, typical of the genre. As the leading feuilletonist in Vienna around 1900, Herzl can indeed be said to have set the standard that others followed. Yet Herzl often used this ironic style to deal with very serious topics. The feuilleton was not always about elegantly rendered subjective feelings on topics calculated to divert rather than inform, as has sometimes been suggested; it could also be about the horrible poverty of some of the Viennese suburbs, as in Herzl’s 1898 essay on “Armensommer”.

There is, further, a deep irony about Herzl as a feuilletonist. The feuilletons that he churned out after 1895 with consummate facility were precisely the product of what he saw as the drudgery of his existence as a Neue Freie Presse journalist. They were his living, not his life. The feuilletons, the most Viennese aspect of Herzl, were precisely what he was trying to escape as a Zionist leader intent on solving the Jewish Problem. After all, part of that “problem” for him was the way in which Jewish intellectuals in European societies were forced into demoralizing and dispiriting careers, becoming venal lawyers or over-worked physicians, or hack-journalists, such as himself. It was Herzl the feuil-
letonist, the “untrue” Herzl, who drove the other Herzl to his Zionism, so that he could finally be “himself”.

Herzl’s attitude to Vienna and Austria was actually very negative. When the young Stefan Zweig went to see Theodor Herzl, his literary idol, the feuilleton editor of the Neue Freie Presse, Herzl’s advice was for Zweig to keep on traveling abroad: “Everything I know I learned abroad. Only there does one get used to thinking in distances. I am convinced, that here I would never have had the courage to formulate that first conception [of the Judenstaat]. Somebody would have destroyed it, while it was still germinating. But thank God, when I brought it here, it was already complete, and they could do nothing but treat it with contempt.”

If Herzl’s relationship to Vienna and Austria in terms of his own attitudes and character, especially as a Zionist leader, is far from being as straightforward as has been claimed, there is still our second question, of how important Herzl’s Viennese and Austrian experience was in making Herzl a Zionist in the first place. Herzl’s Austrian background might not have been as salient as sometimes thought when it comes to his “artistic” personality. When, however, we start asking what it was that drove Herzl to abandon his belief in the strategy of Jewish assimilation, and induced him to adopt the radical plan of a new Jewish exodus to a new state for the Jews, then the Viennese and Austrian connection takes on a significance that is crucial.
Herzl’s upbringing in Budapest probably contributed more than is usually credited to providing a tension in Herzl’s “national” identity. As a German-speaker in the rapidly and triumphantly Magyarizing Hungarian capital, Herzl would have had one form of identity crisis; as a German-speaking Jew in a city where a nascent anti-Semitic movement was forming, he might have had another. The notion that the Jews were a separate nation was being expressed in Budapest by anti-Semitic thinkers at a time when such thoughts were more or less dormant in Vienna. Then again, as a German-speaking Jew from Hungary newly subscribed at Austria’s premier university in Vienna, Herzl would have had yet another crisis of identity, as evidenced by his vacillation over his nationality in his student records. Yet the main rivalry for the role of being the “cause” of Herzl’s Zionism is between Vienna and Paris.

The traditional story of Herzl’s conversion to Zionism attributes Herzl’s epiphany to his experience of the Dreyfus Trial in Paris. The trial and subsequent conviction and degradation of Captain Dreyfus demonstrated to Herzl that even in the heartland of liberal progress, Paris, a Jew was persecuted as a Jew, that anti-Semitism was everywhere, and that the belief in assimilation as a solution to the Jewish problem was misplaced, even in France. This version is particularly cogent, because Herzl himself supported it in 1899. However, Herzl said this at the height of the Dreyfus Affair, and four years after the initial trial, and Herzl’s Zionist conversion. There is actually scant evidence that Herzl, in 1895, reacted to the Dreyfus case in the dramatic way that he later claimed. There is no mention of Dreyfus at all in his Zionist diary of 1895, in which he painstakingly details how he came to his new belief in the need for a state for the Jews in April of that year. There is one possible, indirect mention of the case, from June 1895, when Herzl imagines himself addressing the French Assembly on the impossibility of having Jews as military leaders: “And the peoples cannot surrender themselves by making the members of an undigested and indigestible group the leaders of their armies.”6 This response, however, is quite different from that portrayed in the myth, bordering as it does on accept-
ALFRED DREYFUS, leaving the Court in Rennes after the reopening of his trial. The guarding soldiers are turning their backs on the demoted officer. Photograph by Gerschel, 1898.
ance of the anti-Semitic argument against having Jews such as Dreyfus in the French General Staff. If the Dreyfus case did have an effect on Herzl’s views on the Jewish Question, it appears not to have been very large, with Herzl appearing much more ambivalent than he was later to claim at the height of the “Affair”.

The Dreyfus case was only one of many factors, and probably much less significant than usually thought, that brought Herzl to his Zionism. The “conversion” was the culmination of a long process, whose first stages predated the Dreyfus case by some months, even years, and the main reasons for the transformation of Herzl’s thinking are to be found in Vienna and not Paris. Herzl’s concern about the Jewish Question had been building from the early 1890s. He had expressed his thoughts about various “solutions” to the problem to interlocutors such as Baron Leitenberger and his editors at the *Neue Freie Presse*, including his idea of a dramatic, mass conversion in St. Stephen’s. Then he had thought that Jews should support socialism as a scourge of bourgeois anti-Semitism. His play, *Das Ghetto*, had been written in late 1894, before the Dreyfus Trial. It had discussed in some detail the social and moral trap in which assimilated Jews found themselves in modern society. These “solutions”, and the searing critique of Jewish social life in *Das Ghetto*, all took place in Vienna, not Paris. It was the Jewish bourgeoisie in Vienna that was his prime subject.

Herzl’s penetrating critique of French politics also can be seen to have Viennese roots. His unveiling of the totalitarian implications of the “symbolist” politics of Maurice Barrès, for instance, was probably facilitated by his being made so sensitive to the power of “irrationalist” politics back in Vienna. His exposure back in his student days and subsequently to the racist, German Nationalist politics of Schönerer and his colleagues, would have made him aware of the true nature and consequences of Barrès’s politics in ways that French colleagues might not have seen. He saw French politics, in other words, as a Viennese, or rather as a Viennese, ex-Hungarian Jew.
Rather than the Dreyfus case, the timing of Herzl’s conversion to the idea of a state for the Jews points much more to a Viennese cause. It was only a few weeks after Karl Lueger and his Christian Socials won the municipal elections in Vienna of April 1895 that Herzl wrote his letter to Hirsch, where he first outlined his state idea. It was the experience of Vienna, his hometown, as a centre of triumphant political anti-Semitism that drove him to think that the Jewish Question could no longer be solved at home.

Herzl not only saw Vienna as a center of anti-Semitism, though, but also as the central instance of the Jewish Problem more generally. For Herzl, the Jews were part of the problem. Herzl’s turn to Zionism can also be seen as due to his belief that the only way to bring about a moral and spiritual regeneration of the Jews was to take them out of the decadent and closed society in which they found themselves and put them in their own state, where they would, by necessity, turn into “real human beings”. Herzl had a very negative attitude to his fellow Jews, and even his own Jewishness before 1895. He saw Jews as degenerate and vain, intellectually shallow, and unable or unwilling fully to assimilate, fit in. He found his evidence for this, as illustrated by Das Ghetto, in his experience of the Viennese Jewish bourgeois milieu in which he mostly moved.

This vision of Viennese Jewry was not fully justified. Herzl’s contemporaries, Schnitzler and Freud, were also of this Viennese Jewish milieu, and both had their own problems with their Jewishness, but both saw in their Jewish background more positive values than the pre-Zionist Herzl. Perhaps this is why, ironically, neither were so radical as to become Zionists. In Herzl’s case, what needs to be clear is that it was his experience of Vienna and Austria, and his Jewish world within it, that was the primary cause for making him a Zionist, in order to transform the Jews as much as to help them.
THEODOR HERZL at his desk in the study at 29 Haizingergasse, 1080 Vienna, where he had been working from May 1898 up to his death for his cause. Photograph, c. 1900.
This leads to the third question: how did Herzl’s experience and relationship with Vienna and Austria affect his thought, particularly his plans for the state for the Jews. We have seen how he wanted to transplant the “circenses” and “fleshpots” of (Central) Europe, including the Viennese coffeehouse, to the new land. The spa resorts that surround the Sea of Galilee in Altneuland have more than a touch of Bad Ischl about them. We have also seen his preference for the “aristocratic” principle, and the new society of Altneuland, for all its progressive co-operative structures, is still founded and run by an elite of cultured, well-educated meritocrats. More significantly, his Austrian, or at least Austro-Hungarian, background comes through in his attitude to language in the new state. He rejected the use of Hebrew as unrealistic in the modern age, and Yiddish was also to be discouraged. The other languages spoken by the new inhabitants were to be free to compete on equal terms, although German would, in his estimation, probably be the official state language (as it never was, ironically, in the Monarchy).

The Austro-Hungarian themes are even stronger in Altneuland, which has been seen as an attempt to rescue Austrian liberalism and “Vienna” from the anti-liberal Austrian populace. The best way Herzl could think of providing liberalism with a true triumph, according to this argument, was having the Jews set up their own, liberal state. Herzl was in fact accused at the time of the novel’s publication by other Zionists, most famously by Ahad Ha’am, of presenting in his novel a state that is not in any way “authentically Jewish”, only liberal and cosmopolitan.

It was much easier for Russian Jews, such as Ahad Ha’am, to distinguish between “Jewish” and “liberal”, because they had a much more ethnic and cultural idea of what “Jewishness”, or Yiddishkeit, signified. At the same time, this meant that they completely missed the point that in Central European Jewish terms, in terms of what David Sorkin has identified as the tradition of the ideology of emancipation and the terms in which Vienna’s bourgeoisie understood themselves, Herzl’s vision of the state for the Jews was very Jewish. Within that modern Central
Title page of the first edition of “Altneuland” with the famous motto: “If you want it, it is no fairy tale”. Leipzig, 1902.
European Jewish tradition, Jewish values had become identified with liberalism. The Haskalah (Jewish Enlightenment) had shared with the Aufklärung (German Enlightenment) the values of Menschheit (humanity), tolerance, emancipation and individualism. Striving to realize these universal, humanist values had become the Jewish mission, the new Jewish identity.

Herzl was nothing if not loyal to precisely these universalist goals. He saw his new state as being made possible by the triumph of modernity, by the combination of liberal emancipation on the one hand and social and technological progress on the other. He also saw anti-Semitism as an unavoidable by-product of this process, but he came to see this in a dialectical relationship to progress of humanity, and the Jews’ role in that progress. He saw the Jewish people, indeed, as a “modern people” who would, through his “modern attempt” to solve the Jewish problem, become the most modern people. Above all the Jews were historically and existentially fated to create a society based on tolerance, for that was the logic of their emancipation. As he trenchantly put it in Der Judenstaat: “We learnt tolerance in Europe.”

Altneuland is hence an attempt to realize a Jewish version of Western society, not an assimilationist, but rather a super-emancipationist ideal. It is not Vienna, or Austria, that is to be recreated, but rather Vienna and Austria as they ought to have been, Vienna as the “new Jerusalem” that Manès Sperber describes dreaming about in his turn-of-the-century Galician shtetl. It is anything but an “un-Jewish” vision; it was rather Herzl’s vision of the goal of Central European Jewry’s emancipatory tradition. Furthermore, Herzl’s new society in Altneuland sees Jews now, in the main, as upright, hard-working, self-confident, very progressive and socially responsible. In other words, all the problems that Herzl had associated with Viennese Jewry before 1895 (that he once more outlines in the opening chapters of Altneuland) have been solved by Jews having their own state. The intelligentsia now has enough jobs to go around; Jewish society is no longer concentrated in trade
and finance, but is much more diverse and balanced, in a word, normalized. There are still some “bad” Viennese Jews around, dishonest, vain, obsessed with money and lacking any inner confidence, but their existence is now tolerable. This is because the dominant image or type of Jew in the new society is supplied by decent, self-confident, honest and honourable individuals such as David Littwak. These are people who are truly emancipated, who can therefore preach about tolerance for non-Jews from conviction and a position of strength – as the true message of Jewish history.

Herzl’s Zionist vision is, centrally, a response to the threat of anti-Semitism’s political triumph in Vienna, and his answer to what he perceived as the real moral and social problems within Vienna’s Jewish community. It is also, in its content and goals, in the tradition of Central European Jewry’s identification with the traditions of the German Enlightenment and Central European liberalism, with some influence from the context of the multi-national Habsburg Monarchy. His particular Viennese and Austrian experience is therefore central to understanding the origins and character of Herzl’s Zionism.

Yet it is a particular Viennese and Austrian experience. The more stereotypically Viennese and Austrian qualities which we saw identified in Herzl’s style and attitudes, in his “artistic” approach, his theatricality, his aristocratic preferences, and his supposedly irrationalist politics, were arguably not as Austrian or Viennese as has been claimed. These qualities can be better explained by the fact of Herzl’s being a writer and dramatist, and an admirer of cosmopolitan high society. He was, however, very much a product of the Central European Jewish world, centred on Vienna, that was such a powerful force in shaping our modern culture. In his perception of the failings of liberal ideology, and his humanistic attempts to use “modern” tools to rescue that liberalism’s central values, Herzl shows himself to be a typical Viennese Jew. His Viennese and Austrian experience was a Jewish Viennese and Austrian experience.
THEODOR HERZL in Palestine. Photograph by David Wolffsohn. Early November 1898.
Street scene in Vienna’s second district
This differentiation partially solves the paradox with which we began. It is not so odd that Herzl’s Zionism came out of Austria, because it was a product more of the world of Central European Jewry than it was of Viennese or Austrian society generally. It might have appeared to be only Austrian, and not “Jewish”, to East European Zionists, and many modern-day commentators, but that was because they could not see what was, admittedly, often the “hidden tradition” of Central European Jewry. The major “contribution” that the larger Austrian culture and society made to Herzl’s Zionism was its harbouring, and then explicit support for, anti-Semitism, whether in its political, religious, social, economic or cultural forms. It was this Austrian context that forced Herzl to the conclusion that Jews, being different, could never be accepted as full members of Austrian, or even European, society. Hence his determination to found a new state for the Jews, a nation-state, where they could then become a nation like all other nations, because no longer a locus of difference within a nation.

This only leads to another, deeper paradox, however. From the perspective of a hundred years on, it should be plain that, just because Herzl’s achievement derived from his Jewish experience in Vienna and Austria, this does not mean at all that this cannot be regarded as part of the larger Austrian culture and society. Just because the Jewish part to Austrian culture can be identified as different, it does not follow that it has to be seen as separate from the rest of Austrian culture. Rather, in our pluralist world, it should be seen as a central part of general Austrian culture and heritage -- to the extent that we can see Austrian identity and heritage in pluralist, inclusive terms.

The logic that Herzl was addressing a century ago, and that the anti-Semitic movement was built upon, assumed that national identity and loyalty were based solely on the law of the excluded middle: you were either for us or against us; a Czech or not a Czech; a German or not a German. The Habsburg Monarchy, “Austria”, being a supra-national polity governing a multi-national populace, had some difficulties with
this “modern” approach to identity, indeed it eventually collapsed be-
cause of it. Nevertheless, its peoples were increasingly convinced by
this mutually exclusive logic of ethnonationalism, and the rise of po-
litical anti-Semitism was an outgrowth of it. For, if Jews were seen as
different, which they in fact were, religiously and ethnically, “logically”
they could no longer be full members of the nation, could no longer
belong or be integrated. Herzl’s acceptance of this nationalist logic as
a fact of (Central) European life resulted in his Zionism.

Yet this is a logic that modern Europeans, and modern Austrians, no
longer believe. As Isaiah Berlin pointed out many years ago, the idea
that a liberal democracy needs ethnic, religious and cultural uniformity
to function is not only a myth, but a complete reverse of the truth. It
is precisely in the existence of difference, whether in terms of interests
or of values, that liberal democratic systems find the grist for their dif-
ference-managing mills, otherwise known as parliaments, law courts
and the media. Without difference, liberal pluralism would have no
meaning; therefore it was exactly the sort of difference offered by Jews
(and other non-conformist groups) that led Western society to realize
the values of liberal democracy, including tolerance. In that sense Herzl
was only half right: Jews might have learnt tolerance in Europe, but to
some extent the presence of Jews in Europe also taught Europeans the
need for tolerance.

After a century of rampant ethnonationalism, with the horrors of the
Third Reich, in which Austrians, notoriously, played their full part, and
many other nationalist excesses, modern Europeans are coming to rec-
ognize that the logic of “either/or” simply does not work when applied
to human concerns such as one’s identity and sense of self. The great
benefit of the European Union is that it takes the hard edges off notions
such as national sovereignty, and complicates national identity. If this
has echoes of the Habsburg Monarchy, then that should be greeted by
Austrians, for this is a supra-national polity for a multi-national popu-
lace in a “post-nationalist” era. Europe and Austria, a century on, are
finally making good on the immense errors that they committed in between, and none is more important than the recognition that difference, of whatever sort, is not in itself a ground for exclusion and separation. Herzl himself gave one last, ironic, dialectical twist to his understanding of the logic of nationalism. Ultimately, his aim was not to accept that logic, but rather to overcome it, in the new state for the Jews. “We learnt tolerance in Europe.” It was to rescue this key principle of pluralism, and make it the meaning of the new, Jewish society, that Herzl embarked on his mission. If he wanted, as an artist, to establish a beautiful, harmonic new polity for Jews, it was also going to be one with a harmony based on difference, an inclusive society, in which “no one human would be turned away”. It was to be a model of pluralist tolerance, in which all were welcome, and humanist values, because Jewish, were cherished. The Temple in Jerusalem would be restored, but nearby would be built the Palace of Peace, to house Herzl’s version of what would later be called the United Nations. Much has changed in the world in the last century, in Europe and the Middle East, and many of Herzl’s assumptions about the future have proven to be inaccurate, even unrealistic. In particular, and with a truly tragic irony, circumstances in the state that is the crowning success of Herzl’s Zionist movement, Israel, especially as concerns relations with the Palestinians, have not proven conducive to the full realization of the Herzlian ideal. Yet this pluralist vision of Herzl’s, Jewish and Austrian, properly understood, has never been more relevant than it is today.

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Major events in the life of Theodor Herzl

2 May 1860       Theodor Herzl born in Budapest, Hungary.
September 1878   Herzl becomes a student of Law at Vienna University.
April 1883        Herzl leaves “Albia” Burschenschaft.
5 August 1885     Herzl gives up legal career to become writer.
4 May 1889        Premiere of Herzl’s Der Flüchtling at the Burgtheater.
25 June 1889      Marriage to Julie Naschauer.
5 October 1891    Herzl appointed Paris correspondent of the Neue Freie Presse.
October 1894      Herzl writes Das Ghetto.
5 January 1895    Degradation of Alfred Dreyfus.
1 April 1895      Christian Social victory in Vienna’s municipal elections.
2 June 1895       Herzl’s meeting with Hirsch; start of Zionist Diary.
27 July 1895      Herzl becomes Neue Freie Presse feuilleton editor in Vienna.
2 February 1896   Publication of Der Judenstaat.
4 June 1897       First issue of Die Welt (Herzl’s Zionist periodical).
29-31 August 1897 First Zionist Congress, in Basle.
2 November 1898   William II of Germany receives Herzl on visit in Palestine.
18 May 1901       Herzl’s audience with Sultan Abdul Hamid II in Constantinople.
October 1902      Publication of Altneuland.
16 August 1903    British official offer of “Uganda” as Jewish refuge.
23-28 August 1903 Sixth Zionist Congress, in Basle.
23-24 January 1904 Audiences with Victor Emmanuel III of Italy and Pope Pius X.
3 July 1904       Death of Herzl in Edlach, Lower Austria.
Notes:

3 Ibid. p. 92.
7 Theodor Herzl, *Der Judenstaat: Versuch einer modernen Lösung der Judenfrage* (Vienna: Breitenstein, 1896) p. 75-76

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