

## **Antisemitism Today**

Lecture delivered at LSE on 7 November 2024

Anthony Julius

### **Preliminary**

There is much to say, and much of it will have to be left unsaid if I am not to run over the hour, and cut into the time allotted for questions. Yet, I wonder what more *needs* to be said than that these are bad, dark times for Jews?

*How bad?* A young Jewish woman, a Master's student, relates: "I was wearing a JSoc [Jewish Society] jumper on campus and someone spat on me as they walked past." Shylock's protest to Antonio comes to mind: "[You] spat on my Jewish gaberdine" (I. iii. 122). For Venice's Rialto read university campus; for Jewish gaberdine, read JSoc jumper.

Other Jewish university students have related similar experiences: "After leaving a bagel lunch from the Jewish Chaplaincy on campus I was spat at." "I wear a Magen David. I have been spat at and shouted at as well as not allowed to enter certain areas in the university. I have been told I should have 'died in the gas chambers.'"<sup>1</sup>

What does it mean, to spit at a Jew at her place of study? You are not wanted here. You do not merit the ordinary civilities. You are an object of disgust; expressions of disgust are therefore your portion. Spitting at a Jew is a moral act: something to be done *precisely* in public, in demonstration of virtue, as an act of witness, a refusal of complicity with the Jew.

Now - let us agree that a student spitting at another student is an objectionable, reprehensible act, and that when the student is spat at because she is Jewish, it is an objectionable, reprehensible, anti-Jewish or "*antisemitic*" act.

And let us further agree that for it to be necessary for me to say these things - and it *is* necessary - is a sign of quite *how* bad these bad times are.

It is my disagreeable task this evening to speak about such objectionable, reprehensible antisemitic acts and language; to communicate some sense of their weight and consequence; and to protest against them. How could one *not* protest against them? It is a puzzle and a scandal that they are regarded with such complacency by so many people.

### **Introduction**

So - my subject is "Antisemitism Today."

By "today" I mean the period that began on 7 October 2023 - a period of two moments, the moment of the terror attack, and the moment of the military campaign, the response to the one, and the response to the other.

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<sup>1</sup> "I have never felt less protected as a Jew:" *Antisemitism at UK Universities since 7<sup>th</sup> October 2023*, ICPG. [https://www.icpg.org.uk/files/ugd/e23fb6\\_f233abe19150411c95e84a73196b8bbf.pdf](https://www.icpg.org.uk/files/ugd/e23fb6_f233abe19150411c95e84a73196b8bbf.pdf). Spitting at Jews has its own honoured place in the repertoire of antisemitic gestures: "Let us pursue with a cry of revenge every traitor, every Judas! Let us spit on the gang which, with its hook-fingered hands, plays its hand to save Dreyfus." Quoted, Pierre Birnbaum *The Anti-Semitic Moment: A Tour of France in 1898* (New York, 2003), 98.

- *Terror Attack 7 October* itself, that is, when Hamas terrorists invaded Israel to murder, rape<sup>2</sup> and abduct Israeli citizens and other defenceless civilians. Over 1000 people were killed; elderly women and children were among the over 240 people seized, including the four year old Abigail Eden, whose parents were murdered on that day. Bodies were mutilated; the kidnapped were paraded in the streets of Gaza City; some hostages were sexually assaulted,<sup>3</sup> others have been murdered in captivity.<sup>4</sup> This terror attack was on Israel itself, the national entity, with the intent of initiating a maximally violent process that would only end with Israel's dismantling, its destruction.
- *Military Campaign* The months thereafter, until today, that is, when Israel invaded Gaza with the declared aim of rescuing the hostages, and destroying Hamas (which meant, among other things, destroying the approximately 500 kms. of tunnels, many built under heavily populated areas, at a cost of approximately \$1 billion),<sup>5</sup> an undertaking that has caused immense destruction to the region, and an estimated 43,000 casualties, both terrorists and civilians.

(I say "terrorists," relying on a standard definition: "Terrorism involves the deliberate killing and injuring of randomly selected noncombatants for political ends. It seeks to promote a political outcome by spreading terror and demoralisation throughout a population."<sup>6</sup> I say "military" because Israel is answerable to the laws of war, that is, the laws governing just cause and just prosecution).<sup>7</sup>

Of the diverse *responses* to these events, I have in mind the welcoming (or exculpatory) response by some to the terror-attack, and certain aspects of the condemnatory response to the military campaign, led by people who welcomed the terror-attack, and joined by some who did not.

It is the combination of events and responses that defines this new conjuncture, our "today." And it is a new conjuncture, not a mere episode. Simply put, for Jews there is no going back to 6 October 2023.

What I mean by "antisemitism" is the concern of what follows. I simply note for now that antisemitism for some time has had a poor name, because it has been associated with everything that is stupid, malicious, and menacing. Few people wish to be thought cruel or stupid; fewer still, to be thought to menace others. Antisemites therefore tend to resist being described as antisemites, and they no longer name their programmes and parties "antisemitic." Indeed, there are few antisemites today who are not also declared enemies of "antisemitism." Typically, they speak the language of antisemitism while repudiating the title.

<sup>2</sup> Jeffrey Gettleman, Anat Schwartz and Adam Sella, "'Screams Without Words:' How Hamas Weaponized Sexual Violence on Oct. 7," *New York Times*, 28 Dec. 2023 / 25 March 2024.

<sup>3</sup> "UN: 'Convincing information' sexual violence committed against hostages in Gaza," BBC News, 4 March 2024; <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-68474899>. "A UN team says there is 'convincing information' that hostages held in Gaza have been subjected to sexual violence including rape and sexualised torture. There were grounds to suspect the abuse was still ongoing, the UN said. The UN team also found 'reasonable grounds to believe' sexual violence, including gang rape, took place when Hamas attacked Israel on 7 October."

<sup>4</sup> The kidnapping was always part of the plan: the terrorists entered with detailed maps of the kibbutzim closest to the border. See Saul Friedländer *Diary of a Crisis* (London, 2024), 195, 265.

<sup>5</sup> Saul Friedländer *Diary of a Crisis* (London, 2024), 246.

<sup>6</sup> Report of the Sharm el-Sheikh Fact-finding Committee, 30 April 2001, 20-21. [https://unsco.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/sharm\\_el-sheikh\\_fact-finding\\_mission.pdf](https://unsco.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/sharm_el-sheikh_fact-finding_mission.pdf)

<sup>7</sup> And answerable to Jewish law too, where it imposes a higher standard. See Shlomo Brody *Ethics of Our Fighters* (Jerusalem, 2024), 111 ("In this book, we'll use the term 'Jewish multivalued framework' [JMF] to describe the system of considering the plural values found in classic Jewish sources").

## Summary

I am going to present my arguments in propositional form, in part because I'm here as a guest of the law faculty and that is how we lawyers like speak, but principally because the essential points I want to make might otherwise be lost in the detail of subsidiary reasoning and narrative.

In brief, these are the propositions – four in number.

*First*, antisemitism is a proper topic for consideration. While there are many topics to be addressed in respect of "today" (that is, the world post-7 October), *antisemitism is one of those topics*. For sure, it is not the only one. It is not even the most important one. The likelihood of a Third World War is the best candidate for *that* one: we live in a world, to borrow a formulation, "radiant with triumphant calamity."<sup>8</sup> And yet, even in the shadow of *this* question, antisemitism is still worth discussing.

Indeed, I would go further: the only perspective which rules out such a topic is one that holds Jews as such, with Gaza in view, as a perpetrator-people. In this perspective, every Jew is culpable; Jewish guilt is collective, inescapable. No Jew has an excuse, and all talk of "antisemitism" misses this essential point. This is not my perspective.

*Second*, there have been responses to the attack and responses to the campaign that are reprehensible, for separate but overlapping sets of reasons, relating to their moral, psychodynamic and cognitive aspects. I have in mind, for example:

- *Terror Attack* The protesters on 8 October in Sydney, who chanted "Fuck the Jews," and burned an Israeli flag. The London journalist's tweet, "Today should be a day of celebration for supporters of democracy and human rights worldwide." "It was so beautiful and inspiring to see", said one speaker at a rally in Brighton. The social media invitations to "rejoice as Palestinian resistance humiliates racist Israel," or to admire "the most inspiring act of resistance," etc., etc. I also have in mind the pompous, pseudo-judicial position taken by the Harvard student bodies, that they would "hold the Israeli regime entirely responsible for all the unfolding violence."<sup>9</sup> Every Jewish writer, addressing these provocations, has his or her own list. Joshua Leifer, for example, quotes a literary journal that dismissed "smarmy moralizing about civilian deaths," and quotes a speaker at a rally relating to a cheering crowd the activities of "the resistance [who] came in electrified hang gliders and took at least several dozen hipsters." And so on, and so forth.<sup>10</sup>
- *Military Campaign* Across Europe's cities, Israeli flags have been burned *outside synagogues*; a Jewish *cemetery* was set alight and swastikas daubed on the walls; multiple visibly Jewish *homes* have been marked with antisemitic graffiti; a man brandishing a knife and shouting "Allah Akhbar" was stopped by police outside a *synagogue*. In the United States: a man fired shots outside a *synagogue*, and declared "Free Palestine!" when arrested; a woman drove her car into a *school* building, believing it to be Jewish; a Jewish man died after being struck on the head by somebody on a pro-Palestinian demonstration in Los Angeles. In Russia a mob stormed an *airport* looking for Jewish passengers to attack.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (Stanford, California, 2002), 1.

<sup>9</sup> Quoted, Dave Rich *Everyday Hate* (London, 2024), 252, 253; *Socialist Worker*, 11 October 2023.

<sup>10</sup> Joshua Leifer "Toward a Humane Left," *Dissent*, 12 October 2023.

<sup>11</sup> "Two months later: five things we have learned," 10 December 2023  
<https://everydayhate.substack.com/p/two-months-later-five-things-we-have>.

It should come as no surprise that the generality of Jews have found these responses dismaying and objectionable. For the rest of this lecture, when I speak of "the responses," it is to responses such as these that I refer.

(For context, I note here that 1,978 antisemitic incidents were recorded by the Community Security Trust in the first six months of 2024, 44% higher than the previous half-year record in 2021 of 1,371 incidents).

*Third*, these reprehensible Terror-Attack and Military Campaign responses are correctly described as antisemitic. They comprise, in their antisemitism, both historical and novel elements.

- *Historical* The principal historical element is the libel that (a) Jews make victims of non-Jews, and (b) make false claims about their own victimhood in pursuit of that objective. We recognise this second aspect in the often-repeated allegation that Jews "weaponise" antisemitism: that is, that when they talk about antisemitism they do so in bad faith, to give themselves and their fellow Jews an excuse for pursuing a murderous campaign against Palestinians, or to distract attention from that campaign.
- *Novel* The principal new element is the final retiring of arguments about antisemitism and antizionism (that is, antizionism in its present, dominant form). They are now routes to the same lethal outcome. We can term the hatred and the malice, the threats and the violence, "antisemitism," or we can term it the current iteration of "antizionism" ("today's antizionism"). *It doesn't matter*. Earlier versions of antizionism, including the intra-communal antizionisms of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and large parts of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, have little continuing salience now (though this may change). For the moment at least, they are largely an affair of private definition, without organisational heft.

I will argue that avoiding this antisemitism is a moral duty, one not difficult to honour. (It is indeed a matter of honour).

*Fourth*, the Jewish world finds itself in a new conjuncture. The impact of these antisemitic / antizionist responses are of such consequence that they have created a new antisemitic conjuncture, a new hostile environment. It will take some time before Jews find their bearings in this environment, given both its novelty and its sheer unwelcomeness, as well as a certain ceaselessness of assault: media misreporting, insulting, abusive graffiti, scratched-off posters of the kidnapped, the coldness – and worse – of many workplaces, schools and universities, puzzling policing decisions, etc., etc.. Jews are bewildered, dismayed, uncertain. This unmastered present induces a paralysis, including a paralysis in thinking.

The Jewish world will rally, of course. It will find the necessary resolve and clarity of purpose. Jews will even find in this new environment a certain shifting of burdens. That is, they will give up pointlessly, ignominiously, appealing to the good faith of antisemites; and they will, with full open-mindedness, interrogate their own collective situation, in the various groupings to which they belong.

They will then come to realise that what first presents itself as merely a new phase in antisemitism is in fact a much larger thing – a new phase, a new conjuncture, in the Jewish world itself. For some among them, the conjuncture will make a clear demand: To oppose today's antizionism regardless of the actions and policies of Israel's present administration, *and* to oppose those actions and policies

regardless of today's antizionism.<sup>12</sup> Notwithstanding its rhetorical appeal, this demand, this dual formula, will be hard to meet.

I now turn to the elaboration of these propositions.

## **Propositions**

### **Proposition I: Antisemitism is a proper topic for consideration**

There are many other topics, of course. I mentioned one earlier on. Here are others:

- *A proxy war* The conflict has a partly proxy character. Most proximately, Israel is proxy for the Sunni Arab states in their contest with Iran for regional hegemony. More geo-politically, Israel and Ukraine are the front-line states in a contest between Western powers and certain state and non-state actors, including the so-called "Axis of Resistance." Note, for example, reports that Israel's most recent attack on Iran is likely to lead to Tehran halting the export of ballistic missiles for use by Russia against Ukraine.<sup>13</sup> (The still further iteration of this logic, with Israel cast as civilisation's champion in a war with anti-civilisational evil, I acknowledge only to dismiss as a political-Manichean fantasy).<sup>14</sup>
- *An episode in a longer conflict* The conflict is a further episode in the long, bloody contest between Jews and Arabs over land held in early modern and modern times by the Ottomans, and then by the British. Within this topic crowd very many sub-topics: the extent of Palestinian support for Hamas (high enough to extinguish the possibility of peace?); the proportionality of Israel's response to the terror-attack; the absence of any plan for the "day after;" the worry that the prolongation of the war serves the political interests of the Netanyahu government and Netanyahu's personal interests; Hamas's use of human shields<sup>15</sup> and the morality of hostage-taking, the enabling of Hamas by successive Netanyahu administrations;<sup>16</sup> the weakening of Israel by the deplorable "judicial coup" in the earlier part of 2023.<sup>17</sup> Not to mention: How should this catastrophic episode in the Conflict end? And beyond that: What would be a just resolution of this Conflict? And beyond that, what would be an unjust resolution that might be just enough to avert further catastrophes, or even contain the possibility of a decent future for all?

To these topics, the topic of antisemitism must be added. I say this for five reasons.

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<sup>12</sup> I adapt Ben Gurion's formulation of the strategy to be pursued by the Yishuv following publication of the 1939 White Paper. "We must aid the English in their war as if there were no White Paper, and we must stand against the White Paper as if there were no war." It became known as the "dual formula." Tom Segev *A State At Any Cost: The Life of David Ben-Gurion* (London, 2019), 287-288. Another version of my appropriation: We must fight the antisemites as if there were no divisions in the Jewish world, and we must address the divisions in the Jewish world as if there were no antisemites.

<sup>13</sup> Neil Johnston "How Israel's attack on Iran hurts Russia," *Telegraph*, 28 October 2024.

<sup>14</sup> Arthur Herman "October 7 and the Battle for the West," *Mosaic*, 15 October 2024.

<sup>15</sup> "The United Kingdom manual on the laws of armed conflict [provides]: 'the enemy's unlawful activity may be taken into account in considering whether the incidental loss or damage was proportionate to the military advantage expected.'" Shlomo Brody *Ethics of Our Fighters* (Jerusalem, 2024), 279.

<sup>16</sup> Amir Tibon *The Gates of Gaza* (London, 2024), 110-112, 221-224, 225-226, 237 (releasing Sheikh Ahmed Yassin from prison; permitting Qatar to bring cash into Gaza; negotiating with Sinwar, failing to take the Hamas threat seriously ["Hamas is deterred and afraid of us"], favouring Hamas in order to frustrate a 2-State Solution).

<sup>17</sup> Amir Tibon *The Gates of Gaza* (London, 2024), 228, 235, 236-238, 239-240 (admitting Ben-Gvir into government; pursuing the attack on the Israeli judicial system; placing self-interest over national interest; "Israel was being torn apart from the inside ... thousands of reservists ... announc[ed] they would no longer show up for routine missions and trainings in protest").

First, antisemitism is now a balefully oppressive presence in Jewish lives. Jews therefore *want* to talk about it, to testify to it. Implicit in this witnessing, an appeal lies, though it is rarely heard. Throughout history, antisemites have threatened Jewish lives, Jewish security, and Jewish morale. They would deny to Jews rights others enjoy; they would withhold from Jews equality of treatment and regard. Jews cannot be silent regarding these burdens.

Call this the Jew's reason for addressing the topic.

Second, antisemitism does greater harm than to Jews alone. It also encourages misconceptions about the causes of social conflicts, and of human suffering and social deprivation, thereby prolonging their existence, to general disadvantage. By denying Jews the opportunity of making contributions to society, it injures all society's members. It corrupts political discourse; it taints political life; its injustices towards Jews are precedent-establishing. It even injures antisemites, degrading them and making them stupid.

Call this the democrat's reason.

Third, that idle quarrel between anti-antisemites and anti-racists, a feature of progressive political activity in the last decade, in which the anti-antisemites hold the anti-racists to be complicit in antisemitism, and the anti-racists hold the anti-antisemites to be self-pitying, privileged White people (I caricature, but the essential point is correct), can only be resolved by a mutual understanding, which, among other things, recognises antisemitism as a potent, oppressive presence in Jewish lives.<sup>18</sup>

Call this the anti-racist's reason.

Fourth, if antisemitism is to be combatted, it must be understood. That is, it must be grasped in its persistence (over centuries, over millennia), in its dizzying diversity of form and expression, in the breadth of its appeal, and in its typical exception-making (only rarely are *all* Jews a target).

Call this the activist's reason.

Last, antisemitism is a topic for academic inquiry. It properly engages the attention of historians and literary critics, social scientists and psychologists. Among the lines of inquiry is the this one: How to explain the continuities of language and action between historical and current episodes of Jew-hatred, the former, generally acknowledged to be antisemitic, the latter, the antisemitism of which are fiercely disputed?

Call this the academic's reason for addressing the topic.

One should also acknowledge, however, two counter-reasons - two objections to addressing antisemitism in the context of our post-7 October world.

The *first* derives from the same source that drives the tearing down of hostage photographs - an exasperation with Jews, an indignant rejection of their appeal for sympathy, or brute acknowledgment of unwarranted, hostile attention. There is no doubt anger too, at this appeal, because of the confusion it causes - how could one *not* feel pity, looking at the hostages' faces?

We can give this counter-reason another formulation. Jews with an attachment to Israel should be prepared to take without complaint all expressions of outrage at the continuing Gaza catastrophe, even if some of those expressions are immoderate (or worse), even if they catch local, wholly

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<sup>18</sup> See, e.g., Kristin Wagrell "Antisemitism and the Struggle for the 'Good' Society," in Mikael Shinkman *Antisemitism Today and Tomorrow* (Brighton, Massachusetts, 2018), 142.

uninvolved Jews in their sweep. This is the price that Jews must now expect to pay, without complaint. Wear a *kippah*, join a JSoc, pray in a synagogue, and take your chance.

Even Jews on the Left, Joshua Leifer has recently written, are expected to "shrug off casual antisemitic remarks from other activists," as the "cost of 'doing the work.'" They are required to "accept that [their] friends and loved ones be killed and tortured – imagined by their comrades as part of some cleansing, liberatory act – and *not speak of their deaths*."<sup>19</sup>

The *second* counter-reason is grounded in the conviction that given the greater suffering - I am speaking here about the devastation of Gaza, the dead and wounded, the homeless and displaced, the disease, the impoverishment, the daily horror - it is unseemly or narcissistic, or unjust, to notice mere insult and rebuff, chants and graffiti, threats and menaces, synagogues burned down and Jews intimidated and assaulted. And though there is a point at which the list becomes indisputably oppressive in itself, and, indeed, recalls to mind those comparable insults and rebuffs, etc., which in earlier moments of Jewish history were the preliminaries to the most immense of horrors (Arnold Schoenberg, in 1923: "What is antisemitism to lead to if not violence?"),<sup>20</sup> the objection can still be maintained.

These reasons and counter-reasons must be weighed. What I say here this evening is the outcome of my own process of consideration. That I am speaking further at all, of course, indicates that I find the reasons more persuasive than the counter-reasons – though I acknowledge the weight of the second of these counter-reasons. In brief: What matters, matters. And it doesn't stop mattering because other things matter too.

### **Proposition 2: There were responses to the Terror-Attack and to the Military Campaign that were dismaying and reprehensible**

What are these responses? As to the attack, they use the word "resistance;" as to the campaign, they use the word "genocide." These responses are reprehensible in their symmetrical extravagance of expression. Death wears two masks, one angelic, and one satanic. The wholly good confronts the wholly wicked, pure victims at the mercy of demonic aggressors. No one should be surprised when Jews protest at being cast as the villains in what is commonly now represented as a struggle of global significance. We have been here before.

As for the responses to the Terror-Attack, their reprehensible ethical, psychodynamic and cognitive aspects need to be separately addressed.

Regarding the ethical: It is patently unethical to welcome a well-funded, state-backed assault by a group planning to conquer land one rape, one murder at a time, with a view to eliminating a nation, and inflicting incalculable suffering on the region's entire population. Hannah Arendt's judgment comes to mind: "Violence can be justifiable, but it never will be legitimate. Its justification loses in plausibility the farther its intended end recedes into the future."<sup>21</sup> There is no "end" at all here, if violence is pursued. Only a precisely endless cycle of death and destruction.

Regarding the psychodynamic: The celebrations of the Terror-Attack contained an active element of sadism, responsive to the predatory sadism of the attack itself.<sup>22</sup> The protesters gave themselves permission to be cruel. In our affectively over-policed society, this permission doubtless represents a psychic release, one that can be re-experienced in marches, demonstrations and encampments.

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<sup>19</sup> Joshua Leifer *Tablets Shattered* (New York, 2024), 196, 338.

<sup>20</sup> Joseph Auner *A Schoenberg Reader* (New Haven, Connecticut, 2003), 172 (letter to Kandinsky)

<sup>21</sup> "On Violence," *Crises of the Republic* (London, 1972), 98.

<sup>22</sup> Graeme Wood "A record of pure, predatory sadism," *Atlantic*, 23 October 2023.

Regarding the cognitive: I have in mind here the indifference to true accounts of the Terror-Attack, or the ready embrace of denial of these accounts (flat denial, or phoney scepticism of the "I am keeping an open mind," "questions need to be asked," kind), a denial which is rife among people who nonetheless celebrated it, or some whitewashed fantasy-version of it. The political Unconscious, in which there is no law of contradiction, has found ready expression in current times. These cognitive failings drew strength from the trope that Jews lie about their suffering, in order to justify their own persecutory behaviour.<sup>23</sup>

As for the responses to the Military Campaign: We must distinguish the reprehensible responses from compassionate regard for victims of human rights violations, without respect to the victims' ascribed ideological or ethnic status (perhaps the majority response of those engaged at all with these horrors), empathetic responses taking in the totality of suffering, of fear, of terror, since the early hours of 7 October to today (displacement of populations, separation of families, death, injury, homelessness: the horror and the pain of it is almost too much to contemplate).

(Take the call for a ceasefire. In a short *New Yorker* piece, Zadie Smith offered a salutary lesson in ethical reasoning on the question. "There is a dangerous rigidity to be found in the idea that concern for the dreadful situation of the hostages is somehow in opposition to, or incompatible with, the demand for a ceasefire. Hamas will not be 'eliminated.' The more than seven million Jewish human beings who live in the gap between the river and the sea will not simply vanish because you think that they should. All of that is just rhetoric. Words. Cathartic to chant, perhaps, but essentially meaningless. *A ceasefire, meanwhile, is both a potential reality and an ethical necessity.* After a ceasefire, the criminal events of the past seven months should be tried and judged, and the infinitely difficult business of creating just, humane, and habitable political structures in the region must begin anew. Right now: ceasefire. And, as we make this demand, we might remind ourselves that *a ceasefire is not, primarily, a political demand. Primarily, it is an ethical one.*")<sup>24</sup>

The *reprehensible* responses, by contrast, in their deformations of precisely this humanitarian compassion, likewise have their moral, psychodynamic and cognitive aspects:

Regarding the ethical: We must distinct between two ethical zones of interest (to borrow a phrase of Smith's), "there" and "here:"

- *There* It is patently unethical to discriminate between classes of the tormented and the suffering; to condemn on no evidence or inadequate evidence; to enlist ethical language for unethical purposes. These pseudo-ethical judgments are self-subverting, in their combining of prohibition and obligation. You shall not kill, you must not be complicit in violence; You should kill, you must celebrate violence. A super-fastidiousness coexists with an equivalent permissiveness. Nothing is permitted to the one; everything is permitted to the other. Phrase it like this: "When you kill our enemy, it is resistance; when you kill my friend, it is genocide."
- *Here* Say this, at the very least: No defensible logic of "complicity," connecting "there" (Gaza) to "here" (London), justifies the abuse, intimidation and violence directed at Jews. Zadie Smith adds: "It may well be - within the ethical zone of interest that is a campus [...] -

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<sup>23</sup> "[A] woman in Primrose Hill said she was taking down hostage posters because she didn't believe Hamas had kidnapped anyone at all. Ali Hammuda, a Muslim preacher based in Wales with 160,000 subscribers on YouTube and 466,000 Instagram followers, denied there is any footage, any evidence at all, of Hamas killing civilians." From the site, Mondoweiss: "There are a growing number of reports that indicate the Israeli military was also responsible for Israeli civilian and military deaths on October 7 and the days after... It deserves to be investigated who caused most of the death and destruction that took place." [The poster war - by Dave Rich - Everyday Hate](#).

<sup>24</sup> "Shibboleth," *New Yorker*, 5 May 2024 (italics added).

that a Jewish student walking past the tents, who finds herself referred to as a Zionist, and then is warned to keep her distance, is, in that moment, the weakest participant in the zone." And thus, within the operative ethics of the protesters, the person deserving of solidarity.<sup>25</sup>

Regarding the psychodynamic: The responses are conditioned both (a) by sadism in a second register, a certain pleasure in tormenting Jews by dressing them in the clothes of their greatest tormenters – they are "Nazis," they are committing "genocide," they administer "concentration camps," Hamas terrorists are the valiant heirs to the fighters of the Warsaw Ghetto, etc.; and (b) by a neurotic fear of contamination: if we are not endlessly vigilant, we risk the infection of complicity. Political activity becomes a narcissistic affair of affective hygiene.

Regarding the cognitive: I have in mind, principally, a certain will to ignorance, the ruling of a whole domain of motives, reasons, explanations out of sight: say, the rescue of the kidnapped, the prevention of another 7 October-style massacre. It is related to the exasperation induced by exposure to the historical complexity, the density of argument, the diversity of parties, in the Israel-Palestine conflict, which is all *too much* to encompass; this exasperation deepens on exposure to the intractabilities preventing the Conflict's resolution (the objections and obstacles to a Two-State Solution, the objections and obstacles to a One-State Solution, the unsustainability and miseries of *no* Solution), which are all *too demoralising*. This in turn leads to:

- a relentless simplifying, a rendering of the complex history of the 120-year long engagement between Jews and Arabs, Israelis and Palestinians, as melodrama. Distance from the conflict, ignorance of its history, and partisan reporting of it in the moment-by-moment violence of its life, aid this process of simplification.
- a ready gullibility, a willingness to believe any story, however implausible, if discreditable of the Zionist project or of Israel; an intransigent disbelief towards any story, however compelling the evidence, if to their credit;
- a blithe embracing of fully contradictory positions: there must be a ceasefire, there must be resistance; international law must be kept, international law may be violated;<sup>26</sup> the UN's authority must be upheld, the UN's authority may be disregarded (the Partition resolution: 181, 29 Nov. 1947); there must be freedom of speech, there cannot be freedom of speech (for Jews: deplatformed, etc.); a politics of human rights is championed, a politics of human rights is repudiated (e.g., advocating hatred of a nation, Israel: art. 20 (2), International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, 1967).

And yet – these responses, culpably stupid, have attracted much support. Why? Wherein lies the appeal of such a stance?

First, it grants a general permission to engage in the otherwise *impermissible* - feelings of envy, words of insult, blame and self-exculpation, snubbing and bullying, and deeds of violence, boycott, and exclusion. All the ordinary restraints may be put aside: it is impossible to behave disgracefully to

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<sup>25</sup> "Shibboleth," *New Yorker*, 5 May 2024.

<sup>26</sup> This is not a general Palestinian position. "The brutality of Hamas's attack and the civilian death toll certainly cast a dark shadow on their military success. Whereas an occupied population has the right under international law to resist, they have no right to commit war crimes." Raja Shehadeh *What Does Israel Fear from Palestine?* (London, 2024), 81. Shehadeh speaks "for the majority of Palestinians, who are not part of Hamas" (108).

a people already in disgrace. The extensive deposits of hatred in our psychical reservoir<sup>27</sup> find sanctioned expression, something that passes for virtue.

Second, it is central to the politics of today's global protest movement, as described by the late Fred Halliday: a children's Crusade of intellectual demagogues, dreamers and unreconstructed political manipulators of the Old and New Left, whose claim to moral and analytic superiority masks unexamined, recycled Cold War platitudes. It comprises: a narcotic incantation of "No War" that avoids any substantive engagement with problems of international peace and security; vague and often dangerous utopian ideas about an alternative world; a pleasing but vapid invocation of global human values and internationalism; an innocent when not indulgent attitude towards political violence; a capitulation to nationalist and religious bigots that would have shocked their earlier socialist forbears.<sup>28</sup>

Third, we also see in it an instance of political life as it is lived today, a combination of polarisation and stereotypical thinking, which in turn produces Manichean perspectives, susceptible to a "demagogic will-to-overstatement",<sup>29</sup> a stark friend-enemy distinction, in which those persecuted are not even seen as fellow human beings, a paranoid style of expression.<sup>30</sup>

Last, there is antisemitism.

### **Proposition 3: The reprehensible and dismaying responses, may fairly be described as antisemitic**

A Jewish commentator asks of the reprehensible responses: "If we knew anything at all about Jewish history, why were we so surprised?"<sup>31</sup> Another Jewish commentator observes: "People who care about civilians do not generally express that compassion by harassing and intimidating other civilians. Clearly, something else is going on."<sup>32</sup> What, then, is going on? What is this "else"?

I offer as a general rule the principle, Antisemitism is the explanation of last resort. Only when all other candidates as explanation for language, act or programme, have been eliminated, and antisemitism is the last candidate standing (so to speak), may one choose *that* one. This is to adopt a stringency: The default position would be that the most likely explanation should be accepted, at least for the time being. But "most likely" to whom? The "last resort" position guards against that tendency inherent in the condition of oppression to identify that as the source of *all* one's miseries.

We have reached precisely this terminus.

### **(1) The historical elements, with a novel application**

"Anti-Semitism" is short-hand for "anti-Semiteisms." It is a heterogeneous phenomenon, the site of collective hatreds, anxieties and resentments. However, *all* versions of anti-Semitism libel Jews. There are five such libels:

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<sup>27</sup> Cornelius Castoriadis "The psychical and social roots of hatred," *Figures of the Thinkable* (Stanford, California, 2007), p. 163.

<sup>28</sup> *Political Journeys* (New Haven, Connecticut, 2011), 53.

<sup>29</sup> Gershom Scholem "On Eichmann," *On Jews and Judaism in Crisis* (New York, 1976), p. 303.

<sup>30</sup> Fabian Freyenhagen "Adorno and Horkheimer on Anti-Semitism," in Peter E. Gordon, Espen Hammer, and Max Pensky, *A Companion to Adorno* (Hoboken, NJ, 2020), 111.

<sup>31</sup> Daniel Gordis "October 7: The Return of History," *Jewish Review of Books*, Fall 2024.

<sup>32</sup> Dara Horn "October 7 created a permission structure for Anti-semitism," *Atlantic*, 7 October 2024.

- *The blood libel* supposes that Jews entertain homicidal intentions towards non-Jews (and specifically, non-Jewish children), and commit acts of murder, either in re-enactment of the Crucifixion, or to avenge their continuing, collective punishment for that cosmic crime;<sup>33</sup>
- *The economic libel* supposes that Jews, who are self-interested, materialist, acquisitive, and unproductive by nature, exploit non-Jews when they can, and seek monopoly power, the better to pursue their greater objectives.
- *The conspiracy libel* supposes that Jews act in concert, in secret pursuit of goals inimical to the interests of non-Jews. That is: Jews conspire with other Jews.
- *The silencing libel* supposes that Jews cannot tolerate truth-tellers; they fear exposure of their plots. They conspire together to silence their virtuous enemies.
- *The mendacity libel* supposes that Jews proceed by deception and other forms of deceit. That is: Jews lie to non-Jews.<sup>34</sup>

The libels typically combine. Talk about (variously) the "Israel Lobby," the "Zionist Lobby," the "Jewish Lobby," said to exercise a sinister and subversive influence on the foreign policy of many nations, plays both to the economic and conspiracy libels. The five libels as a whole are founded upon a notion of Jews as misanthropes of great but hidden power, a people apart. They are libellous because they are damaging to the good name of the Jewish people.

The persistence, the exceptional longevity of the themes and tropes associated with these libels is set out in histories of antisemitism. Randomly, in preparation for this evening, I picked up Paul Massing's *Rehearsal for Destruction* (1949), a study of political antisemitism in Imperial Germany.

Massing quotes the cleric Adolph Stoecker (1835-1909), founder of the Christian Social party and career antisemite: "Since others are permitted to speak about everything else ... why should it not be allowed to point to the danger which Jewry represents? I don't think this is liberal. I for one will speak of this sore until it is healed ..." Massing also translates the "Antisemites' Catechism," a document in wide circulation at the time: Jews deceive the people and distract them from the truth, it says.<sup>35</sup> The mendacity and silencing libels, so familiar to us now, were active then too – some 150 years ago. I will return to these libels, in their combining in the allegation that the Jews have "weaponised antisemitism" – but first I must address the blood libel.

### (I) Blood libel

There is a photo in circulation of a Saturday march demonstrator cradling a plastic doll, spotted with red paint, and with a fabric plaster stretched across its mouth.<sup>36</sup> What does it mean? The following, I suggest: The IDF killed a child and then silenced it, for fear that it would otherwise incriminate its murderers. How very bizarre, one might think!

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<sup>33</sup> Ivan G. Marcus *How the West Became Antisemitic* (Princeton, New Jersey, 2024), 127, 181.

<sup>34</sup> A common version of this libel (as common now, as it was among agitators in the 1930s and 1940s) is the claim that "antisemitism" is "a label used by Jews" to "protect themselves against criticism." Leo Lowenthal *False Prophets* (New Brunswick, New Jersey, 1987), 81. David Hirsh calls this the "Livingstone Formula." The former London mayor, on being accused of antisemitism, after a specific incident that had nothing to do with Israel, responded: "For far too long the accusation of antisemitism has been used against anyone who is critical of the policies of Israeli government, as I have been." See "Contemporary Antisemitism," in Mark Weitzman, Robert J. Williams and James Wald, eds., *The Routledge History of Antisemitism* (New York, 2024), 47-48.

<sup>35</sup> *Rehearsal for Destruction* (New York, 1949), 59, 77-78.

<sup>36</sup> The photo is reproduced above the title of Howard Jacobson's piece, "Tales of infanticide have stoked hatred of Jews for centuries. They echo still today," *Guardian*, 6 October 2024.

And yet there are earlier versions of this allegation. Its most obscure origins are to be located in New Testament stories.<sup>37</sup> It was a staple of the medieval imagination, and is to be found in the masterworks of the period – say, in Geoffrey Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*. In the Prioress's Tale, a town's Jews kidnap and torture a child. They then hide his body in a sewer, fearful that their crime will be discovered – which it is, by a miracle. The dead child sings, disclosing his whereabouts to his frantic mother, searching for him in the Jews' quarters.<sup>38</sup>

Do I need to spell out the connection, I wonder? For the town's Jews, read the IDF. For the dead child, read – the dead child. For the sewer, read the fabric plaster. For the child's mother, read the protester. I am not concerned with intentions; I am concerned with given historical associations, alive in the common language, and freighting the common understanding.<sup>39</sup>

It is standard though deplorable politics to treat the alleged crimes of one's enemy as proof of his essential criminality, while treating the proven crimes of one's friends as excusable lapses – or "resistance." It is standard though appalling warfare for civilians, including children, to be killed, even if *sometimes* there is accountability for their deaths. And it is standardly extravagant and mendacious antisemitism to summarise the events of the last year in the formula, "Zionists are burning babies" (written on a board at a university encampment).<sup>40</sup>

It is this libel, more than any other, that sustains the acts of abuse, intimidation and violence directed at Jews, at "Zionists."<sup>41</sup> They are – *all* of them – said to be "baby killers."<sup>42</sup> In the Middle East, the

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<sup>37</sup> "These accounts were modelled in part on the story from the New Testament of young Jesus getting lost and his mother Mary finding him in the Temple, among the Jewish doctors of the Law (Luke 2:41-52). Mediaeval children said to have been murdered by Jews were conflated as well with the Holy Innocents, the children of Bethlehem described in the gospel of Matthew (Matt. 2:16-18) who were killed by Herod's soldiers in place of the Christ child. Although the Massacre of the Innocents was a story of murdered Jewish children, in the high Middle Ages these *innocenti* were often understood as Christian infants murdered by order of a Jew." Emily M. Rose "Crusades, Blood Libels, and popular Violence," in Steven Katz *The Cambridge Companion to Antisemitism* (Cambridge, 2022), 203.

<sup>38</sup> It is an important literary work. It is only in certain works of literature that antisemitism is not degraded and degrading, composed by blackguards for blackguards. Of these works, most are to be found within the English literary canon. Indeed, the emergence and continued existence of literary antisemitism is due to Chaucer, Shakespeare, and Dickens, the three eminences of the English literary canon. Their antisemitic works resonate in world culture. See my *Trials of the Diaspora* (Oxford, 2012), 166-171.

<sup>39</sup> "Ask how Israel is able to target innocent children with such deadly accuracy and no one can tell you. Ask why they would want to target innocent children and make themselves despised among the nations of the Earth and no one can tell you that either. Hate on this scale seeks no rational explanation. Hate feeds off the superstitions that fed it last time round." Howard Jacobson "Tales of infanticide have stoked hatred of Jews for centuries. They echo still today," *Guardian*, 6 October 2024.

<sup>40</sup> "I have never felt less protected as a Jew." *Antisemitism at UK Universities since 7<sup>th</sup> October 2023*, ICPG. [https://www.icpg.org.uk/files/ugd/e23fb6\\_f233abe19150411c95e84a73196b8bbf.pdf](https://www.icpg.org.uk/files/ugd/e23fb6_f233abe19150411c95e84a73196b8bbf.pdf).

<sup>41</sup> <https://x.com/avivaklompas/status/1851816733973319723?s=48&t=118zxY45O02vLelxDIynAA>. A Jewish father and his 5-year old son are thrown out of a restaurant as "Zionists." The father is wearing a hat with a Magen David symbol. A 5<sup>th</sup> year medical student, writes, "A public post was made about me accusing me (by name) of supporting genocide, killing children and supporting an Israeli occupation. None of which were true. This post has been shared multiple times. It has led to me receiving threats that I would be physically hurt if I am seen at campus. I have not attended the medical school campus and am taking a year out for my safety. I reported it via the student discipline process 1.5 months ago but have not had a response, even after sending multiple follow up emails asking for updates." "I have never felt less protected as a Jew." *Antisemitism at UK Universities since 7<sup>th</sup> October 2023*, ICPG, 3. [https://www.icpg.org.uk/files/ugd/e23fb6\\_f233abe19150411c95e84a73196b8bbf.pdf](https://www.icpg.org.uk/files/ugd/e23fb6_f233abe19150411c95e84a73196b8bbf.pdf).

<sup>42</sup> Last Friday evening in north-west London, , a young Jewish man, walking home from synagogue, identifiably Jewish by the *kippah* on his head, was shouted at in the street, "Baby killer!" (personal communication).

ritual murder iconography is a favoured visual tool in anti-Israel, "antizionist," cartoons - as is the Crucifixion.<sup>43</sup>

## (2) Mendacity and silencing libels

When Jews deny the truth of a "blood" libel, an "economic" libel, and/or or a "conspiracy" libel, they are often met with the "mendacity" and the "silencing" libels. These auxiliary libels operate thus: *Of course* Jews insist on the falsity of damaging allegations against them.

The Jews claim to be victims, say the antisemites, when in truth they are perpetrators; they claim to be heterogeneous and divided, when in truth they are a conspiratorial unity; they claim to be among the exploited, when in truth they are chief among the exploiters. And if a few Jews are perhaps unjustly treated, then all the others, and for all time, complain of it, ever the opportunists.

Jews are accused by antisemites, then, of being liars and deceivers, hoodwinking others by making false claims about themselves. We recognise two variations or versions of this libel in Holocaust Denial and the widely current "weaponisation of antisemitism" allegation:

- *Holocaust Denial* The Jews fabricated the evidence of the Holocaust, in order to blackmail the Allies into supporting the creation of Israel, and to extort money from the Germans. Victimisers masquerade as victims.
- *Weaponisation of antisemitism* The Jews deploy such evidence of antisemitism as may exist for an ulterior, improper purpose, (a) to deflect attention, or otherwise excuse, Israel's crimes, and/or (b) to intimidate antizionists into silence, or to discredit them. They typically overstate the level or seriousness of antisemitism, and their own concern about it.

It is this second variation that concerns me here. The trope is to be distinguished from the political practice of weaponising antisemitism *against* Jews. Take Iran, for example. It seeks to mobilise support for its political goals by the deployment of antisemitic tropes such as Holocaust Denial. Hannah Arendt, among others, drew our attention to precisely this "alarming reality of antisemitism as a political weapon."<sup>44</sup>

The "weaponisation of antisemitism" trope is different. The oppressor masquerades as the oppressed. Antisemitism is not a weapon used *against* the Jews, it is a weapon they themselves wield.

On the face of it, it is a bizarre claim, and runs somewhat counter to common practice. It would not be difficult to identify the racism, say, in equivalent claims about other minority groups. I don't even want to give examples of what I mean – one shrinks from proposing them, even for purposes of argument – and this shrinking, is to be contrasted with the insouciance with which equivalent allegation is made against Jews. This contrast, indeed, is itself evidence of the coexistence of anti-racism and antisemitism in our political culture.

If a bizarre claim, however, it also a common one. In her recent essay, *Blindness*, Hadley Freeman quotes a Jewish student: "When a student from a minority background complains about bigotry, we all need to do the work. When I complain about antisemitism, it's another Jew trying to control things."<sup>45</sup> Another student reports on an encampment "teach-in" entitled "The Weaponisation of Antisemitism," in which the speaker said that "we have 'too much Holocaust education,' that

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<sup>43</sup> Magda Teter *Blood Libel* (Cambridge, Mass., 2020), 2; Dina Porat "Anti-Zionism as Antisemitism," in Steven Katz *The Cambridge Companion to Antisemitism* (Cambridge, 2022), 458.

<sup>44</sup> Jerome Kohn and Ron H. Feldman, eds, *The Jewish Writings* (New York, 2007), 198.

<sup>45</sup> Hadley Freeman "Blindness," *Jewish Quarterly*, Issue 256, May 2024, 13.

accusations of antisemitism are overblown, and that antisemitism distracts from the locus of Jewish power."<sup>46</sup>

This kind of thing did not start on 7 October 2023. A book published earlier that year, *The Weaponisation of Anti-Semitism: How the Israeli Lobby Brought Down Jeremy Corbyn*,<sup>47</sup> claimed to expose the real motive driving Jews and Jewish organisations to protest Corbyn's antisemitism. It could not be because they truly thought that he was an antisemite, because he wasn't one, declared the author. He had "decades of anti-racist campaigning." The "antisemitism crisis" was "alleged," "engineered," an affair of "smears" and "concocted incidents," and kept current by "media dishonesty," "corporate media misreporting." So why the fuss? These Jews and Jewish organisations were all members of the "Israel Lobby." Acting on orders from Jerusalem they conspired to floor the man who threatened the Jewish State's interests.<sup>48</sup>

Books of this type may claim for their founding precedent a work of Martin Luther's, which bears the title, risking no doubt as to its contents, *On the Jews and Their Lies* (1543).<sup>49</sup> "Dear Christians, be on your guard against such damnable people whom God has permitted to sink into such profound abominations and lies," Luther writes, "for all they do and say must be sheer lying ..."<sup>50</sup> He recommended setting fire to their synagogues, which of course we have also witnessed in this last year. The specific allegation that antisemitism itself is a Jewish hoax, however, has a 20<sup>th</sup> century provenance.<sup>51</sup>

Now, all this creates a dilemma for Jews. Should they hotly protest, "We are truth-tellers," and submit themselves to cross-examination on motive? (Aby Warburg described the experience as "answering questions at pistol-point").<sup>52</sup> That would be ignominious – and fruitless. Or should they ignore the allegation (a "tactic of silence"),<sup>53</sup> allowing it thereby to stand unchallenged? There is no solution – which is another aspect of the difficulties that Jews now face. Jews live under a perpetual indictment.

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<sup>46</sup> "I have never felt less protected as a Jew:" *Antisemitism at UK Universities since 7<sup>th</sup> October 2023*, ICPG. [https://www.icpg.org.uk/files/ugd/e23fb6\\_f233abe19150411c95e84a73196b8bbf.pdf](https://www.icpg.org.uk/files/ugd/e23fb6_f233abe19150411c95e84a73196b8bbf.pdf).

<sup>47</sup> Asa Winstanley *The Weaponisation of Anti-Semitism: How the Israeli Lobby Brought Down Jeremy Corbyn* (London, 2023), I, 9, 30, 115, 162, 231.

<sup>48</sup> The same author tweeted: "It's becoming increasingly clear that 'Israel' carried out a calculated massacre of 'Israeli' captives in Kibbutz Be'eri." <https://x.com/AsaWinstanley/status/1716375147886571995>. He linked to an anonymous item in Mondoweiss (22 October 2023), "A growing number of reports indicate Israeli forces responsible for Israeli civilian and military deaths following October 7 attack."

<sup>49</sup> It was but one of three texts written by Luther in just one year against the Jews. See Debra Kaplan "Martin Luther and the Reformation," in Steven Katz *The Cambridge Companion to Antisemitism* (Cambridge, 2022), 280.

<sup>50</sup> [https://www.prchiz.pl/storage/app/media/pliki/Luther\\_On\\_Jews.pdf](https://www.prchiz.pl/storage/app/media/pliki/Luther_On_Jews.pdf). *On the Jews and Their Lies* (Internet, 2009), 15.

<sup>51</sup> "In an April 2023 lecture, David Nirenberg, the historian, presented the example of an activist with a large following whose boundary-pushing rhetoric met with accusations of anti-Semitism. The activist pointed out, as Nirenberg put it, that anti-Semitism 'was merely an accusation that Jews used to silence criticism and squash free speech.' He brought libel lawsuits against newspapers that accused him of antisemitism, and won them. It is unfortunate for those making this argument today that this activist was named Adolf Hitler." Dara Horn "Why the most educated people in America fall for anti-Semitic lies," *Atlantic*, 15 February 2024. The Nirenberg lecture: <https://www.cornell.edu/video/how-can-history-help-the-example-of-anti-semitism>.

<sup>52</sup> Charlotte Schoell-Glass *Aby Warburg and Anti-Semitism* (Detroit, Michigan, 2008), 32.

<sup>53</sup> Charlotte Schoell-Glass *Aby Warburg and Anti-Semitism* (Detroit, Michigan, 2008), 40.

## **(2) The novel elements**

### **(1) Antizionism / antisemitism collapse**

Zionism is a "Jewish cause" – if not, as Herzl proposed, "the Jewish cause."<sup>54</sup> For many Jewish households, in postwar America, Judaism and Zionism "were synonymous."<sup>55</sup> According to a 2010 survey, 95% of British Jews said Israel plays some role in their Jewish identity, while 82% said it plays a central or important role.<sup>56</sup> By the year 2050, Israel is projected to be home to the majority of the world's Jews.<sup>57</sup> Zionism will always attract the attention of antisemites.

In the past few years, the definition of antisemitism has been the subject of "heated controversies."<sup>58</sup> Likewise, antizionism's intimacy of association with antisemitism - the complicity of one with the other. This too was once a matter of "passionate controversy."<sup>59</sup> But now? Not so much.

#### **(i) A vandal**

Consider the case of the man filmed destroying an informal, communal memorial to the 7 October dead in a Brighton square.<sup>60</sup>

The act of vandalism occurred in the late afternoon, while it was still light; cars drove past – the man acted in full view of drivers, pedestrians, people in the square; he looked to be about 50 years' old, dressed neatly, in cream chinos and jacket; methodically, he worked his way across the length of the memorial, picking up messages and notes, flowers, a teddy, other small objects, and throwing them aside; he also threw aside an explanatory board, in the centre of the memorial; he then attempted to tear up a large photo, but failed, and then tossed this aside too. A passer-by challenged him, and the clip ends with the vandal pointing at the memorial-wreckage, his body arched in indignation.

Among the details of this brutish behaviour, the man's motivation (antizionist or antisemitic?) seems to me to be unimportant, even irrelevant.

Antisemitism *as it now is*, and antizionism *as it now is*, in its newest and lethal iteration, travel in the same direction, and have the same violent, destructive outcome. Joshua Leifer reminds those who need reminding: "The most radical forms of antizionism now exhibit a cruel disregard for the lives of Jews in Israel; in the aftermath of 7 October, some went as far as to suggest that killing Israeli Jewish civilians might be necessary, and even justified, for a free Palestine."<sup>61</sup>

#### **(ii) Antisemitisms, antizionisms**

Just as there are quite different species of the genus "antisemite" so there are quite different species of the genus "antizionist." Disaggregation is necessary: there have been several antizionisms in history and it is important not to confuse them. The first versions, for example, were fully internal

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<sup>54</sup> Gil Troy, ed., *Herzl's Zionist Writings* (New Milford, Connecticut, 2023), Vol. 1, 663.

<sup>55</sup> Joshua Leifer *Tablets Shattered* (New York, 2024), 3.

<sup>56</sup> An IJPR Report, cited in Dave Rich "The British Summer of 2014: Boycotts, Antisemitism, and Jews," in David Feldman, ed., *Boycotts Past and Present* (London, 2019), 247.

<sup>57</sup> Joshua Leifer *Tablets Shattered* (New York, 2024), 210.

<sup>58</sup> François Soyer *Mediaeval Antisemitism?* (Leeds, 2019), 5.

<sup>59</sup> Derek J. Penslar *Zionism: An Emotional State* (Newark, New Jersey, 2023), 215 ("There is a passionate controversy whether anti-Zionism is a form of antisemitism ...").

<sup>60</sup> "Watch: Man filmed destroying Jewish memorial on eve of October 7 anniversary," *Telegraph*, 6 October 2024.

<sup>61</sup> Joshua Leifer *Tablets Shattered* (New York, 2024), 214.

to the Jewish world; some of them even survive to present times.<sup>62</sup> In the history of these iterations, at times antizionism came closer to antisemitism, and at other times, pulled away from it. The new iterations have reached points of close convergence, and in certain instances, even identity, with antisemitism.

We had, some time before 7 October, left behind the plea, "It's not antisemitic, it's criticism of Israel, and that's ok." It's *not* ok, as we wearily pointed out, when the "criticism" is itself "antisemitic." We have now, in consequence of 7 October, also left behind the further plea, "It's not antisemitic, it's antizionist, and that's ok." That too, is not ok, we now must affirm, because, among the current antizionisms, there is a version that is as irrational and dangerous to Jews as any antisemitism of modern times.

The term "antisemitism" was invented by a Jew-hater to give dignity to his animus; "antizionism" is often used now for the same purpose. They have this in common too.

To those who regard the "Protocols of the Elders of Zion" as something other than a mere fabrication, the document is commonly regarded as minutes or resolutions of the first Zionist conference, held in Basel in 1897. The Zionist movement itself is taken to be a new variation of the eternal Jewish conspiracy against the non-Jewish world.<sup>63</sup>

A Vatican document, Declaration on the Jews, issued on 28 October 1965, was met with a hostile response from Christians in Arab countries. Efforts to minimise religious antagonism towards Jews was a "Zionist plot." Many protesting telegrams were sent to the Pope.<sup>64</sup>

In late 1960s Poland, the words "Zionism" and "Zionist" were "freely applied to any person of Jewish origin whom the regime targeted for attack." It was "a Soviet ready-made vocabulary," enabling "popular anti-Jewish prejudice to be more mobilised and exploited under an orthodox Marxist-Leninist camouflage." Charges of antisemitism were met with indignation, however: "We will not permit revisionists and Zionist rioters accuse us of antisemitism," party officials declared, as they purged "Zionist elements" from the Party. These elements were conspirators against Poland, with hidden connections with the "World Zionist mafia" headquartered in the West.<sup>65</sup> As with Poland, so with East Germany,<sup>66</sup>

With Hamas, Hezbollah, and Iran, hostile, disparaging, hateful language about Israel, Zionism, and Jews, run together, re-enforcing each other, and drawing on themes of transhistorical Jewish perfidy. "Jews" and "Zionists" are used interchangeably.<sup>67</sup> Fred Halliday termed this a "composite ideology,"

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<sup>62</sup> Dina Porat "Anti-Zionism as Antisemitism," in Steven Katz *The Cambridge Companion to Antisemitism* (Cambridge, 2022), 450-451; Michael Selzer, ed., *Zionism Reconsidered* (New York, 1970).

<sup>63</sup> Dina Porat "Anti-Zionism as Antisemitism," in Steven Katz *The Cambridge Companion to Antisemitism* (Cambridge, 2022), 450.

<sup>64</sup> Gerhard Falk *The Jew in Christian Theology* (Jefferson, North Carolina, 1992), 120.

<sup>65</sup> Dariusz Stola "Anti-Zionism as a Multi-Purpose policy Instrument: The Anti-Zionist Campaign in Poland, 1967-1968," in Jeffrey Herf, ed., *Anti-Semitism and Anti-Zionism in Historical Perspective* (London, 2007), 161, 164, 174, 175, 177.

<sup>66</sup> A political opponent of Party leader Walter Ulbricht was jailed for 4 years for heading a Zionist spy ring, "defending the interests of Zionist monopoly capitalists." During another political trial in the 1950s, a Party journal editorialised, "the Zionist movement has nothing in common with the aims of humanity and true love of humankind. [It] devotes itself exclusively to its own interests and the interests of the Jewish capitalists." And so on. "Ideology and *Realpolitik*: East German Attitudes towards Zionism and Israel," in Jeffrey Herf, ed., *Anti-Semitism and Anti-Zionism in Historical Perspective* (London, 2007), 194, 200.

<sup>67</sup> Fred Halliday *Political Journeys* (New Haven, Connecticut, 2011), 194-195; Meir Litvak "The Islamic Republic of Iran and the Holocaust: Anti-Semitism and Anti-Zionism," in Jeffrey Herf, ed., *Anti-Semitism and Anti-Zionism in Historical Perspective* (London, 2007), 252-264.

one "combining the themes of European antisemitism (in themselves confused) with specific Islamic themes, and hostility to the State of Israel and its policies."<sup>68</sup>

(iii) Hamas is antisemitic / antizionist

Consider the antisemitic, antizionist organisation that is Hamas. Hamas's programme for the Jews is one of extermination. It calls for victory, and plans a wasteland – from the river to the sea. Palestine's liberation is to be achieved by sexual violence, by rape, by torture, by murder. This "antizionism" wishes the State of Israel out of existence. It justifies the wish by insisting that it should never have come *into* existence. No measures for its removal are objectionable; no price in death and destruction is too high. "So-called peaceful solutions ... are in contradiction to the principles of the Islamic Resistance Movement" (1988 Hamas Charter, art. 13).

Since this state, like all others, is comprised of its citizens, for the State to disappear *as Hamas requires*, the citizens must disappear too,<sup>69</sup> Every brutality against them is permitted; atrocity loses its opprobrium. "Resistance" is indivisible and is free to take any form. No distinction is made between soldiers and civilians, citizens and visitors, men and women, adults and children. All can be hunted down and killed. "Israel, Judaism and Jews challenge Islam and the Moslem people. 'May the cowards never sleep'" (Hamas Charter, art. 28).

Art. 22 of the Hamas Charter provides:

For a long time, the enemies have been planning, skilfully and with precision, for the achievement of what they have attained. They took into consideration the causes affecting the current of events. They strived to amass great and substantive material wealth which they devoted to the realisation of their dream. With their money, they took control of the world media, news agencies, the press, publishing houses, broadcasting stations, and others. With their money they stirred revolutions in various parts of the world with the purpose of achieving their interests and reaping the fruit therein. They were behind the French Revolution, the Communist revolution and most of the revolutions we heard and hear about, here and there. With their money they formed secret societies, such as Freemasons, Rotary Clubs, the Lions and others in different parts of the world for the purpose of sabotaging societies and achieving Zionist interests. With their money they were able to control imperialistic countries and instigate them to colonize many countries in order to enable them to exploit their resources and spread corruption there.

You may speak as much as you want about regional and world wars. They were behind World War I, when they were able to destroy the Islamic Caliphate, making financial gains and controlling resources. They obtained the Balfour Declaration, formed the League of Nations through which they could rule the world. They were behind World War II, through which they made huge financial gains by trading in armaments, and paved the way for the establishment of their state. It was they who instigated the replacement of the League of Nations with the United Nations and the Security Council to enable them to rule the world through them. There is no war going on anywhere, without having their finger in it.

It is sometimes protested: There is another, more recent document, the 2017 "A Document of General Principles and Policies." It contains liberal language: "Hamas rejects the persecution of any

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<sup>68</sup> *100 Myths About the Middle East* (London, 2005), 36.

<sup>69</sup> "On 7 October 2023, [Iranian academic Mohammed] Marandi posted on social media: 'It's been a great and historic day. Israel can't even defeat the besieged Gazans. How can the regime even contemplate confrontation with Hezbollah, let alone the Islamic Republic of Iran. It is time for colonisers to go back to their homes in Europe and North America.'" One year later, Murandi was a guest on BBC Radion 4's Today programme: <https://camera-uk.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/11/BBC-report-update.pdf>.

human being or the undermining of his or her rights on nationalist, religious or sectarian grounds" (para. 17).

The Charter, however, has not been repudiated. The 2017 Document represents "our position for now," Khaled Mashaal said.<sup>70</sup> One can hear the Charter in its language: "The Israeli entity is the plaything of the Zionist project and its base of aggression" (para. 14). "The Zionist project also poses a danger to international security and peace and to mankind and its interests and stability" (para. 15). " Hamas rejects any alternative to the full and complete liberation of Palestine, from the river to the sea" (para. 20). "There is no alternative to a fully sovereign Palestinian State on the entire national Palestinian soil, with Jerusalem as its capital" (para. 27).

In the same interview, Mashaal went on to say, "We don't have to answer to the Israeli propaganda claims that try to make us seem monstrous when it comes to Jews. Arabs and Muslims were highly moral and ethical with their enemies during wartime. They committed no massacres of innocent civilians."<sup>71</sup> We may say: Hamas practice does not reflect the 2017 document. Not in relation to its own violent actions, nor in relation to its incitements of others to violence: "On July 12 [2019], Fathi Hammad, a senior Hamas official, urged Palestinians abroad to kill Jews in Israel and beyond, 'All of you seven million Palestinians abroad, enough of the warming up. You have Jews everywhere and we must attack every Jew on the globe by way of slaughter and killing, if God permits.' A Hamas official in Gaza said Hammad's views did not represent the official position of Hamas."<sup>72</sup>

The Israeli historian of the Holocaust, Saul Friedländer writes, "In their efforts to retrieve whatever was left behind the victims of October 7 and by their murderers, Shin Bet and Military Intelligence say they found the cell phone of one of the victims near Re'im, which her killer used to call his parents in Gaza (the conversation was recorded on the phone): 'Dad, I call to tell you that I killed the Jew whose phone I am using, and with my own hands I killed ten other Jews – yes, ten – with my own hands. Open WhatsApp and you will see all the dead.' The father: 'May God protect you.' The killer then shared his feat with his mother and got her blessing. Foreign minister Eli Cohen read a transcript of the phone call to the UN Security Council, on the occasion of a special debate regarding the Israel-Hamas war."<sup>73</sup>

The slogan of the Yemeni Houthis, Hamas' allies, makes their position quite clear: "Death to America, Death to Israel, Cursed be the Jews and Allahu Akhbar."<sup>74</sup>

Are Hamas's supporters in the West to be designated antisemites or antizionists? Who cares? Among the placards carried on Saturday marches were these two, held high: "WAKE UP OUR MEDIA TV RADIO & GOVERNMENT ARE CONTROLLED BY ZIONISTS," and "Is Our Blood So Sweet?"<sup>75</sup> Antizionist? Or antisemitic? We should all care about the Jew-hating content of these messages, but not spend a moment pondering whether they are antisemitic or antizionist.

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<sup>70</sup> Ali Younes "Meshaal: 'We want to restore our national rights,'" Aljazeera 2 May 2017 <https://www.aljazeera.com/features/2017/5/2/meshaal-we-want-to-restore-our-national-rights>.

<sup>71</sup> Ali Younes "Meshaal: 'We want to restore our national rights,'" Aljazeera 2 May 2017 <https://www.aljazeera.com/features/2017/5/2/meshaal-we-want-to-restore-our-national-rights>.

<sup>72</sup> "International Religious Freedom Reports." <https://www.state.gov/report/custom/501a3e7940/>. Adam Rasgon "Senior Hamas official calls on members of Palestinian diaspora to kill Jews," *Times of Israel*, 14 July 2019; "Hamas official walks back call to Palestinian Diaspora to kill 'Jews everywhere,'" *Times of Israel*, 15 July 2019.

<sup>73</sup> Saul Friedländer *Diary of a Crisis* (London, 2024), 215-216.

<sup>74</sup> Nabih Bulos, Patrick J. McDonnell "'Death to America! Death to Israel!' say Houthis in Yemen," *Los Angeles Times*, 20 February 2015; <https://www.adl.org/resources/news/why-do-houthis-curse-jews>.

<sup>75</sup> Quoted, Dave Rich *Everyday Hate* (London, 2024), 261, 262.

## (2) The maturing of the ideology, "settler colonialism"<sup>76</sup>

No movement can survive on chants and slogans. It requires an authorising ideology. This is provided by the theory of settler colonialism, which serves the ideological function of conferring all relevant rights on Palestinians Arabs, while withholding them from Jewish Israelis. The theory's application is not limited to Israel – indeed, it seems that it was first developed with the United States and Australia in view. The case of Israel, however, solves what otherwise would be three insurmountable difficulties in translating the theory from scholarship into activism.

These are the difficulties: As a programme, the theory is extravagant, unrealisable, and self-subverting.

- *Extravagant Indigeneity* is the trump value, and settlement, the foundational vice. A right to settle can never be acquired: the offence is permanent and trans-generational. The worst crimes are attached to settlement, not as contingencies but in its logic.<sup>77</sup> Everything from genocide to "reconciliation" is "genocide," because reconciliation contributes to "the extinction of ... forms of indigenous alterity."<sup>78</sup> A radical "complicity" with these vices is inescapable. "No matter how much it tries," writes a settler colonialism theorist, "the settler colonial situation cannot ultimately supersede itself."<sup>79</sup>
- *Unrealisable* It "demands a politics that can't be acted out."<sup>80</sup> There is no blueprint, and therefore no *question* of route to implementation.<sup>81</sup> Should all Australians be expelled, other than the Aboriginal dwellers? But In 2021, only 3% of Australia's population was Aboriginal.<sup>82</sup> The entire White and Black population of the United States, expelled? (Black Americans are deemed settlers, "either erasing Indigenous peoples, attempting to replace them, or outright settlers").<sup>83</sup> But – of course – it is not just the population of the United States at notional risk: *all* the countries of the Americas are at risk. Though the theory's effect is "to cultivate hatred of those designated as settlers and to inspire hope for their disappearance,"<sup>84</sup> the hope cannot be realised, and the hatred is left to feed on itself.
- *Self-subverting* The indigenous are not indigenous. We are *all* settlers. Conquest, settlement, destruction, and death are history's dominant themes; all the indigenous people were once settlers themselves, as Michael Walzer has pointed out. Every people that occupies a territory took it from another people, who took it from someone else.<sup>85</sup> Walzer builds on

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<sup>76</sup> I have relied on Adam Kirsch's *On Settler Colonialism* (2024), and on Michael Walzer's review of Kirsch's book in the *Jewish Review of Books*. Simon Sebag Montefiore did the preliminary work: "The Decolonization Narrative Is Dangerous and False," *The Atlantic*, 27 October 2023.

<sup>77</sup> "Pretty much everything that today's settlers do - that we do - is effectively genocidal." Michael Walzer "Unsettling Ideology," *Jewish Review of Books*, Fall 2024. Kirsch quotes Patrick Wolfe, a leading theorist of "settler colonialism:" "[The] logic that initially informed frontier killing transmutes into different modalities, discourses and institutional formations as it undergirds the historical development ... of settler society." "The question of genocide is never far from discussions of settler colonialism." *On Settler Colonialism* (New York, 2024), 24, 25.

<sup>78</sup> Quoted, Adam Kirsch *On Settler Colonialism* (New York, 2024), 28 (Lorenzo Veracini).

<sup>79</sup> Quoted, Adam Kirsch *On Settler Colonialism* (New York, 2024), 28 (Lorenzo Veracini).

<sup>80</sup> Michael Walzer "Unsettling Ideology," *Jewish Review of Books*, Fall 2024.

<sup>81</sup> "As to the epithet Utopian, the case to which it is rightly applied seems to be that to which, in the event of the adoption of the proposed plan, felicitous effects are represented as about to take place, no causes adequate to the production of such effects being found in it." Jeremy Bentham *The Book of Fallacies* (Oxford, 2015). Quoted, David Estlund *Utopophobia* (Princeton, New Jersey, 2020), 11.

<sup>82</sup> Adam Kirsch *On Settler Colonialism* (New York, 2024), 29.

<sup>83</sup> Quoted, Adam Kirsch *On Settler Colonialism* (New York, 2024), 30 (Mays).

<sup>84</sup> Michael Walzer "Unsettling Ideology," *Jewish Review of Books*, Fall 2024.

<sup>85</sup> Michael Walzer "Unsettling Ideology," *Jewish Review of Books*, Fall 2024. DNA and paleontological evidence has established, writes Kirsch, that the earliest human beings to inhabit the Americas came from East Asia,

Maxime Rodinson's argument: "Who is innocent of this charge? The only variable lies in the time that has elapsed since the usurping was done. The human conscience sooner or later accepts the idea that long-time use establishes a valid claim."<sup>86</sup>

The theory thus takes its adherents to an impasse. Though its unrealisability is mostly dismissed,<sup>87</sup> the case of Israel offers the promise of a more positive outcome. Even if Americans and Australians cannot be cleared out, the Israeli Jews are different proposition. The Jewish State thereby becomes the scapegoat for the sins of settler colonialists everywhere; it is the proxy for all "settler colonial states." Christian antisemitism once again assists, with its theory of the Jews' inherited guilt: "Then answered all the people and said, 'His blood be on us, and on our children!'" (Matthew 27: 25).

But a new set of difficulties arise, specific to Israel. The facts of the history of Zionist enterprise do not quite fit the theory<sup>88</sup> - indeed, hardly at all.<sup>89</sup> A great deal of squashing and squeezing is needed, and even then, the results are not especially convincing. "Placing Zionism within the broad sweep of Western colonialism leaves unexplained many of its key aspects," writes Derek Penslar, "such as the nature of Zionism's connection with historic Palestine."<sup>90</sup> In any event the Israelis show no sign of leaving – no more than the Americans or the Australians. Hence the immense, bottled-up energy of frustration and exasperation in the antizionist movement.

### **(3) Avoiding this antisemitism, this antizionism, is not difficult**

When I used to tell people in the late 1980s that I was researching T.S. Eliot's antisemitism, I was often met with the response, "Oh, but wasn't everyone antisemitic in those days?" Perhaps in years to come, a similar remark will be made about our own times. Yet the statement was not true of the first decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and it is not true of the third decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

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perhaps as long as 2,500 years ago. An ideologist responds: This "conflicts with the understanding of some [native American] tribes of their own origins." She then writes: "I acknowledge this conflict but will not attempt to resolve it (if it is possible – or necessary – to resolve it at all)." Quoted, Adam Kirsch *On Settler Colonialism* (New York, 2024), 66 (Raff).

<sup>86</sup> Maxime Rodinson *Israel: A Colonial Settler State?* (1973), 91 ("I do not recognise for myself the right to preach vengeance and murder from my ivory tower").

<sup>87</sup> "Decolonization is not obliged to answer these questions," writes one ideologist. "It is not accountable to settlers, or settler futurity. Decolonization is accountable to Indigenous sovereignty and futurity." Quoted, Adam Kirsch *On Settler Colonialism* (New York, 2024), 30 (Tuck and Yang).

<sup>88</sup> An early exposition of the thesis Maxime Rodinson *Israel: A Colonial Settler State?* (1973) struggles to conform the historical facts to the colonial settler model. The thesis he defends? That the Arab view of Israel, as "an imperialist base set up by British imperialism," (alternatively, "the American-European nations as a whole") is correct. And yet, he acknowledges that Palestine was "the one historically certified homeland of the Jews as Jews;" that there were "no necessarily colonialist or imperialist orientation in [Zionist] motivations;" that "the Jewish Palestinian colonists had not come from the British population; and that "events in Europe were making the limitations on immigration intolerable." At one point, he is driven to italicise the word "colonists" in almost involuntary acknowledgment of the strain the facts put on his thesis. Of the 1947-1948 period, he writes: "I will not try here to determine what could or should have been done according to various moral criteria, but to explain the Arab reactions." Maxime Rodinson *Israel: A Colonial Settler State?* (1973), 36, 56, 62, 66, 72-73 ("These [European- American] nations ... constituted the true mother country of the *Yishuv*"), 84 ("The historical role of mother country for the *Yishuv* was played by Europe as a whole"), 84 ("Great Britain's 'colonists'").

<sup>89</sup> Jerome Kohn and Ron H. Feldman, eds, *The Jewish Writings* (New York, 2007), 434-435.

<sup>90</sup> Derek J. Penslar *Zionism: An Emotional State* (Newark, New Jersey, 2023), 70. Penslar equivocates. "There are ... good reasons to place Israel within a settler-colonial framework, but that framework requires considerable expansion, both geographic and conceptual, beyond what is commonly found" (83); "Our comparative examination of colonial indigenisation places Zionism within a settler-colonial; matrix while allowing for its particularities ... Whether Zionism's particularities or its commonalities with other forms of settlement colonialism are more important is largely a function of the observer's disciplinary position and political commitments. Engaged scholarship is not necessarily bad scholarship ..." (95-96).

Antisemitism is always a choice. Avoiding antisemitism, avoiding the newest antizionism, is not difficult. Certainly, on 7 October the line was drawn very clearly – though many crossed it.

### (I) Principles

(i) Do not rejoice in murder. Leave the sadistic joy in 7 October to the political sociopaths; do not share it. Do not tolerate the abuse of Jews. Don't tolerate, say, those men who in May 2021 drove through Jewish parts of NW London waving Palestinian flags and shouting "Fuck the Jews! Fuck their mothers, rape their daughters!"<sup>91</sup> (All charges were dropped 18 months later).<sup>92</sup> And do not indulge antisemitic conspiracists.

(ii) Educate yourself in antisemitism's history. If you want to speak about antisemitism, learn something of its history. Don't capitulate to that will to ignorance characteristic of so much of the discoursing today on the subject. (The Corbyn book I mentioned earlier exemplifies this will to ignorance. It is a book about antisemitism, but it indicates no serious interest in antisemitism's history or character).

(iii) Be open to Jewish perspectives. If a Jew says "antisemitism," listen. Give Jews a voice. I do not propose, a *decisive* voice. I do not insist, "I am, therefore I know." But since antisemitism disproportionately afflicts Jews, it is reasonable to suppose that they are likely to know things about it that others may not.<sup>93</sup>

(iv) Don't be faint-hearted: There is much talk about the Jewish lobby among antisemitic progressives, talk which supports displays of phoney bravado. But these types face no actual threat, and risk nothing. Standing with Jews, however, requires some courage. One example must suffice. In January 2024, the British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy cancelled an article about post-7 October Jewish trauma from its quarterly magazine, citing "unease" around the possible "ramifications" it could have.<sup>94</sup>

(v) Don't risk complicity in antisemitic positions. Addressing the Islamist politics, Fred Halliday drew attention to "a mindset of anti-Jewish prejudice that is riven with racism and religious obscurantism." He added, in a judgment which stands the test of time, and applies today as much as it did when he made it: "It is worth recalling the saying of the German socialist leader Bebel, that 'antisemitism is the socialism of fools.' The question of how many on the Left are *tolerant if not actively complicit* in this foolery today is a painful one" (italics added).<sup>95</sup> Do not tolerate – still less, make oneself actively complicit in antisemitism. Do not share space with antisemites; do not forgive them, for the sake of a common cause.

(vi) Grapple with the complexity of the region's history. Among other things, seek some realistic sense of means, objectives and outcomes. Understand the depth of the discontent with Israel's

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<sup>91</sup> Rachel Bunyan "Convoy of cars that drove through Jewish community in London yelling 'F\*\*\* their mothers' had 'travelled 200 miles from Bradford,'" *MailOnline*, 17 May 2021. The incident was widely reported.

<sup>92</sup> Elizabeth Haigh "Fury as prosecutors DROP all charges over 'Convoy for Palestine' when protestors screamed 'F\*\*\* the Jews. F\*\*\* their mothers, rape their daughters,'" *MailOnline* 18 November 2022.

<sup>93</sup> See *Trials of the Diaspora* (Oxford, 2012), 587.

<sup>94</sup> Charlie Parker "Magazine removes article about Jewish trauma over backlash fears," *Times*, 2 January.

<sup>95</sup> The sentences before the sentences quoted above: "The reactionary... nature of much of [the Islamists'] programme on women, free speech, the rights of gays and other minorities is evident. There is also a mindset of anti-Jewish prejudice that is riven with racism and religious obscurantism. Only a few in the West noted what many in the Islamic world will have at once understood, that one of the most destructive missiles fired by Hezbollah into Israel bore the name Khaibar – not a benign reference to the pass between Afghanistan and Pakistan, but the name of the victorious battle fought against the Jews by the Prophet Muhammad in the seventh century." *Political Journeys* (New Haven, Connecticut, 2011), 82-83.

current condition among Israelis, and among Jews of the Diaspora. Understand the extent of Hamas's responsibility for Gaza's grievous condition.

## (2) Boycotts

Now, apply these modest principles to the boycott question. Notwithstanding that a boycott is a non-violent political practice, a form of activity of the autonomous self (allying with the good, distancing from the bad), and consecrated by the South African anti-Apartheid movement, the reflex of most Jews, still by far the majority, who are committed to Israel as a Jewish project, and are mindful of the history of boycotts, is to characterise boycotts of Israel as antisemitic.

Why do they say that? In part, because of the double standards applied (what general principle could justify the boycotting of Israel, alone among the nations of the world?); in part, because of the history of anti-Jewish boycotts; and in part because of the absence of any determinate political objective served by the boycott<sup>96</sup> - that is, at what point would the boycott be called off? Only when the Jewish State is eliminated?<sup>97</sup>

I do not myself think that all boycotters are antisemites.<sup>98</sup> But I doubt whether they have given any thought to these considerations – let alone the principles just listed. Boycotters operate in a broader antisemitic environment which gives a general permission to pursue hostile acts against Jews. Academic and culture-industry boycotters are open to further objections:

- *Academic boycotters* violate the principles of academic freedom (freedom to research, freedom to study), and create insuperable conflicts of interest for themselves. The scientists among them also violate the principle of the universality of science, as well as falling into absurdity, given the indispensable, inescapable contributions of Israeli science to the world.
- *Culture-industry boycotters* tear at the bonds that unite the world's republic of letters. "It cannot be that the solution to the conflict is to read less, and not more," wrote two Jerusalemite literary agents in the New York Times last week. They reported, "Jewish and Israeli writers are struggling to find publishers."<sup>99</sup> Cultural boycotts are an attack on freedom of expression, denying communication rights to the boycotted writers, to publishing houses, and so on.<sup>100</sup> I have yet to read a coherent case for the boycott of the work of *any* writer or artist, any film-maker or composer.

Isaac Deutscher wrote of a certain coldness displayed by the Allied nations towards the suffering of Jews in the years leading to World War II, during the War itself, and indeed in its immediate

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<sup>96</sup> "... lacking the ANC's clarity on goals and strategy, the Palestinian BDS campaign is politically incoherent, lacking consensus on the end goals and the mechanisms by which BDS is meant to achieve them. Consequently, it neither focuses on activating these mechanisms, nor does it evaluate 'success' sensibly." "The BDS Call expresses rather than surmounts Palestinians' disorganisation and division, compelling the avoidance of substantive political goals." "Disagreement over the goals of BDS is fundamental." Lee Jones "Sanctioning Apartheid: Comparing the South African and Palestinian Campaigns for Boycotts, Disinvestment, and Sanctions," in David Feldman, ed., *Boycotts Past and Present* (London, 2019), 199, 206, 208.

<sup>97</sup> J. Krikler "Moral-Historical Questions of the Anti-Israel Boycott," in David Feldman, ed., *Boycotts Past and Present* (London, 2019), 196; Cary Nelson "BDS and Antisemitism," in Mark Weitzman, Robert J. Williams and James Wald, eds., *The Routledge History of Antisemitism* (New York, 2024), 340.

<sup>98</sup> Indeed, the political philosopher and liberal Zionist Michael Walzer entertains the boycott of goods produced in the Occupied Territories. See Marc Tracy "Michael Walzer on the proposed co-op boycott," *Tablet*, 2 March 2012. <https://www.tabletmag.com/sections/news/articles/michael-walzer-on-the-proposed-coop-boycott>

<sup>99</sup> Deborah Harris and Jessica Kasmer-Jacobs "Stop the Boycott of Israeli Culture," *New York Times*, 31 October 2024.

<sup>100</sup> *Trials of the Diaspora* (Oxford, 2012), 482.

aftermath too. This suffering "has not truly shocked their conscience. It has left them also cold." And then a few sentences later, "the fate of the European Jews left the nations of Europe, the gentile world at large, almost cold."<sup>101</sup>

I do not compare – not for one moment – the fate of the Jews *then* with the experiences of Jews *today* – even though, as we know, the killings on 7 October left more Jews dead than on any other day since 1945. (Let me add here - one reason why I do not draw the comparison is because Jews the world over now have their own state, in the last resort).

But this matter of "coldness" has a more general application than to the years of Nazi persecution. It concerns a certain impatience with, a certain indifference to, even a certain readiness to "understand," all the troubles visited upon Jews. This is what sustains antisemitism.

#### **Proposition 4: We live in a new conjuncture**

So: Jews now find themselves in a new conjuncture, not a new moment in what was the then given conjuncture. Prior to 7 October, and the antisemitic responses to it, there was a general belief that among the world's liberal democracies, the post-war interdiction of violence against Jews, and the endorsement of that violence, would be maintained, even if punctuated by antisemitic "moments," that is, short periods of intensified hostility towards Jews. We were wrong. The last year does not represent a mere "pause" or "disruption" in the post-war security of Jews.

The Corbyn period, in the light of responses to 7 October, now seems less a moment, more the precursor of a more fundamental change of direction. Could it be that we are now reverting to an older norm, the one that defined centuries of Jewish life in Europe and elsewhere, characterised for us, even in the best of times, by defensiveness, limited horizons, and an atmosphere of hostility? There are compelling grounds for thinking so.

#### **(1) The new quantum of antisemitic incidents**

Of the 1,978 antisemitic incidents recorded by the CST in the first half of this year, 121 incidents fell into the "assault" category (an increase of 41% from the 86 Assaults reported in January-June 2023). In 26 of these assaults, the offender threw eggs, stones, bricks, bottles or other objects at the victim (16 of the 26, from a passing vehicle). In 25 incidents, the victim was punched or kicked. In 19 incidents, the victim was spat at. In 16 incidents, the perpetrator stripped the victim of religious clothes or accessories. In 5 incidents, the offender fired a non-lethal gun at the victim. One incident involved a knife; and on one occasion, a vehicle was used to endanger pedestrians. 73 of these attacks were accompanied by verbal abuse, and nine contained an element of threatening language.<sup>102</sup>

To explain a little further what happened in one of these incidents: "In January, a group of two men and two women from Israel were in central London in the early hours of the morning speaking Hebrew to each other. Three men of Arab or North African origin asked them if they were Jewish, and one of the victims confirmed that they were. One of the offenders then started to shout, 'Fuck Jews, Hamas is the best.' They followed the victims into a nearby shop and started to throw glass bottles at them, before punching one of the women in the neck."<sup>103</sup>

Quantity matters: antisemitism now has an "everyday" quality. There is a new variety, however, within the aggregated figures. To the brute increase of antisemitic incidents, that is, we must add:

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<sup>101</sup> "The Non-Jewish Jew" (1958), in Michael Selzer, ed., *Zionism Reconsidered* (New York, 1970), 83, 84.

<sup>102</sup> CST *Antisemitic Incidents January-June 2024*, 4, 18.

<sup>103</sup> CST *Antisemitic Incidents January-June 2024*, 19.

- The fact that the first evidence of this increase followed a massacre of Jews, not violence by Jews: The worst week for antisemitic incidents in the UK was the week following the 7 October terror-attack.<sup>104</sup> On the evening of 7 October, demonstrators, rich in fellow-feeling and camaraderie, celebrated the deaths in carnival-style displays of joy.<sup>105</sup> Most of the antisemitic incidents reported to CST in the month after the Hamas terror attack affected Jewish children in mainstream schools. In one example, a Jewish boy in a primary school was asked by a classmate if he supported Israel or Palestine and when he replied Israel, he was told: "I support Palestine, I want to kill all the Jews."<sup>106</sup> By 29 October 2023, Saul Friedländer was noting "the enormous outpouring of hatred against Jews ... in an outburst of antisemitism not seen in the West since the heyday of Nazism."<sup>107</sup>
- The fact that individual incidents occur in the context of an unboundaried, unpredictable menace. A leaflet in wide circulation demands: "Get Fascists, Racists, Nazis, Zionists and Islamophobes out of Finchley!"<sup>108</sup> The chant "From London to Gaza we'll have an intifada," is a threat to all of London's Jews. As is the placard carried by a demonstrator on a recent march, "Intern all Zionists."<sup>109</sup> According to a poll of British Jews carried out in November 2023, 77% felt less safe as Jews living in the UK since the 7 October attacks.<sup>110</sup> This has led to a withdrawal into more private spaces. Dave Rich of the CST writes, "In response to all this, a lot of Jewish people decided it was time to hide."<sup>111</sup> A recent news story provides relevant anecdotal detail: "Shortly after the Hamas attacks in Israel, Bloom said his wife hid her necklace that had her name in Hebrew when going to the gym, while others hid the mezuzah, the Jewish scroll, on their doors. People either took them off or painted them black so the houses couldn't be identifiable as being a Jewish home. People have felt intimidated going into city centres on a Saturday, when there have been anti-Israel marches."<sup>112</sup>
- The uneven age distribution among the reprehensible, hostile responses. Simply, the young were hostile, older people, much less so. One US poll conducted two months after the Hamas attack found that while Americans as a whole supported Israel over Hamas by 81%, those aged 18-24 were split 50-50. Of the Hamas supporters, more than half believe that though the attack was "genocidal," it "can be justified by the grievances of the Palestinians."<sup>113</sup> A CAA poll conducted the last month confirmed a similar unevenness in this country. Jewish people have too much power in the media: General public, 10%, 18-24 year olds, 16%. Jews talk about the Holocaust to further their political agenda: General public, 7%, young people, 10%. Jewish people cannot be trusted as much as other British people in business: General

<sup>104</sup> Dave Rich *Everyday Hate* (London, 2024), 257; Vikram Dodd "Antisemitic hate crimes up 1350%, Met police say," *Guardian*, 20 October 2023.

<sup>105</sup> <https://x.com/hurryupharry/status/1711491742451605521>.

<sup>106</sup> CST *Antisemitic Discourse in Britain 2023*, 30.

<sup>107</sup> *Diary of a Crisis* (London, 2024), 224.

<sup>108</sup> Lee Harpin "Police urged to probe 'get Zionists out of Finchley' leaflets at anti-racism protest." *Jewish News*, 7 August 2024.

<sup>109</sup> Stephen Pollard "Postmodernism and relativism have led us to disaster," *Jewish Chronicle*, 7 October 2024 (photograph).

<sup>110</sup> CST *Antisemitic Discourse in Britain 2023*, 15.

<sup>111</sup> *Everyday Hate* (London, 2024), 258.

<sup>112</sup> The piece continues: "Since the increase in the war with Lebanon and the Iranian attack, people are nervous about going to synagogue for the high holy days coming up for the Jewish new year because they might be targets. It hasn't changed." Aamna Mohdin and Neha Gohil "British Jews adjusting to 'new reality' after year-long surge in antisemitism," *Guardian*, 2 October 2024.

<sup>113</sup> Adam Kirsch *On Settler Colonialism* (New York, 2024), 1 (quoting a Harvard CAPS-Harris poll, 31-14 December 2023).

public, 4%, young people, 9%. Reports that Hamas killed around 1200 people on 7 October are not true: General public, 7%, young people, 13%.<sup>114</sup>

This is something more than "the hum of ambient antisemitism" "growing steadily louder."<sup>115</sup> Though for sure - it is hard for Jews to hear themselves think and speak above the racket. Antisemitism is now too destabilising, too attention-demanding, to be understood as ambience. It is not background, it is foreground. It is not a presence, it is a disruptive activity, in Jewish lives.

## (2) A fractured trust in national institutions

That unqualified trust invested by Anglo-Jewry in, say, the universities, the police,<sup>116</sup> the BBC, even the NHS,<sup>117</sup> is no longer fully intact. Let this story stand, inadequately, for my general point. On the day of the 7 October massacre, while the rest of Britain's media were detailing the brutality of Hamas's attack on Israel, the BBC led its coverage with the headline: "Israel warns Gaza residents to flee homes ahead of revenge attacks."<sup>118</sup> This was Israel as Shylock: "If you wrong us, shall we not revenge?" (III. i. 65-66). That the Jewish world would be grieving on that terrible day, that it would want - more than anything to else - to retrieve its abducted, to bury its dead, this was beyond the Corporation's understanding.

## (3) A new militancy in relation to antisemitism:

That there is now a general understanding that no benefit is to be derived from reasoning with antisemites about antisemitism comes from the abandonment of a certain pre-7 October conviction. That is, that certain words or actions against Jews, or to be more exact, certain defamations or certain atrocities, would lead to reflection, a critical reconsideration of hitherto unqualified allegiances, the beginning of some understanding of complexities, and a recoil from a Jew-hatred undeniable in its lethal vigour.

But no, as it turns out – not at all. It is now clear, the very worst things having happened, and the most repellent things having been said, that the Jewish world can expect repetition of these things, if the opportunity arises, and solicitous endorsement of them, if the opportunity is taken.

This has an important implication. No arguments, no reasons or facts, no appeals or compromises, will weaken the enmity directed at us by people who wish us harm. We should drop all such efforts, then. They are as pointless as they are ignominious. (Antisemites will always deploy what pass for

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<sup>114</sup> <https://antisemitism.org/antisemitism-in-britain-one-year-on/>.

<sup>115</sup> Joshua Leifer *Tablets Shattered* (New York, 2024), 343.

<sup>116</sup> E.g., in relation to a "ruckus" on 27 October 2024 outside JW3, a London Jewish community centre, "The Metropolitan Police recognised it did not "get the balance perfect" between the right to peaceful protest and serious disruption." Tom Witherow "The ringleaders behind pro-Palestine protests which left Jews in tears," *Times*, 1 November 2024. There is a sense that the Metropolitan Police give greater priority to the maintenance of public order (which requires some accommodating of threats to order) than to the protection of the London Jewish community.

<sup>117</sup> In November 2023, a survey conducted of more than 200 Jewish healthcare professionals found that 73% of respondents said they had dealt with at least one antisemitic incident since 7 October, 70% had experienced antisemitic incidents involving their colleagues and 48% did not feel safe in clinical settings. CST *Antisemitic Discourse in Britain 2023*, 39. See also Michelle Rosenberg "NHS pathologist: 'Dead and suffering Israelis brightens the day,'" *Jewish News*, 30 October 2024.

<sup>118</sup> *Cohen Report*, 30 September 2024, 9. <https://camera-uk.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/09/BBC-ISRAEL-GAZA-BIAS-06b.pdf>. BBC Verify, the fact-checking service inside the BBC, has not improved things: David Rose and Archie Earle "Who verifies BBC Verify?" *UnHerd*, 4 November 2024.

arguments<sup>119</sup> - though they are not true arguments, open to refutation, advanced in good faith. They are no more than insults given the rhetorical form of an argument, the better to wound).

History confirms this intuition. Antisemitism is too deeply embedded in the culture. Plausibly rational economic and political explanations and counter-arguments cannot appease the antisemite. Antisemitism is a rage vented on people who are both conspicuous and unprotected; the rage is of a kind that the community, the "collective," is expected to sanction.<sup>120</sup> You can't meet an insult with an argument.

Though this has always been the case (indeed, I have been relying here on mid-20<sup>th</sup> century formulations), for decades the Jewish world forgot it. Indeed, part of the evidence that we are living in a *new* conjuncture is precisely this return to a collective Jewish understanding of what had been forgotten in the conjuncture just passed.

#### (4) A decline in the salience of the Jewish world's polarities

For some time now, the Jewish world has been constituted by two polarities, (a) Israel and the Diaspora, and (b) within the Diaspora, the United States and the rest of the world. In critical respects, the vibrancy of these polarities has either faded or been recast as simple antagonism. *Faded* - because of the new sense of a common vulnerability shared by Jews.<sup>121</sup> *Recast* - because of the diminution of Israel's standing, in consequence of the steps and missteps of the Netanyahu

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<sup>119</sup> As observed by the Jewish Bolshevik and anthropologist Lev Shternberg, quoted in Yuri Slezkine *The Jewish Century* (Princeton, New Jersey, 2004), p. 93.

<sup>120</sup> Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (Stanford, California, 2002), 139, 140.

<sup>121</sup> There are accounts from the United States – but, with modifications, they could be from here: "Physical assaults, harassment, and death threats; vandalism at homes and businesses; bomb threats at synagogues—all of these have become almost commonplace for American Jews in the past year. In addition to this intimidation and violence, Jews have also been loudly and proudly ostracized in spaces ranging from professional networking groups to the corner bookstore, in what can only be described as an ongoing campaign to push Jews out of American public life." In consequence, "many American Jews have changed their behaviour, hiding outward signs of Jewish identity and thinking twice before sharing their identity with colleagues and acquaintances." Dara Horn "October 7 created a permission structure for Anti-semitism," *Atlantic*, 7 October 2024. The Hillel House attacks, for example: Jane Prinsley "Leeds students told: 'Jewish bastards, I'm going to beat the sh\*t out of you' while walking to synagogue," *Jewish Chronicle*, 14 February 2024; University statement – Antisemitic attacks on Hillel House and Rabbi Deutsch, 12 February 2024. <https://www.leeds.ac.uk/news-statements/news/article/5510/university-statement-antisemitic-attacks-on-hillel-house-and-rabbi-deutsch>. "At Hunter College, in Manhattan, students at Hillel found a sign depicting an assault rifle, calling on students to Bring the war home next to a sign reading Hillel go to hell with an upside-down triangle, indicating that this Hillel is a target. At a recent Baruch College Hillel event held at a Midtown restaurant in New York City designed for incoming freshmen to learn about campus life, Jewish students were met with protesters shouting references to the hostages recently executed by Hamas." Mayim Bialik "Hillels are under attack," *Atlantic*, 9 October 2024. A list of the factors said to differentiate American antisemitism from antisemitism elsewhere, though compiled as recently as 2022, looks especially wan now: in American Jews have always been able to fight back against antisemitism freely; antisemitism is more foreign to American ideals than to European ones; America's religious tradition is inhospitable to antisemitism; American politics resists antisemitism. Jonathan D. Sarna "Antisemitism in America 1654-2020," in Steven Katz *The Cambridge Companion to Antisemitism* (Cambridge, 2022), 408-410.

administrations, in the eyes of the Jewish world.<sup>122</sup> The gap between respective levels of support for Trump among Israelis and American Jews makes the point.<sup>123</sup>

(5) A new acknowledgment of (if not yet openness to) the Jewish world's diversity

In the pre-history of the current conjuncture, the Jewish world tended to be denominated religiously, not politically. There were political implications attached to these denominations, but the politics was not primary. In the conjuncture before *that* one, the Jewish world was denominated both politically and religiously. We have returned now to this former state of affairs – specifically, in relation to the resolution of the Israel-Palestine question.

The Jewish world is now divided between impossibilities (the Two-State Solution, the One-State Solution) and intolerabilities (versions of the "occupation-management paradigm").<sup>124</sup> There does not seem to be an available "solution;" instead, members of the Jewish world orient themselves towards their own impossibility, in order to live a life - as Theodor Adorno would put it - "less wrongly."<sup>125</sup> And keep alive, amidst all the death, the knowledge, as the Palestinian lawyer and writer Raja Shehadeh puts it, "that the only future is for the two peoples to live together."<sup>126</sup>

(5) There is, in sum, a new disorder in the Jewish world.

Joshua Leifer writes of the fracturing of all three pillars of the "American Jewish consensus," "Americanism, Zionism, and liberalism." Equivalent pillars are fracturing everywhere in the Jewish world.<sup>127</sup> Very little of this fracturing is the consequence of antisemitism. And yet for too long, antisemitism and the fear of antisemitism has been a prophylactic, an obstacle, to thinking. The Jewish world must not let antisemitism today block discussion of Jewish tomorrows, the Jewish future. It is helpful in this respect to recall to mind Arendt's warning, "there is no such thing as a solidarity of fear."<sup>128</sup>

## Conclusion

On 15 August 1974, the novelist and philosopher Iris Murdoch wrote a long, informal letter to the philosopher and mathematician, Georg Kreisel. Unconstrainedly moving from topic to topic, though she is writing to him she is also ruminating:

Thank you for telling me about your parents. And about how you did the other boys homework! How disgusting anti-Semitism is – and how strange. I can understand about your not telling your parents. (They were lucky to survive. I suppose they got out?). I remember your telling me long ago

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<sup>122</sup> We begin to comprehend the wisdom of Hannah Arendt's warning against "the dangerous illusion of the possibility of an autonomous Jewish politics." Jerome Kohn and Ron H. Feldman, eds, *The Jewish Writings* (New York, 2007), 57, 385 ("Palestine is not a place where Jews can live in isolation, nor is it a promised land where they will be safe from antisemitism. The simple truth is that Jews will have to fight antisemitism everywhere or else be exterminated everywhere").

<sup>123</sup> Philissa Cramer "79% of Jews voted for Kamala Harris, according to largest preliminary exit poll," *JTA*, 6 November 2024; "Israelis back Trump in US election, survey says," *Jewish Chronicle*, 4 November 2024.

<sup>124</sup> Joshua Leifer *Tablets Shattered* (New York, 2024), 341. For a realistic overview, see Rajan Menon "The No-State Solution," *UnHerd*, 19 August 2024.

<sup>125</sup> Minima Moralia (London, 1974), 39 (Aphorism 18); Fabian Freyenhagen *Adorno's Practical Philosophy* (Cambridge, 2013), ch. 2 ("No right living"). Those who remain attached to the Two State Solution impossibility can take comfort in the sober witticism, "A two state solution is impossible. Everything else is more impossible" (<https://www.thearticle.com/hamas-israel-and-britain-an-interview-with-sir-john-jenkins>).

<sup>126</sup> Raja Shehadeh *What Does Israel Fear from Palestine?* (London, 2024), 108.

<sup>127</sup> *Tablets Shattered* (New York, 2024), 61.

<sup>128</sup> Jerome Kohn and Ron H. Feldman, eds, *The Jewish Writings* (New York, 2007), 156.

about how you went back to Austria and were annoyed because some childhood friend recognised you and called you by some old nickname!<sup>129</sup>

The phrase "disgusting and strange" intimates both visceral recoil and curiosity. Antisemitism is always disgusting and strange in these ways, but now, perhaps, it is *especially* disgusting, and *especially* strange. *Disgusting* – who could not be disgusted by the celebrations on 7 October? *Strange* – who would not be puzzled by antisemitism's new appearance? All this can induce, as I have suggested, a kind of thought-paralysis. Still more – when the thought-paralysis confronts this new appearance, in the company of *other* newnesses.

It has been said, "understanding antisemitism is a daunting task."<sup>130</sup> Perhaps so. I've spent much of my life struggling to understand it. But we can also over-complicate things. When the question is asked, What is antisemitism?, and there's not much time, it's acceptable to respond: "Spitting at a Jewish student."

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<sup>129</sup> Avril Horner & Anne Rowe, eds., *Living on Paper: Letters from Iris Murdoch 1934-1995* (London, 2015), 426.

<sup>130</sup> Bruno Chaouat "Theories on the Causes of Antisemitism," in Steven Katz *The Cambridge Companion to Antisemitism* (Cambridge, 2022), 497.