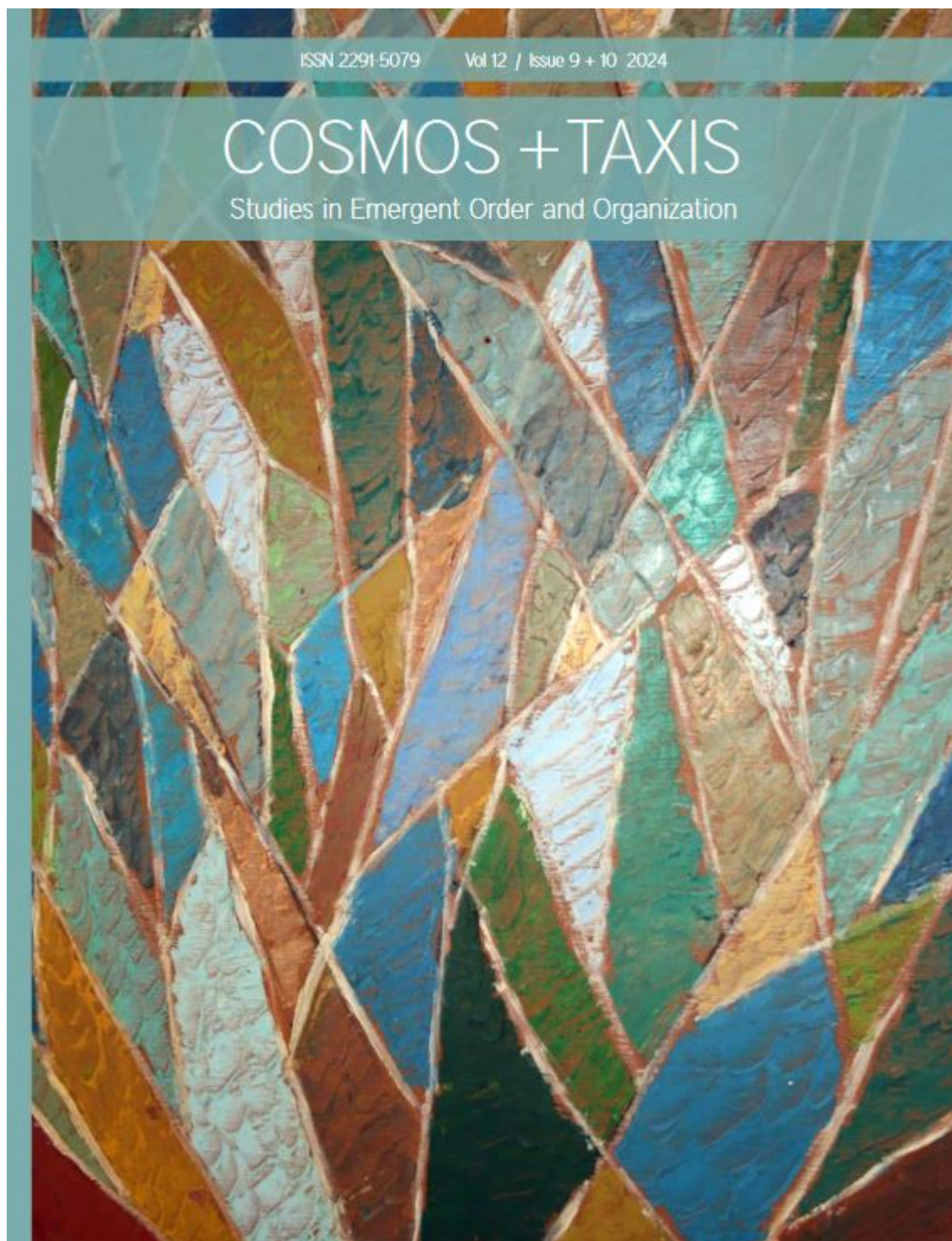


# Symposium on Walter E. Block's and Alan G. Futerman's 'The Classical Liberal Case for Israel'



*COSMOS + TAXIS* hosts a “Symposium on [Walter E. Block](#)’s and Alan G. Futerman’s *The Classical Liberal Case for Israel*” in their most recent issue. Contributors include Ran Baratz, Alan Dershowitz, Efraim Karsh, Richard Landes, Itay Meirson, Gustavo D. Perednik, Avraham (Russell) Shalev, and Gil Troy. Read it all [here](#).

**By Walter E Block and Alan G Futerman**

**We shall be remarking on each and every contribution to this compilation on an individual basis,** but, before we begin, here is our commentary on all of them. The complexity surrounding the study of Israel’s history, its development, and its self-defensive wars demand a thorough study. As such, although one may get to fundamental conclusions, there is always much to be learned. Here, then, despite having written the book on the basis of which this symposium has been organized, we feel that we are the students, and the contributors are the teachers. Why are we learning so much from them? The obvious answer is that they are extremely knowledgeable about these issues, passionate about them, articulate, and world-class scholars. Thus, it is no exaggeration to claim that if we had read these contributions before writing our book, them serving as our guides and mentors during that time period, our book would have been not infinitely better, but greatly improved. We therefore can say, humorously, that we can now blame the contributors, not ourselves, for the many short comings in this book. Not to make too fine a point of it, we are exceedingly grateful to them for not only instructing us, but, also, making an important contribution to the world as a whole. With their splendid essays, we can almost see our way clear to viewing the proverbial light at the end of the tunnel

that Israel now finds itself enmeshed in. Their publications de serve the widest possible circulation, if civilization is ever to once again reign supreme in this presently sad corner of the world, the Middle East. Thank you so very much for all of you for your superb chapters in this compilation. Bless you, bless you. Now for our reaction to each specific contribution to this splendid compilation.

**KARSH:** Given Israel's numerous and important contributions to human flourishing, which impacts the entire world, Professor Karsh plaintively asks, "How, then, is one to understand the hordes of hateful, violent 'demonstrators' flocking onto the streets of western cities throughout the world whenever Israel responds in strength to indiscriminate terrorist attacks?" His answer: "Not out of empathy with the Palestinians." His proof? When force is used against this group of people not by Jews but by their fellow Arabs, there is no such wailing and gnashing of teeth emanating on the part of the US, the UN, Western Europe and other such supposedly civilized societies who he pithily describes as "self-righteous Western do-gooders".

We all know the answer to this quandary. By resorting to John Stuart Mill's method of difference, the answer is Jews. The latter are "a perpetual punching bag and a scapegoat for whatever ills befell society." Some civilized people would like to think that matters have changed in this regard. Professor Karsh is to be commended for once again reminding us of this truth. Our hats are off to him for so doing.

**BARATZ:** The analysis of Jabotinsky and his thought masterfully depicted in this essay is truly remarkable. Not only explains how and why Jabotinsky's critics are wrong, but also why he is the great classical liberal Zionist. By surveying the author's works touching on political philosophy, sociology and economics, it is clear for anyone who is willing to look at them objectively that Jabotinsky was a true scholar in the classical liberal tradition. Although Jabotinsky mentions

anarchy as an ideal for humanity, it is clear that he was also very conscious of realpolitik, which is why he was an enthusiastic classical liberal. And, according to this philosophy, he allowed for certain limited subsidiary government actions as Hayek himself advocated in his *Road to Serfdom* (1944). Moreover, reading Baratz's account of Jabotinsky sheds light on both his political career and the movement he founded. Revisionist Zionism is a faithful reflection of his philosophy, highlighting both the right to liberty and property as well as to self-defense. We cannot less than agree with the author's final remarks, modern Israel is indeed a true example of Revisionist Zionism, and should look for extending the application of this approach in order to improve even more, always striving to the ideal.

**DERSHOWITZ:** This essay is everything we and the entire world have come to expect from the pen of Alan Dershowitz, incisive, well documented, well argued, insightful analysis. Here, he is intent to lay two fallacies to rest. One, that Israel is a colonist state, its actions similar to those of other first world nations that have subjugated colonies, such as France in Algeria and Britain in the Middle East and New Zealand. His evidence for this claim? He challenges: "Those who absurdly claim that the Jewish pioneers who moved to Palestine in the last decades of the nineteenth century were the "tools" of European imperial ism must answer the following question: For whom were these socialists and idealists working? Were they planting the flag of the hated czar of Russia or the anti-Semitic regimes of Poland or Lithuania? Quite the contrary... These pioneers wanted nothing to do with the countries they left, where Jews had suffered po groms and religious oppression for centuries." He concludes this section of his essay on this note: "Based on the actual history of the Jewish pioneers, the claim that Israel is a colonial or imperialist state is so farfetched that it simply serves to illustrate how language is willfully distorted in the service of a partisan agenda." Second on his agenda is to refute the ludicrous

notion that Israel has come within a million miles of engaging in genocide. His conclusion: "To the contrary, Israel has done more to protect the civilian population of Gaza than any country in the history of warfare." His proof: "(Critics) know that Israel has no intention of intentionally wiping out the civilian population of Gaza. They know that the Palestinian population has increased. They know that medical care and jobs have long been provided by Israel. And they know that Israel would never have entered Gaza had it not been for the brutal attacks of October 7... The Arabs who live in Israel are an important part of its democracy. They have representatives in the Knesset, in the judiciary, in academia and all aspects of Israeli life." Although this author is primarily known as a lawyer and legal theorist, when he went into that discipline, he deprived the field of history an eminent practitioner. He ranges widely over practically the entire Jewish history in that corner of the world, and does so superlatively.

**LANDES:** This author puts his finger on a Jewish characteristic which is both a blessing and a curse: self criticism. With "friends" like some of these people of a Hebrew background one hardly needs enemies. Arab Societies, in sharp contrast, suffer from no excess of self-criticism. States Landes in this regard: "As a result, one runs into serious cognitive and moral distortions. If one asks Palestinians who caused the (post 1948) refugee problem (Nakba), all of them will blame Israel; if one asks Israelis, half of them will either blame Israel or split the responsibility. Any outsider, unfamiliar with this yawning gap in ability to self-criticize, might reasonably conclude that Israel is about 75% responsible." Outsiders, here, consist of much of Europe and North America. They have fallen victim to this sort of bias. Here is yet another brilliant insight of Landes' that we cannot resist not quoting in full: "This striking difference between the Israeli attitude towards the lives of their enemy's civilians, and the Palestinian attitude towards their own civilians' lives has produced over the last two decades a cannibalistic strategy in

which Jihadis try and engineer the highest civilian casualties so that they can win the PR war by accusing Israel of wantonly killing civilians.” Perhaps Landes’ best illustration (there are many!) of the perfidy of the press is the disproportionality between deaths in the Congo and journalists coverage of it, compared to that which occurs between the Israel Defense Forces and the Palestinian Arabs. If a picture is worth 1,000 words, this depiction is worth 10,000. We cannot end our coverage of this inspirational commentary without one last quote from his conclusion: “There is a broad consensus of voices who declare themselves not only progressive, but the cutting edge of advanced, progressive values, who manage a complete moral inversion when looking at the conflict between Israel and its neighbors. Israel, which goes to great lengths to avoid killing innocent civilians is viewed as a brutal child-killer while the Palestinians—who target enemy children and endanger, even kill, their own, are considered noble resisters.”

**MEIRSON:** This author takes us on an excursion of political philosophy. Showing a keen interest in, and knowledge about, the finer points of libertarianism and classical liberalism, he demonstrates the absolute foolishness of singling out Israel, and questioning whether it, alone, deserves to be a state. In his view, whether we like it or not, all such entities “exist not because they are morally approved by the international community (what a spectacular oxymoron) but simply because their public institutions are trusted by an immense majority of their citizens (in democracies) or effectively imposed by a ruling elite loyal to the tyrant (under dictatorships).” No truer words were ever said than these by our author: “The Libertarian anarchists, most of whom are close friends or disciples of Rothbard’s (and often both), have always been the most devoted anti-Zionists around. Lew Rockwell, Hans-Hermann Hoppe, Justin Raimondo, Joe Sobran, Sheldon Richman, and of course Rothbard himself are fountainheads of the most coherent and brutal anti-Zionist

texts one can find anywhere outside the Muslim world.” He is equally correct in locating among the quasi-libertarian followers of Ayn Rand the strongest support for Israel in this corner of the left-right political economic spectrum. We venture to claim that our own book is among the very first of those that are more philosophically beholden to Rothbard than to Rand which takes a decidedly pro-Israeli position. There is also a great deal of truth in this claim of our author’s: “The Palestinian-Israeli conflict has the very solid Libertarian characteristic of being essentially a dispute over property.” Private property rights based on John Lockean homesteading principles can never venture too far away from the concerns of libertarians, of any and all stripes. At this point, this commentator asks a crucially important question: “Is it individual rights of Palestinians that makes this conflict so appealing to Rothbard and his followers? Or is it something else?” And he speculates, not unreasonably, that there are other, political, motives that may be involved. The author’s is indeed an excellent analysis of the Middle Eastern situation from a classical liberal point of view. He avers: “... many anti-Zionist Libertarians judge the Palestinian-Israeli conflict by standards they would never apply to other issues. Supporting the Palestinian side over the Israeli as a monolithic, tribal account means that Zionist pioneers who legally purchased thousands of acres in the 1920s and homesteaded them for generations according to the Lockean manual will never be fully entitled to their property, because in some cosmic collective sense it will always remain Palestinian.” Well said. No. Exceedingly well said. He puts his finger on an important weakness of the libertarian anti-Israel perspective. As does this statement: “... pointing at the 1948 war as grounds for proclaiming Israel’s existence il legitimate amounts to a call for overturning the results of a war because the side that initiated it is dissatisfied with its consequences.” If there is a better critique of the Rothbardian position on this matter, we are unaware of it. We are extremely grateful to the congratulatory comments heaped on our book at the end of his



essay by this author.

**PEREDNIK:** This author starts off with a bang, elucidating two crucially important points, points that are all too often ignored. One, Israel is fighting Hamas not only on its own account, but on behalf of the entire civilized world. If barbarous criminals can get away with their bestial incursions of October 7, 2023, they become more of a threat to all enlightened nations, not just to Israel. Second, and more controversial, the mass protests of the left inside Israel against the very modest changes contemplated by the Likud Party for the reconstruction of its Supreme Court (to place it akin to the US system where this institution is not self-perpetuating) may have played an important role in the timing of the enemies of Israel to move forward with their plan on October 7th. It is for later historians to decide, but Hamas may well have thought that these protests rendered Israel vulnerable to its sordid attack. We are extremely grateful to this scholar for his suggestions regarding historical emphasis should our book be revised, and a second edition published. We will seriously consider deemphasizing the role of the Roman Empire in this regard, and instead emphasizing the role of the Arab invasion of the land of Israel in the 7th century CE. We appreciate his foray into the early history of the Zionist movement. Both of us are Zionists as well as Austrian economists, but we never really put these two strands together. Thanks to Professor Perednik, this oversight of ours will no longer occur. With great respect to this scholar, we partially reject his assessment of Murray Rothbard. To be sure, we diverge, and strongly so, from his mistaken views about Israel. However, we still regard him as one of the leading economists to have ever graced the planet, and the single most gifted libertarian theorist whoever wrote and spoke. We find fascinating the attempt to understand Rothbard's motives in so strongly attacking Israel. Our author may well be correct in this assessment of his. We are very grateful to Professor Perednik both for his unstinting praise



of our efforts, as well for his gentle chiding of several of our views wherein we diverge.

**SHALEV:** This scholar offers an inspirational historical exegesis about Jews both as a religious entity and as a political community. Our book is explicitly and proudly Zionist, but there cannot be found within its pages anything of the “song of Zion.” We are very happy that this contribution buttresses our treatment in this manner. Yes, Jews have from time immemorial said “Next Year in Jerusalem,” a point made herein. No one has to say “Next Year in London, or Paris or Tokyo, or Beijing, or Rio or Buenos Aires or Cairo or Lagos.” No other peoples have been wandering not for centuries but for millennia, attempting to come home once again. Economists have a phrase, “voting with the feet.” This means that migration patterns are a far surer indication of human flourishing than any number of statistics can ever be. The same holds true regarding the fact that “Israel is the only Western country with a positive birthrate.” This fact, alone, is symbolic of the success of the only fully civilized country in the Middle East.

**TROY:** True confession: we do not much like criticism of our books. They are our intellectual children. However, we must be open to the claim of Professor Troy that our book on Israel does indeed give short shrift to the contributions to that nation made not only by free market and classical liberal champions, but, also, by those occupying the opposite end of the political economic spectrum. Says our friendly critic: “First, they downplay how central democracy, freedom, and traditional liberalism were to the overwhelming majority of Zionist thinkers—including the Socialist Zionists who dominated pre-State Mandatory Palestine, and Israel during its first half-century. And second, as a result, they underestimate how much Socialist Zionism, the Labor parties, and David Ben-Gurion himself contributed to the Israeli and Zionist miracle.” In our defense, we may say that the thesis

of our book had little or nothing to do with who was responsible for the success of this country. Rather, it was a within the libertarian movement critique of those, following Mr. Libertarian, Murray Rothbard, who maintained that the entire country and all its works were incompatible with this particular economic political philosophy. Nevertheless, we admit to being caught up short by this scholar. There is no line in our book which deprecates the contributions to Israel of socialist Zionists (except in their economics, of course), but, reading in between the lines, he may well have a point. We are not going to allow Professor Troy get away with saying, following Irwin Cotler, that "the Jews are the original aboriginal people," without complimenting him for bringing this primordial fact to our attention. So much for the claim that our people are outsiders, colonialists, and all the rest. As for "reducing the book to a 150-page primer" that, too, is an excellent suggestion, one, however, we will not follow. Instead, we are now working on a summary of this book, which will amount to roughly 50 pages to be published in this very same compilation, but we thank him for this insightful advice. Our friendly critic is quite right, too, to mention "the Jew-hatred built up over centuries." As libertarians and followers of John Locke's homesteading theory of just titles to property, we cannot help but defend Israel on this ground. However, this is only a part, a big part, but only a part of the story. The pogroms in Eretz Israel started long before 1948, when the charges of land theft began. Any analysis of what is now going on in Gaza that does not incorporate "the Jew-hatred built up over centuries" in that corner of the world is an incomplete analysis. We respectfully part company from Professor Troy when he taxes us for an overemphasis of undermining the views of Murray Rothbard on Israel. We believe in specialization and the division of labor in intellectual pursuits. The two of us are Austro-libertarians. We believe that the hatred of Israel emanating from this quarter is important to dispute, and, we compliment ourselves, we are uniquely positioned to do just that. We do not have the talent

or the background to expand our defense of Israel to counter lies about this country emanating from many other sources. George Washington Carver, according to the story, prayed to God for knowledge of everything. His prayer was rejected. He then asked for a bit less. Again, no dice. Finally, he was granted full information about the peanut. Well, our “peanut” is confined to defending Israel on this admittedly narrow ground. We are fully challenged to acquit ourselves in this small arena, and dare not take on areas where we have even less capacity. Here is another important contribution of this author: “When we add the Talmud’s many discussions about property, it is clear that a fuller treatment of the idea of private property in Jewish law and individual autonomy is necessary to understand the Zionist commitment to liberalism and private property.” Exactly true. The Talmud’s treatment of property rights is in far greater depth than can be found in John Locke. But this is almost an unfair comparison. He was only one writer, the Talmud features dozens of contributions. This essay ends with encomiums for David Ben-Gurion. We indeed join our author and acknowledge his important contributions to the success of Israel.

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