In all three cases, he asks, why did secular liberation movements fail prey, within a generation, to a religious counterrevolution? What does this tell us, he asks in turn, about Zionism, the Indian Congress Party, and the Algerian National Liberation Front (FLN)? What was it about religion that these movements failed to understand?

The paradox of liberation, Walzer argues, is that the liberators looked down on the people they came to liberate. None of Kant's "crooked timber of humanity" for these revolutionaries: they all believed that the timber made crooked by oppression could be planned straight as a board. Liberation was always an ambiguously dual project: to free the people from the colonial power and then to free them from their own submissiveness and psychological subjugation.

The Algerian FLN's Symfony conference platform of 1956 positively seethes with scorn toward "the torpor, fear, and skepticism" of the Algerian population in general. The revolutionary militants of the FLN vowed that they would shock their people into militant consciousness and awaken "their national dignity" after a century of colonial occupation. If it took bombs and the assassination of collaborators with the French to do this, so be it. Through this trial by fire, Frantz Fanon, the Algerian revolution's leading theorist, proclaimed, "a new Algerian man" would be born.

The Zionist revolutionaries took a similarly millenarian view of liberation: not just to throw out the colonial oppressors, in this case the British, but to create a new kind of Jew. In 1906, for example, Ze'ev Jabotinsky wrote that Zionism's "starting point is to take the typical Yid of today and to imagine his diametrical opposite... Because the Yid is ugly, sickly, and lacks decorum, we shall endow the ideal image of the Hebrew with masculine beauty." Zionism's weird streak of anti-Semitism, Walzer allows us to see, flowed directly from its idea of what liberation had to be about. Achieving national independence was not just winning self-government, but using state power to throw off the dead weight of subjection burdening the very soul of the Jewish people.

This took the measure of the harm that the sufferings of exile had done, but at the same time it condescended toward the sustaining beliefs of the Jews the revolutionaries came to free. The roots of this condescension, Walzer argues, lay in a deep misconception about religion. In exile, in the diaspora, the Jewish faith had not always been the willing accomplice of subjection and accommodation, as the Zionists too often seemed to believe: religion had also been a source of resistance and affirmation.

In the Indian revolution, too, religion was dismissed as an obstacle, never truly seen as a potential resource to fuel revolt. Nehru argued that the major challenge of freedom was not just throwing out the British, but liberating the vast mass of the population from the stranglehold of India's religion and its prevailing "philosophy of submission... to the prevailing social order and to everything that is." Once religious traditionalism was challenged by a humane, progressive reformist state, Nehru thought, its illusionary comforts would vanish, in his words, "at the touch of reality."

The other leaders of national liberation movements believed in the same, though as Walzer points out, there were nuances. The FLN conceded that a free Algeria would be an Islamic democracy. The Zionists acknowledged, sometimes reluctantly, that their movement and support for Jewish masses depended almost entirely on the ancient biblical call, repeated in every prayer, to remember Jerusalem. Whenever the Zionist leadership forgot the biblical warrant for a return to the Holy Land, as the Zionist leader Theodor Herzl appeared to do when he gave serious consideration to accepting a Bibly preposterous offer in Uganda, the Jewish masses in the shetel responded with incredulity and anger. There was only one Zion, the one promised in the Bible.

The secular leaders of national liberation realized they could only succeed if they had support from Islamic, Jewish, and Hindu traditions among the poorest and most despised of their supporters; yet their accommodation of religion was tactical and condescending rather than sincere. The secular revolutionaries believed that history was a story of modernization and that freedom would inevitably win in a battle with superstition, prejudice, and backwardness. In such a story, progress, religion was a vestigial attachment, "a haven in a heartless world" as Marx so condescendingly put it, a haven bound to crumble in the face of the ruthless forces of global capitalism and the relentless pressures of a modernizing secular state.

In the liberationists' desire to purge their people of the timorous, abject, accommodating, credulous aspects of their character, they sowed the seeds of their own undoing. There were strengths in the African, Hindu, and Islamic traditions of faith—in traditional Islamic culture in prerevolutionary Algeria, just as there was in the Hindu tradition in India—that could provide a Jewish experience of the diaspora, just as there was a language of freedom and national pride in Hindu traditional consciousness. For the national liberation movements, Walzer argues, none of these religious traditions seemed useful. Instead, they were seen as obstacles to overcome, dead weights to be thrown off. Once the revolutionaries seized control of the state, they were confident that they could use state power to safely reject faith to a politically innocuous private sphere, while educating a new post-liberation generation to do without religion altogether.

In essence, the liberators were alienated from the people they came to liberate. They were the privileged children of the empires they sought to overthrow.
Once these Westernizing revolutionaries seized power, once they took control of the state, Walzer argues, their rule had to be a painful reckoning with the stubborn force of religious traditionalism. In this reckoning, they not only had to shed many of their liberation illusions. The deepest one was that a secular, egalitarian citizenry could transcend religious, caste, and tribal divisions.

The Algerian revolutionaries promised a single secular code for all Algerians. By 1981, however, they had conceded jurisdiction over family matters to sharia law. By the late 1980s an Islamist party was challenging the secular revolution in the name of Islamic democracy. In 1991, faced with this challenge, the regime abolished democracy in order, it said, to save the revolution. Barred from democratic politics, the Islamists then went to war against the regime and it was only after a bloody battle, lasting from 1991 to 1997, that the old revolutionary order prevailed, now more autocratic and reactionary than ever. Their revolution had prevailed but at the price of all the ideals for which the revolution had been fought, and though the Islamists were eventually defeated, Algerian society is now more Islamized than ever.

In Israel, the story is different. Democracy survived and for the Jews who made aliya, their transformation into Hebrew-speaking Israelis kept alive, at least for them, the Zionist idea that political liberation could also deliver inner transformation. But otherwise, Zionist ideals are in full retreat. In December 1947, Ben-Gurion said:

In our state there will be no-Jews as well, and all of them will be equal citizens, equal in everything without any exception, that is, the state will be their state as well. Who could honestly say that this promise of equality has been kept in Israel today?

Walzer is not clear about how this failure came about. Being surrounded by unrelenting Arab hostility on all sides, the state decided to live in a fortress-like landscape, still big, secure, urban and at least as conventionally American państw, with no real negotiations.
This Walzer would say, what else could the revolutionaries do, but compromise with faith in traditional societies to deeply ordered by religious custom?

What is the moral of this story? One way to read Walzer’s essay, though he does not mean it to be, is to invert the democratic ideal.” His secular egalitarian idealists, failed to create a powerful and convincing alternative. What would offer what religious faith still offers to those who remain in the tent, i.e., a spiritual raison d’être.

Another possible meaning to Walzer’s story is that the relationship between secular revolution and religious counterrevolution is not negative and antiethical, but positive and symbiotic. Secular revolutions may not succeed fully, but to the degree that they do, they make it possible for religious counter-revolutions to entirely turn back the clock. Where secular revolution has failed, where there has been nothing left to restrain the fundamentalist impulses that were already in extremis when they gain power. This becomes clear if you think about Walzer’s story and not consider—the secular revolutions that failed. In Iran, the failure of the secular modernization prepared the way for the furious intolerance of the revolutionaries who, in the end, the Muslim Brotherhood’s failure to govern inclusively when it finally won power can be seen as a consequence not just of its intolerance, but of the failure of the very secular leader from Nasser to Masoud to lay the foundations of a political culture of pluralism and inclusion. Perhaps in Tunisia there is a remaining hope, in the Middle East, that a constitutional order can be found in which secular and religious parties can compete peacefully for power.

If the story Walzer tells seems to be one of defeat, it needs to be said, that in the cases he cites, the story is not over, indeed is never over. This is because, in fact, the secular revolution initially succeeded, and in doing so, laid down the practical conditions and a political culture that fundamentalism may not be able to uproot. In Israel, the aggressive and violent secular, the Orthodox and the non-Orthodox believers are still fighting, mostly peacefully, over the control of the property that they should become. In India, Naren- dra Modi rose to power trafficking in Hinduism. While economic power has so far formed the basis for the government, rebels who still remember the secular revolution’s achievements will not surrender the struggle, to Islamic theocracy.

In other words, the successful secular revolutions that overthrow empires have not finished their work, and neither have the religious counterrevo-

cussions that rose to contradict them. Only a pessimist would believe that the ultimate outcome is a foregone conclusion and only a dogmatist would want final, crushing victory for either side.