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Cardinal Dulles' Inspiration

Elliott Horowitz accurately reports on the truly dangerous—indeed tragic—liaison between Rashi scholar David Blondheim and Eleanor Dulles (yes, John Foster's and Allen's sister), which ended in Blondheim's suicide whilst Eleanor was carrying their first child ("Dangerous Liasons: Modern Scholars and Medieval Relations Between Jews and Christians," Spring 2014).

Allen Dulles's son was the great Catholic theologian Avery Dulles. Toward the end of his life, Cardinal Dulles told me that he might not have pursued a life of scholarship had it not been for the model set by his uncle, David Blondheim.

Jerome A. Chanes
via email

Poland's Aggression

Mr. Konstanty Gebert is wrong in his claim that Poland did not join Nazi Germany against the alliance ("The Ukrainian Question," Summer 2014). In fact Poland was the first country to sign a "non-aggression" pact with Nazi Germany and partook in the dismemberment of Czechoslovakia in 1938. Like Stalin's USSR it joined the allies only after Hitler turned on it.

Ilya Prizel
via email

Sacks' Sermon?

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks has written a sermon, not a critical review ("Nostalgia for the Numinous," Summer 2014). Abdicating critical thinking for sermonizing allows him to shift topics for no discernible reason, engage in logical fallacies, and present ahistorical assumptions as fact. Let's look at a few examples from this sermon.

"We are meaning-seeking animals. And if we can no longer believe in God we will find other things to worship." Why assume that the search for meaning entails searching for something to worship? My dictionary doesn't link meaning with worship. It defines meaning as "purpose" or "significance." If I find purpose in being the best teacher that I can be, am I worshiping teaching? This logical fallacy is rooted in Rabbi Sacks' assumption that God is the only path to finding meaning. And since we worship God, he concludes we must also worship its substitute.

"We are surrounded by choices with no reason to choose this rather than that." Where in the world does this sweeping statement play out? In our relationships? In our choice of professions? In the way we vote? I have no idea. The reference to "Man the Eternal Consumer" is just as baffling: Considering that nearly half the world lives on less than \$2.50 a day, it's laughable to state that "Man" is driven by consumerism.

"The West no longer has a set of beliefs that would justify its commitments to freedom and democracy." What evidence is there for such a broad conclusion? Regardless of whether one thinks that the "West" is perfecting or degrading democracy, there is no justification to think that our commitment is weaker now than at any other point in modern history. Ongoing public activism surrounding human rights, including affirmative action, privacy, voting rights, health care, gene patenting, and income inequality, reveal a deep commitment to freedom and democracy. What justifies Rabbi Sacks to concur with Eagleton that "all [the West] has left is

a mixture of pragmatism, culturalism, hedonism, relativism and anti-foundationalism?"

"Having tried and failed to provide substitutes for religion, today's public intellectuals have no new candidate to offer beyond the present mix of relativism, individualism, hedonism, and consumerism . . ." We might as well say: "Having failed to provide a substitute for paganism in Antiquity, the West turned to God and had nothing to offer beyond centuries of wars, persecution, and superstition." Both statements are illogical and do not reflect history's complexity.

Rabbi Sacks concludes with his concern that the religion of the 21st century will be "the most unre-



constructed, pre-modern kind." Is religion, however, the sole civilizing element in the modern world? I would argue that commitments to relief of human suffering, civil liberties, and prevention of discrimination are substantial enough to provide individuals with meaning. And *halevia* (Yiddish for "it should only be so") that we would "worship" these values.

Michael Nutkiewicz
Albuquerque, NM

Fathers and Daughters

Regarding Stephen J. Whitfield's review of Alisa Solomon's *Wonder of Wonders: A Cultural History of Fiddler on the Roof* ("Tradition! Tradition!" Summer 2014): That *Fiddler* spread the knowledge of the Yiddish words widely used by Jews in English is convincing. It certainly also made Jews themselves more comfortable with their own heritage, at a time when many groups were rediscovering their separateness. There is another explanation for the popularity of it, however, and that is that it represents a set of circumstances that can be recognized as occurring in all Western societies. Fathers love their daughters and feel responsible to protect them. But the world changes, and the old ways don't exert their former pull. Not only do the daughters spin out of the circle of inherited custom, but their behavior makes the parents rethink their relationship and outsiders have to be accommodated. Dangers are not always avoided, and even the house itself is threatened. You will recognize here the plot line of *Downton Abbey*.

Ellen Spolsky
via email

Malamud's New Life

Adam Kirsch's deeply insightful essay on Bernard Malamud ("The Jewbird," Summer 2014) breaks down at just one point, I believe. Trying to put Seymour Levin in a box with Yakov Bok and Roy Hobbs, he badly misreads the ending of *A New Life*.

Kirsch writes: "Seymour Levin's story ends on a desperate note, as he agrees to take in his married lover, with her children, even though he no longer loves her; his bid for a new life has landed him in a new kind of prison."

In the last chapter of *A New Life*, Levin does not "take in" Pauline Josephson. They take off, together, with all their baggage, for California and another new life, a new life that Malamud leaves completely undefined. It could be anything. To say Levin "no longer loves her" doesn't do justice to his chronic agonizing, or his determination to stay with her, and stay with himself, whatever the temporary state of his feelings. Love is not just feeling, they agree in the last chapter; it's also "principle."

Tom Phillips
New York, New York

Heidegger v. Reason

The crux of Richard Wolin's discussion of the Black Notebooks ("National Socialism, World Jewry, and the History of Being: Heidegger's Black Notebooks," Summer 2014) seems to be that Heidegger links reason to World Jewry. Heidegger of course isn't fond of reason, ergo he dislikes World Jewry. This pretty much makes his statements anti-Semitism. However it would only make his philosophy anti-Semitism if you buy into the statement that World Jewry is somehow to blame for reason. And the only way you can make sense of that is by completely ignoring the intellectual history of the concept of reason.

I would conclude that in this case it's pretty easy to make a distinction between Heidegger's personal grudges and his philosophy. This in no way diminishes Heidegger's abominable personal legacy, but I would say his philosophical legacy need not necessarily be seen in the light of his political folly.

Evert Faber van der Meulen
via jewishreviewofbooks.com

Richard Wolin Responds:

With all due respect, the "crux of my argument" was not that Heidegger adventitiously links reason and World Jewry. It is that Heidegger's "critique of reason" (in German: *Vernunftkritik*) partakes of a broader "anti-civilizational" paradigm that he avowedly shares with the likes of other German conservative revolutionary thinkers of the interwar period, a discourse for which *anti-Semitism* and the *rejection of reason* go hand and hand. Thus it is in no way a matter of a personal grudge, but in Heidegger's case, a matter of ideological conviction of the highest order. To this end, I cited the remarks of the German journalist, Thomas Assheuer: "The hermeneutic trick of acknowledging Heidegger's anti-Semitism only in order to permanently cordon it off from his philosophy proper is no longer convincing. The anti-Jewish enmity of the Black Notebooks is no afterthought; instead, it forms the basis of [Heidegger's] philosophical diagnostics."

Neither Friend nor Enemy: Israel in the EU

BY LEONIDAS DONSKIS

This summer I finished a five-year term as a member of the European Parliament (EP), so I was not as shocked as I might have been when, in July, Italian celebrity philosopher and fellow Member of Parliament Gianni Vattimo said that he “would like to shoot those bastard Zionists” and suggested that we Europeans ought to raise money “to buy more rockets for Hamas.” This was extreme even by the standards of the European political and academic elites, and

A couple of years ago, there was an effort in the Israeli Knesset to restrict, in various ways, the actions and influence of Israeli non-governmental organizations (NGOs). I regarded this effort (which eventually failed) as deeply misguided and inappropriate for a democratic country. Still, it was shocking for me to hear Annemie Neyts-Uyttebroeck, a noted Belgian politician and my fellow liberal in the ALDE group, compare the Israeli legislative proposal to the overtly totalitarian

lybears a family resemblance to prewar European fascist states.

Neyts-Uyttebroeck’s comment seems tame indeed compared to the memorable words of a socialist member of the EP—also from Belgium—Véronique de Keyser, who said that she would like to “strangle” Israel’s ambassador if he discussed Israel’s security with her. When famously dovish then-President of Israel Shimon Peres addressed the European Parliament in Strasbourg on March 12, 2013, she refused to rise in his honor, as did many center-left and left-wing MEPs. Would they have done the same, I wondered, if Putin had been the guest? One somehow doubts it.

Then there was Ivo Vajgl, another ALDE colleague of mine, a professed liberal from Slovenia famous for his predictable anti-Israel tirades. Vajgl reached the heights of absurdity when he described Israel as an irrational partner in comparison with the rationality of Egypt—on the eve of the Arab Spring.

The real irrationality in all of these remarks is, of course, distinctively European, and it has multiple sources. It would be easy—and not

Of course, I had already known about the idiosyncrasies and obsessions of the European left, which are not entirely unrelated to the Soviet ideology of the Brezhnev era ideology under which I was raised.

Vattimo has since said that he regretted the remarks, which he made on a controversial Italian talk-radio show—then he went on to compare Israel to Nazi Germany.

I was elected to the EU Parliament on behalf of Lithuanian liberals and joined the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe (ALDE), which is the third largest group in the EP, and, as it happens, also Vattimo’s party. As a child of the Soviet Union, I have had a lifelong interest in human rights and soon found myself on the EP subcommittee dealing with these issues. This brought me to the center of debate with such non-EU countries as China, Iran, North Korea, Pakistan, Russia—and Israel.

Of course, I had known about the idiosyncrasies and obsessions of the European left (which are not entirely unrelated to the Soviet ideology of the 1960s, 70s, and 80s under which I lived). Even so, I was struck by the degree of bias, hostility, and willful disinclination to actually engage with the complexities of the Middle East.

Along with others (especially representatives of Great Britain, Germany, and the other Eastern European countries), I often found myself defending Israel in formal and informal parliamentary settings. Even when, in my judgment, a defense was not necessary or appropriate, I tried to bring a sense of historical context and comparative perspective that were too often missing from these discussions. However, what I did not do was reply to every prejudiced remark made by members of the European political elite. As a relative outsider—an Eastern European and a Jewish one at that—I felt that it was not for me to maintain the decency of political discourse among the legislating (and chattering) classes of Brussels and Strasbourg. Nonetheless, it may be the unguarded remarks, visible grimaces, and Pavlovian acts of rhetorical legislation in which the EU’s Israel problem shows up most clearly.

anti-NGO law adopted in Russia, which regards all NGOs as foreign agents. Vladimir Putin’s Russia is, to say no more, a rogue state that openly supports terrorism, disrupts economic and political life in neighboring countries, and increasing-



Israeli President Shimon Peres addresses the European Parliament, March 12, 2013, in Strasbourg, France. (Photo by Moshe Milner/GPO via Getty Images.)

entirely wrong—to trace this irrationality, not to say hatred, to the enduring legacy of Christian anti-Judaism, the racial anti-Semitism of the 19th and 20th centuries, and the distinctive anti-Semitic heritage of the European left—that is, as the 21st - century incarnation of Europe’s “Jewish Problem.” But there may be other less venerable factors at play as well.

The legendary Russian singer-songwriter, poet, and actor Vladimir Vysotsky wrote a song for the 1967 film *Vertical* called “Song of a Friend,” which became *the* song for soulful young Soviets who could strum a few chords on an acoustic guitar (imagine a Russian “Blowin’ in the Wind”). The opening lyrics, in my rough translation, go something like this:

If your friend turned out not to be one
Neither friend nor enemy but something in
between
If you are unable to determine if he is a good
man or a bad man
Take a risk, bring the man to the mountains and
you will see who he is

These lyrics often came back to me as I sat in the EP when Israel was being discussed. For despite all the parliamentary invective quoted here (and I could give many more examples), the EU is certainly not Israel’s enemy, but it would be hard to call it a friend.

Although I have noted (and for present pur-

poses bracketed) the histories of anti-Judaism and anti-Semitism in Europe, the legacies of World War II and the Holocaust are unavoidable in understanding European attitudes toward Israel (the seemingly irrepressible comparison of Zionists to Nazis by Vattimo and his ideological compatriots is a kind of symptom of this). Eastern and Central

Europe still have difficulty in handling the history of the Holocaust, especially when it comes to local collaborators with the Nazis. A silent refusal to regard the Jews as their own citizens rather than people from some historical parallel reality has led quite a few Eastern and Central European politicians to whitewash their complicated history, thereby trivializing the Holocaust, distorting the facts, relativizing war crimes, and desecrating the memory of the dead. Of course, the Hungarian fascist party Jobbik goes a great deal farther than that. In November 2012, Márton Gyöngyösi, the party’s deputy parliamentary leader, posted a video in which he stated that it is time to count people of Jewish ancestry living in Hungary, especially those who work in the Hungarian Parliament and the Hungarian government, because they pose a national security risk to the country. Still, on the whole, it cannot be denied that the European center-right—especially in Eastern and Central Europe—is far friendlier to Israel than the Western European left.

On the other hand, Western European politicians are far more attentive than their counterparts from Eastern and Central Europe to the necessity of Holocaust education, the importance of acknowledging difficult truths of history, and the political and moral imperatives of collective memory. This is to say that Western European politics with regard to Israel and the Jewish people fail exactly where Eastern and Central Europe succeed and vice versa.

The Western European left has never understood Israel and Zionism as a framework for the Jews’ political self-determination. This failure turns, in part, on a conceptual myopia of European leftists that has nothing to do with Israel and everything to do with Europe and the EU project: a failure to recognize the difference between liberal patriotism and radical nationalist chauvinism.

The EU itself would have been and continues to be unthinkable without the sort of liberal consensus that leaves little room for patriotic and nationalistic sensitivities. Any form of nationalism stands as a threat



Vladimir Vysotsky in an undated photograph.



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to the EU's benevolent neutrality and a still-nebulous European solidarity. It likewise regards religion, no doubt correctly, as something that must be kept away from politics. But there is a cost to this, for such an attitude occludes a deeper and broader perspective on Europe, which is itself unimaginable without Christianity and its sociocultural incarnations.

Europe's forgetfulness, or repression, of its religious history has two consequences with regard to

Israel is, then, everything Western Europe is not: a successful latecomer to the modern world of nation-states endowed with the whole package of modern experiences, anxieties, passions, sensibilities, and forms of solidarity.

Israel. First, it allows the European elite to forget or ignore Europe's long history of anti-Judaism and regard anti-Semitism as merely a form of modern racism. Second, it engenders hostility toward a modern state, such as Israel, that acknowledges its religious roots. Another way to put this is that Israel and Zionism are the two mirror images of Europe and its history that it dislikes the most.

Israel is, then, everything Western Europe is not: a successful latecomer to the modern world of nation-states endowed with the whole package of modern experiences, anxieties, passions, sensibilities, and forms of solidarity.

The nation-state in Europe, by contrast, seems to have been a short-lived and passing phenomenon. Until the 20th century, Europe knew of no such entity; France, Great Britain, the Netherlands, Spain, and the Habsburg Empire were all continental or overseas empires. It was not until the demise of such empires after World War I that nation-states came into existence, including the Eastern and Central European countries. From this perspective, the nation-state in Europe seems a mere passing phenomenon, a short stop on the way from monarchies and empires to the EU in its present (if rather loose) form.

These, then, are the outlines of the cognitive, moral, and political map of the EU. On that map, Israel stands out as a disturbing anomaly, and consequently, as neither friend nor enemy, but something in between.

I have written of the subterranean role that the memory and repression of the history of the Holocaust have in determining the place of Israel in European political discourse, but I have not yet mentioned the role it plays in my own life and perceptions. When I was growing up, my father refused to tell me anything of our family's experience in the Holocaust. Although he was a native and fluent speaker of Yiddish who knew a great deal about the history of Jewish life in Lithuania, he withdrew



Gianni Vattimo, 2010.

completely from the Jewish community after World War II and brought me up as a Lithuanian. As he later put it, he had seen hell on earth only because he was a Jew, and he did not want his sons to undergo that experience.

In 1989, as the Soviet Union was crumbling and Lithuania began to move toward independence, my father and I were able to visit America and reestablish a connection with a branch of our family that had immigrated there in the 1930s. It was only then,

in America, and when I was already an adult, that my father was able to tell me about his experience in the Holocaust. On September 9, 1941, in the small town of Butrimonys, not far from Kovno (Kaunas), where my family lived, Nazi *Einsatzgruppen* together with local Lithuanian perpetrators rounded up the Jews of the town and massacred all but 11. Among the survivors were my father, uncle, and grandparents.

I never mentioned this family history to my parliamentary colleagues, not even when hearing Israel casually compared to the Third Reich. There are many reasons for this, one of which is that I do not choose to discuss deeply sensitive matters with those who cloak European narcissism or a cynical pragmatism (or both) in moral indignation. Nor do I think that my family history gives me unique moral and political insight. Nonetheless, it does help to inform my perspective—one that is just as uniquely European as that of my colleagues—on the rhetoric and reasoning behind the EU's friendship, or lack thereof, with Israel.

Leonidas Donskis is a former member of the European Parliament (2009–2014) from Lithuania. Before his election, he was dean of the faculty of political science and diplomacy at Vytautas Magnus University in Kaunas, Lithuania. He is also docent of social and moral philosophy at the University of Helsinki. He is the author of many books, most recently with Zygmunt Bauman, Moral Blindness: The Loss of Sensitivity in Liquid Modernity (Polity Press).



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The Ethics of Protective Edge

BY ASA KASHER

“Even my loves are measured by wars,” wrote the Israeli poet Yehuda Amichai:

I am saying this happened after the Second World War. We met a day before the Six-Day War. I’ll never say before the peace ’45–’48 or during the peace ’56–’67.

I first heard air raid sirens during Israel’s 1948 War of Independence, and I heard them most recently in August, during Operation Protective Edge. In 1948, an Egyptian plane dropped bombs on the center of Rishon Lezion, where I then lived; more recently the threat took the familiar form of rockets launched by Hamas from the Gaza Strip and intercepted by the Iron Dome system far above my head in another town near Tel Aviv.

During the 1948 air raid, I saw my father, at the time an officer in a northern infantry brigade, treating a wounded female soldier, who died soon thereafter. She was the first casualty of war that I personally witnessed. Recently, my 17-year-old granddaughter Ahiraz encountered her first casualty when a soldier who had been a member of her neighborhood scout troop fell in the present operation.

As Amichai says, our lives in Israel are marked by the wars through which we have lived. In addition to living through the many wars, actions, and operations of the last 66 years as both a civilian and a soldier, I have also spent a great deal of time thinking about the ethics of fighting them, both in official capacities—when, for example, I led the writing of and co-authored the IDF’s code of ethics in the 1990s—and in an unofficial one, as a commentator.

As I write this, in late August, rockets are once again being fired from Gaza, and Operation Protective Edge has resumed after another brief ceasefire. Although—or perhaps precisely because—hostilities are ongoing, it is important to re-examine the challenges that terrorists in general and Hamas in particular pose to the Israel Defense Forces and to do so in light of first principles, both those of traditional Just War doctrine and of specific Israeli military doctrine and values.

Israel, like every other state, upholds the right and duty of self-defense. A state’s right to defend itself when attacked is just as unquestionable as an individual’s right to self-defense when attacked. This right is invoked on the level of international relations and is confirmed by Just War doctrine, international law, and the United Nations charter, not to speak of common-sense ethics. The duty of self-defense, on the other hand, is the responsibility that a state has to protect its citizens. Thus, Israel has both the international right and the domestic duty to respond when Hamas attacks its citizens.

The second fundamental principle of the State of Israel in general and of the IDF in particular is the duty to respect human dignity. This means that

people may never be treated as mere objects or instruments. Their liberty can be restricted only when there is a compelling justification for doing so. Note that this second principle extends not only to citizens or other persons under Israel’s effective control, such as visitors or foreign workers, but also to Palestinians in Gaza who pose no terrorist threat. It even comes into play with respect to terrorists themselves when kill-or-capture options are carefully consid-

Hamas unscrupulously violates every norm in the book. How should Israel respond?

ered. Nonetheless, as I have argued at greater length elsewhere, no state has or should shoulder as much responsibility for the safety of enemy civilians as it does for its own people. Special duties belong to the essence of relationships within a family, a community, and a state.

These two fundamental principles of warfare are

jointly applicable under all circumstances. During war or in the course of any other military activity, the principle of self-defense is what establishes the *ends* in question, namely an effective defense of the people and their state, while the second principle imposes restrictions on the *means* used in pursuit of those ends. Generally speaking, the latter principle requires ceaseless efforts to diminish or “alleviate the calamities of war,” to use a very old but still apt expression from the 1868 St. Petersburg Declaration Renouncing the Use, in Times of War, of Certain Explosive Projectiles.

Other democratic states share the basic principle of respect for human dignity and direct the activities of their military forces in accordance with it. It is, however, worthy of note that the IDF is the only military force of which I am aware that has included it among its explicitly stated values. Two of the values listed in its code of ethics, *Ruach Tzahal*, are those of respecting and preserving human life and the duty to retain “purity of arms,” that is to use the minimum force necessary to subdue the enemy. In the early 1990s, when I presented an early draft of

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the first such code to the IDF General Staff, then-Chief Lieutenant-General Ehud Barak and about 100 IDF groups of commanders, absolutely no one objected to the inclusion of these values. This is because they merely codified strongly entrenched parts of the IDF ethos. I have often been asked what is Jewish about the IDF code of ethics. In answering, I have always pointed to these two values, which are rooted in the Jewish religious and moral traditions of the sanctity of human life and of self-discipline.

It is not hard, however, to think of circumstances in which the principles of restraint and respect for human dignity in times of war might be disregarded. In his famous address to Parliament in 1940 Winston Churchill spoke of “Victory at all costs, victory in spite of all terror, victory however long and hard the road may be, for without victory there is no survival.” But as much as such statements may once have thrilled and heartened people, they are now obsolete, not only for ethical reasons but for strategic ones. To grasp the nature of the change that has taken place in the character of war and its end-state, at least for Israel, compare the consequences of the Six-Day War with the con-

sequences of the Second Lebanon War. In 1967, our enemies’ military forces were essentially destroyed. In Lebanon, on the other hand, we significantly diminished the military force of Hezbollah, but it could and actually did continue launching rockets at northern Israel for a time.

In the “new” wars of recent decades, victory has been replaced by the ideal of successfully accom-

plishing given missions. The missions of Operation Protective Edge were defined in the course of the fighting as the elimination of the threat to Israel created by the Hamas offensive tunnels and the reduction if not elimination of the threat that Hamas’ rockets pose to most parts of Israel. Iron Dome batteries have intercepted over 90 percent of the rockets, but that means that one in 10 rockets remains a mortal danger to the targeted populations (not to speak of the literal terror that all rockets cause). This makes it necessary to destroy the makeshift factories in Gaza that produced the rockets, the magazines that stored them, and the batteries that fired them. The comprehensiveness of this response, it must be hoped, will deter Hamas from future attacks, but only as a by-product of the operation, not one of its military ends. Neither Israeli troops nor Palestinian civilians should be further endangered merely for the sake of deterrence.

I recently attended a meeting at the General Staff base. On a bulletin board outside the room was a message from a major general: “without escalation.”

The clarity with which the IDF has approached its mission was brought home to me one day in early August, when I attended a meeting at the Rabin Base of the IDF General Staff, in Tel Aviv. At the entrance to the building in which the meeting was held I saw a bulletin board full of notes on Operation Protective Edge. At the top of it was a message concerning the operation from the commander of an IDF division, a major general. To the ends of the operation that I mentioned earlier he added a qualification I have not seen in the media coverage: “without escalation.” In *The Art of War*, Sun Tzu said that “if someone is victorious in battle and succeeds in attack but does not exploit the achievements, it is disastrous.” This is not the spirit in which Operation Protective Edge was undertaken, for good reasons.

Operation Protective Edge clearly falls within the bounds of legitimate self-defense. But was it also conducted in such a manner as to alleviate “the calamities of war”? In order to answer this all-important question, we must consider whether the IDF upheld its duty to respect human dignity by maintaining the traditional Just War principles of “distinction” and “proportionality.” The first principle distinguishes between combatants and civilians; the second insists that a military action expected to create collateral damage be taken only if the expected gain in military advantage justifies that damage.

States have usually accepted the principle of distinction between civilians and combatants for obvious reasons: “You don’t attack my non-combatant citizens and I won’t attack yours.” But what should be our attitude toward the principle of distinction when such reciprocity has disappeared? And how

does one deal with an enemy that has eliminated any trace of the distinction between combatants and non-combatants, except for the purposes of propaganda? Hamas attacks Israelis indiscriminately and does so from residential areas and even from mosques, hospitals, and schools. It produces ammunition on a university campus and stores its rockets in mosques and UNRWA schools. Its commanders and their command-and-control system often operate out of the basement of a hospital, and its fighters do not fight in uniform (except, when useful, the IDF uniform). Hamas unscrupulously violates every norm in the book. How should Israel respond? The Israeli response is, I think, a deeply Jewish one. We must conduct our war against terrorists in accordance with our values, i.e., doctrines, procedures, rules of engagement, and commands that are compatible with fundamental Israeli principles, IDF values and principles, and international law, appropriately interpreted and extended.

In applying the ethical distinction between combatant and non-combatant, Israel faces two major problems. There is, first of all, the difficulty posed by Hamas’ overall approach to war. This “crass strategy” was well described by former President Bill Clinton on Indian television in July:

Hamas was perfectly well aware of what would happen if they started raining rockets into Israel. . . . They have a strategy designed to force Israel to kill their own civilians so that the rest of the world will condemn them.

What is Israel supposed to do in this situation? Does the presence of large numbers of non-combatants in the vicinity of a building that is directly involved in terrorist assaults on Israelis render that building immune to Israeli attack? The answer is, and must be, no. Israel cannot forfeit its ability to protect its citizens against attacks simply because terrorists hide behind non-combatants. If it did so, it would be giving up any right to self-defense. The IDF uses a variety of clear warning methods designed to remove non-combatants from the scene of battle, including the distribution of leaflets, personal phone calls, and the use of “roof-knocking” non-explosive missiles as a final warning shot.

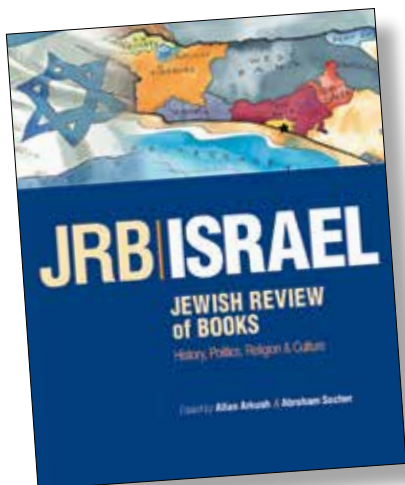
A second, related question follows directly from these attempts to keep civilians out of harm’s way—call it “the soldier’s question.” One must bear in mind that most of the IDF combatants, in particular in the army and navy, are conscripts. As citizens in military uniform, they are entitled to ask the state, as well as the IDF and its commanders, whether they are being placed in greater jeopardy to save the lives of enemy non-combatants who have been repeatedly warned to leave the scene of battle. An affirmative answer to this question would be morally unacceptable.

When it is impossible to accomplish a military mission without endangering the lives of a terrorist’s non-terrorist neighbors, questions of proportionality come into play. The commander in

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charge of a particular military mission is usually the person best equipped to evaluate the military advantages of accomplishing it. In the IDF, the commander is assisted by a staff “population officer” in assessing the extent of probable collateral damage. Human shields may be attacked together with the terrorists, but attempts should be made to minimize collateral damage among them, even though those who act willingly are, in fact, accomplices of Hamas. In all such cases, as much compassion as possible under the circumstances must be shown without aborting the mission or raising the risk to Israeli soldiers.

The norms of proportionality make it incumbent upon a military commander to minimize collateral damage, but they do not prohibit *all* collateral damage. No war has ever been fought without collateral damage. The requirement of the Just War doctrine is that the opposing forces do their utmost to avoid it. Israel does so, while Hamas’ strategy aims at the death of *both* Israeli and Palestinian non-combatants.

The precise number of Palestinian civilians who have died in Gaza during Operation Protective Edge (which as I write is ongoing) is not clear, but there is no doubt that it is in the hundreds and that each death was a tragedy. There is also no doubt that the culpability for those deaths lies with Hamas, which first sacrificed their well-being (building attack tunnels rather than schools and so on) and then their lives in its unrelenting war against Israel. It is true that far fewer Israelis have died (as I write 64 soldiers and six civilians), but simply comparing numbers of casualties on both sides of the conflict is always a conceptual error in evaluating the justness of wars (many more German than U.S. civilians died in World War

II), and this is especially the case in asymmetric ones.

Nonetheless, there are those who have argued that the IDF should strive just as hard to avoid collateral damage in Gaza as it (or Israeli internal security forces) would in, say, Tel Aviv. As Amos Yadlin and I have argued before, in an exchange with Michael Walzer and Avishai Margalit, this is not a reasonable demand. First of all, Israel, like every state, has a primary duty to protect its own people’s lives that is different than the responsibility it has to enemy non-combatants. Moreover, enemy territory such as Gaza is not under its effective control. Israel is bound by the Just War principles of distinction, proportionality, and its strong commitment to minimize the loss of life. But no state owes more than that to warned enemy citizens located in the vicinity of terrorists, and no democratic state would erase the distinction between military ethics and police ethics in this way. A demand to act in Gaza the same way we act in Tel Aviv would be tantamount to asking Israel to relinquish the duty of self-defense.

Some Israeli rabbis, on the other hand, have recently claimed that since the tradition of Just War doctrine began with Christian theologians such as St. Thomas Aquinas, the Jewish state need not worry about the principle of proportionality. Rabbis Ido Reznitz and Elazar Goldshtein, for instance, have argued for a conception of war as a clash between two peoples, which would justify causing damage to non-combatants who are part of the same people as the combatants. This is outrageous and certainly immoral. In any case, it has never been Israel’s position. It is also a misreading of the Jewish tradition, as I see it, but that is another matter.

As was the case with Operation Cast Lead in 2008–2009, Operation Protective Edge has given rise to accusations that Israel acted indiscriminately and disproportionately, without regard for civilian non-combatants. A United Nations War Crimes Commission has been empaneled and many critics (as well, perhaps, as some of its members) are already certain of the conclusions at which it should arrive.

Such matters of politics, perception, and spin have not been my concern here. As I have argued, the IDF approaches its legitimate task of self-defense with great restraint. It has been forced into a war with Hamas that is both strategically and morally asymmetric. This does not mean that it has acted perfectly in every case (no army ever has), but it does mean that the charges against it are grossly unfair.

I have been concerned in this essay exclusively with the IDF’s conduct in war. Without taking sides in the ongoing political debates (on the future of various territories, Jerusalem, refugees, and so on), it must be emphasized in conclusion that it is also the moral duty of a democracy to pursue peace. Peace is, as it were, the ultimate Iron Dome, the best protection for combatants and non-combatants on both sides of the border from the calamities of war.

Asa Kasher is Laura Schwarz-Kipp Professor Emeritus of Professional Ethics and Philosophy of Practice at Tel Aviv University. He led the writing of the first IDF code of ethics and many additional documents examining ethical issues. He won the Israel Prize in 2000 for his contributions to philosophy. His recent books include Military Ethics, Judaism and Idolatry, and A Small Book on the Meaning of Life (all in Hebrew).

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Thoroughly Modern Maimonides?

BY LAWRENCE KAPLAN

Maimonides: Life and Thought

by Moshe Halbertal, translated by Joel Linsider
Princeton University Press, 400 pp., \$35

The Matter and Form of Maimonides' Guide

by Josef Stern
Harvard University Press, 448 pp., \$49.95

Maimonides the Rationalist

by Herbert A. Davidson
The Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 336 pp., \$64.50

Does Maimonides have anything to say to us today, and if so what? These questions have been raised once again by Moshe Halbertal's brilliant new intellectual biography *Maimonides: Life and Thought* (published in Hebrew in 2009 and now available in English), as well as by two other recent major analyses of his philosophy, Josef Stern's *The Matter and Form of Maimonides' Guide* and Herbert Davidson's *Maimonides the Rationalist*.

Maimonides, who was a great halakhist, authored three major works of Jewish law: the *Commentary on the Mishnah* and the *Book of Commandments*, and, towering above them, that summa of rabbinic Judaism, the greatest work of Jewish law authored by a single individual, the *Mishneh Torah*. He is also, of course, the author of the most important work of medieval Jewish philosophy, perhaps of all Jewish philosophy, *The Guide of the Perplexed*. While most rabbinic scholars focus on Maimonides the halakhist and most academics on Maimonides the philosopher, Halbertal is one of the very few scholars equipped to do justice to both sides of Maimonides' creativity—and their interconnection. Indeed *Maimonides: Life and Thought* is one of only a handful of scholarly books on Maimonides to fully cover both the halakhic and the philosophical sides of Maimonides' work.

At the very beginning and end of his book Halbertal sums up what he sees as the two great intellectual transformations Maimonides sought to achieve. In the realm of Jewish law, the *Mishneh Torah* was, Halbertal writes:

a mighty effort to extract the *halakhah* from the thicket of Talmudic discussions, marked by frequent disagreement and tangled debate. . . . Maimonides created an unambiguous, comprehensive, and exhaustive halakhic text . . . by omitting the . . . give and take, the disagreements, and the minority opinions that appear in earlier halakhic writings.

In the realm of philosophy, Maimonides first de-anthropomorphized God, stripping Him of all physical and psychological attributes, thereby

“shifting the struggle against idolatry from the realm of external plastic representation to that of internal mental representation.” Second, he focused “on the causal order and the [divine] wisdom inherent in it as the most substantive revelation of the divinity.” Third, he erased “the distinction between

Maimonides never speaks of love of the world.

what is within the Jewish tradition and what is external to it.” This is a characteristically lucid presentation, though I would add a fourth component to Maimonides' attempted revolution: his unremitting struggle against all forms of superstition, magic, and theurgy.



Spanish stamp of Maimonides, issued ca. 1967.

Though Halbertal does not explicitly link the three components he sets out, clearly they are interconnected. Precisely because the divine wisdom inherent in nature is the most substantive revelation of the divinity, philosophy and science are the best means “for attaining the heights of religious experience—love and awe of God.” And the God whose wisdom is discerned in the natural order turns out to be, for Maimonides, a de-anthropomorphized, non-personalist God. I would add that Maimonides' rejection of all forms of superstition, magic, and theurgy derives, in turn, from the view of God and the world set forth by science and philosophy. Maimonides' God, whose wisdom is manifest in the causal order of nature, cannot be manipulated.

It is worth noting, however, that Halbertal sometimes says that according to Maimonides knowledge “makes it possible for [a person to love God] and the world.” But, in fact, Maimonides never speaks of love of the world. What one perceives as manifest in the natural and causal order is God's wisdom, which leads to the love of God and God alone. In suggesting otherwise, it seems to me that Halbertal subtly but unmistakably modernizes Maimonides.

As Halbertal indicates, Maimonides' attempted transformation of the Jewish religious consciousness “required a new and comprehensive interpretation of the tradition,” and indeed he devoted his great work, the *Guide*, to this task. In doing so, he attempted to give “his spiritual and religious positions binding status.” Yet, Halbertal notes, “historically speaking [Maimonides] did not succeed in bringing about the change in religious consciousness that he hoped for,” and his metaphysically austere interpretation of Judaism has always been a minority position, albeit an important one. Perhaps one reason for Maimonides' failure to effect a spiritual revolution is that, as Halbertal notes elsewhere, he also failed to have the *Mishneh Torah* accepted as the authoritative code of Jewish law.

Halbertal shows in detail how Maimonides “integrated his new religious sensibility into his code.” This is very well done, but does not break new ground. His chapters on the conceptual underpinnings of Maimonidean halakha do just that. The *Mishneh Torah's* goal—Halbertal states in his chapter “What Is *Mishneh Torah*?”—was to make “the whole *halakhah* transparent and accessible.” Yet, Halbertal goes on to say, “Beneath this transparency, however, lies an intense ambiguity bearing on the nature of *Mishneh Torah* itself . . . and on the concept of authority that underlies it.” Thus, Halbertal asserts, there are moderate and radical ways of viewing Maimonides' own understanding of the *Mishneh Torah's* authority. According to the moderate understanding, the *Mishneh Torah* is “a broad, comprehensive representation of the *halakhah*.” According to the radical reading, it is not just “a representation of the law but the law itself.”

Halbertal proceeds to elaborate upon the differences resulting from these two understandings and shows that some statements of Maimonides support the moderate account and others the radical. But are these two accounts as mutually exclusive as Halbertal suggests? In the radical reading, Halbertal notes, the question arises as to the source of the *Mishneh Torah's* authority. He points to the Introduction to the *Mishneh Torah*, where Maimonides maintains that the authority of the Babylonian Talmud derives from its having been “accepted by all Israel.” This view, Halbertal suggests, “lays the groundwork for the possibility of *Mishneh Torah* being transformed into a binding halakhic book in the event it, too, is accepted by all Israel.” But this begs the question as to *why* it would be accepted. Surely, because in the

view of “all Israel” it constitutes “a broad, comprehensive representation of the *halakhah*.” Indeed, this may not be so far from Maimonides’ understanding as to how the Talmud became authoritative. For in his presentation of the history of halakha in his

between them. Instead, in a brilliant tour de force he shows how a consideration of these four approaches allows him to examine all—or rather almost all—of the central issues treated in the *Guide*. Halbertal uses the debate between the skepti-

The *Guide of the Perplexed*’s deliberately enigmatic, often opaque, unsystematic, and indeed explicitly secretive nature stands in stark opposition to the *Mishneh Torah*’s clarity.

Introduction to his *Commentary on the Mishnah* Maimonides maintains—a point not noted by Halbertal—that the Talmud, to begin with, was accepted by “all Israel” because of its great wisdom.

One of the results of the radical understanding of the *Mishneh Torah* is that it would thereby “obviate all other halakhic literature and that all Israel will learn *halakhah* from it.” This leads us paradoxically to the most innovative and incisive chapter in Halbertal’s book, on Maimonides’ “conceptual understanding of *halakhah*.” In this chapter Halbertal examines in detail and with great acuity the *Mishneh Torah*’s often radical reorganization of rabbinic law, showing how this reorganization “reflects a conceptual understanding of halakhic principles.” Particularly convincing is Halbertal’s demonstration that Maimonides’ apparently problematic placement of the laws of mourning in Judges (*Shoftim*), which deals with public law, derives from his view that mourning is not so much a psychological process that helps the mourner overcome his loss but “is first and foremost a statement about the status and honor of the deceased . . . Mourning is a mechanism for constructing the basic social order, signifying the full membership and status of a person in the community.”

Not only does the *Mishneh Torah* reflect a powerful conceptual framework, its “rich, precise formulations” call for conceptual unpacking and analysis. But here the paradox arises. For the great 20th-century rabbinic practitioners of this analytic approach to the *Mishneh Torah*, Rabbis Chaim ha-Levi Soloveitchik, Meir Simcha ha-Kohen, and Yitzhak Ze’ev Soloveitchik, among others, used the *Mishneh Torah*, as Halbertal correctly notes, “to gain a better grasp of the underlying talmudic discussion and to develop a conceptual understanding of the *halakhah*.” Thus, despite Maimonides’ goal of the *Mishneh Torah*’s displacing the Talmud, its distinctive features have, paradoxically, led back to talmudic study.

The *Guide of the Perplexed*’s deliberately enigmatic, often opaque, unsystematic, and indeed explicitly secretive nature stands in stark opposition to the *Mishneh Torah*’s clarity. Moreover, Maimonides clearly distinguishes between the true opinions and the (socially or politically) necessary beliefs that the Torah teaches, not always making it clear as to which biblical views fall into which category. Not surprisingly, then, the work’s ambiguous legacy led very soon after its publication to divergent readings. Halbertal canvases four basic approaches—skeptical, mystical, conservative, and philosophical—without attempting to decide

cal and mystical approaches to examine the first 70 chapters of Part I of the *Guide*, in which Maimonides launches a thoroughgoing critique of religious language. First, Maimonides de-anthropomorphizes biblical sensory terms applied to God, translating them into conceptual language. For example, God’s “eye” turns out to refer to God’s knowledge. Then, in Chapters 50–70, he tackles the meaning of those



A page from *The Guide of the Perplexed* by Maimonides, (Barcelona, 1348).

conceptual terms themselves. What do we mean when we refer to God’s knowledge (or existence or unity)? Maimonides’ answer is famously radical: We can have no positive knowledge about God. The skeptical reading understands this conclusion to mean that, though Maimonides never states this explicitly, *no* metaphysical knowledge about God can be attained. The mystical reading, on the other hand, while conceding to the skeptics that we cannot attain any knowledge about God *expressible in language*, affirms that we can, nonetheless, know God metalinguistically. As Halbertal puts it, after passing through “the refiner’s fire of philosophy,” we can transcend the limits of language and arrive at “a great illumination incapable of being formulated.”

Halbertal proceeds to use the debate between the conservative and philosophical readings of the *Guide* to examine all—or rather almost all—the rest of the philosophical issues discussed by Mai-

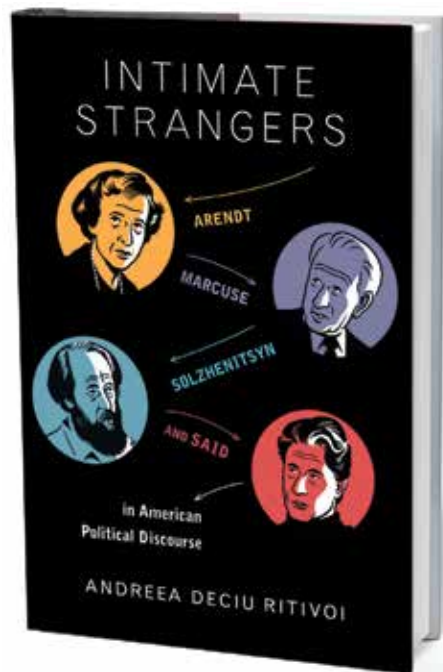
monides. First and foremost is “the work’s great and central metaphysical issue [which runs from Chapter 71 of Part I to Chapter 31 of Part II]: was the world *created ex nihilo* or has it existed for all eternity, like God?” Then follow four subjects dealt with in the second half of the *Guide*, each of which, Halbertal argues, depends on how one believes Maimonides answered the question of creation versus eternity. These four subjects are prophecy, the problem of evil, divine providence and knowledge, and the reasons for the commandments.

The conservative reading takes Maimonides at his word and views his great achievement as being the defense of creation as a reasonable possibility, indeed more probable than eternity, though neither is rationally demonstrable. The philosophic reading views Maimonides’ defense of creation as a necessary belief and maintains that esoterically he adhered to Aristotle’s teaching of eternal pre-existence. The *Guide*’s great achievement on this reading is “its affording the fundamental concepts of Judaism—creation, prophecy, providence, and commandment, among others—an interpretation consistent with the concept of an eternal world.”

The reason why creation versus eternity is the central metaphysical issue of the *Guide*, Halbertal explains, is that they entail two different conceptions of God. Creation entails a God of will, while eternity entails a God of wisdom. If God’s will gave rise to the world, then it can also, in principle, breach the order of nature established by it, allowing for His continuing involvement in the world. If, however, the natural order reflects His wisdom and has existed of necessity from eternity, then it cannot be breached. Yet, as Halbertal notes, the possibility of creation and consequently of God’s interventions in the world “does not negate the idea that nature, with the wisdom implicit in it, is the central, most substantive revelation of God in the world.” It follows, though Halbertal omits to mention this, that there is an asymmetry between the conservative and philosophical readings of the *Guide* on this central issue. In the philosophical reading, Maimonides basically did away with the concept of divine will; on the conservative reading, Maimonides, while stressing the idea of divine will, still left a central role for divine wisdom.

Strikingly, Halbertal never limns a rationalist reading of the *Guide*; indeed, he never refers to Maimonides’ rationalism at all. In lectures and interviews, he has indicated that this was a deliberate decision, as he wants to avoid suggesting too dry and formalistic a cast to his thought. In marked contrast, the distinguished Maimonidean scholar Herbert A. Davidson entitled his recent collection of essays *Maimonides the Rationalist*.

As I noted, Halbertal examines “all—or rather almost all—of the central issues treated in the *Guide*.” What does he leave out? Halbertal asserts that the central metaphysical issue of creation versus eternity runs from Chapter 71 of Part I to Chapter 31 of Part II, but this is highly misleading. For the *first* subjects discussed in these chapters are the proofs of the existence, unity, and incorporeality of God, only *after* which Maimonides discusses the issue of creation versus eternity. Either the world is created or eternal. If the world is created, one can prove the existence, unity, and incorporeality of God, and the same holds true if the world is eternal.



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Unlike Halbertal, Davidson focuses on Maimonides' proofs about God, since, as he correctly points out, Maimonides holds that the first two positive commandments require us to *know* that God exists and is one. Maimonides further holds that knowledge requires not merely probability attained through dialectical argument—that suffices only for rational belief—but certainty attained through demonstrative proof. Hence the only way one can properly fulfill these two commandments is through demonstrative proof. Precisely here we see the meshing in Maimonides of binding halakha and rigorous, formal philosophy. It is in this sense, Davidson maintains, that Maimonides is a rationalist. It appears, then, that Halbertal is able to avoid speaking of Maimonides' rationalism only by not discussing the one critical section of the *Guide* best characterized by that term!

Of course, on the skeptical reading of the *Guide* even these proofs do not give us any knowledge about God, since Maimonides' analysis of religious language leads to the conclusion that we cannot attain *any* metaphysical knowledge about God. This reading was first suggested by Shlomo Pines, one of the last century's leading Maimonidean scholars. Pines hypothesized that a lost text of the great Arab philosopher al-Farabi, which ibn Bajja quoted as saying "that after death and demise there is no afterlife, that there is no happiness except political happiness, [and] that there is no existence except that which is perceived by the senses," might have influenced Maimonides. He brought several literary hints from within the *Guide* to support his view (hints forcefully dismissed by Davidson, incidentally).

Josef Stern's recent, very rich, and carefully argued work *The Matter and Form of Maimonides' Guide* makes the strongest philosophical case yet for a version of the skeptical reading. I will focus on two of his key arguments. Maimonides certainly tells us that we cannot say anything positive about God. However, in his famous doctrine of negative attributes he also says that we can translate positive descriptions of God into negative ones ("God is one" becomes "God is not many" and so on), and this constitutes real knowledge. Skeptical readers, like Stern, argue that such a positive evaluation of negative attributes

merely has the status of a "necessary belief." In truth, Stern maintains, Maimonides is critical of negative attributes, and all statements to the contrary are carefully qualified.

Maimonides opens his discussion of negative attributes in *Guide* 1:58 with the statement "Know that the description of God . . . by means of negations is the correct description." This seems clear enough, but Stern notes that Maimonides uses the term "correct," not "true." Stern continues, "One

Maimonides says that we can translate positive descriptions of God into negative ones.

senses that they are 'correct' only relative to our other linguistic alternatives for talking about God." But Stern is a careful writer and "one senses" is a tip-off that he is on shaky ground. Maimonides later states that "negative attributes conduct . . . the mind toward the uppermost reach that man may attain in the apprehension [of God]." Again Stern argues that "This endorsement is more qualified than first appears," noting that in an earlier chapter (1:46) "the term for 'conduct' [. . . signifies] 'guidance' to belief that something exists as opposed to the kind of understanding of true reality that constitutes . . . scientific knowledge." Stern, however, overlooks the immediately preceding chapter (1:57) in which Maimonides uses the term "conduct" in the context of "conducting the mind to the truth of the matter."

If no one, as Stern argues, can achieve any metaphysical knowledge of God, what is "the uppermost reach that man may attain in the apprehension [of God]"? Stern notes that in the great climactic chapter of the *Guide*, 3:51, Maimonides singles out Moses as having reached such a high level of apprehension that

It is said of Him "and he was there with the Lord" (Ex. 34:28), putting questions and receiving answers . . . in that holy place.

Stern asks—surprisingly, in a lifetime of study—

I Believe

Please remember, contestants, to phrase your answer in the form of a question.

—Alex Trebek, host of Jeopardy!™

I believe with a perfect faith in the coming of the messiah, though he may tarry.

—Late medieval reformulation of Maimonides' 12th Principle of Faith, Commentary to the Mishna, Sanhedrin, Perek Helek.

In the days of the Messiah, each individual will perfect his soul to its root, and the holy sparks will ascend from their husks, which will become entirely null.

—Restatement of a key doctrine of Lurianic Kabbalah by R. Kalonymus Kalman Epstein (1753–1825).

I believe, with a perfect

faith, that the messiah will

be a Jeopardy champion,

whose answers, phrased as questions,

will raise sparks of memory

from husks of forgetfulness, and return us to ourselves.

—P.K. Avery



A page from the 14th book of the *Mishneh Torah*, northern Italy, ca. mid-1400s.

ing the *Guide*, I do not recall anyone posing this question before—what Maimonides could possibly have meant by Moses’ “putting questions and receiving answers.” He notes that Maimonides twice constructs imaginary dialogues, the first between a philosopher and an Islamic theologian regarding the lawfulness of nature and the second between himself and Aristotle regarding creation versus eternity, and he suggests it was this kind of open-ended, inconclusive discussion that Maimonides was describing. However, it is more likely that Maimonides is alluding to *Guide* 1:54, where he speaks of Moses’ “making requests of God and receiving answers from Him”—which is explicitly interpreted to suggest a progression to ever-higher levels of knowledge.

If we grant Stern’s skeptical conclusion that we can have no metaphysical knowledge of God, the question arises as to what the point of philosophical inquiry was for Maimonides. Pines drew the radical conclusion that Maimonides, like (at least allegedly) al-Farabi before him, abandoned the ideal of human intellectual perfection, maintaining (though only esoterically) that the highest perfection is all too human, that is civic, political, and moral. But this, as Davidson and Stern note, goes against the entire thrust of the *Guide*. Stern more conservatively suggests that

Maimonides did not surrender the *ideal* of intellectual perfection . . . [but] it may function as a regulative ideal . . . What is important is not only *what* is proven but the *drawing up* of the proofs . . . not winning the race . . . but the race or pursuit itself.

This suggestion is certainly highly appealing to the modern temper, but, to paraphrase Richard Bentley’s famous remark to Alexander Pope about his translation of *The Iliad*: It’s a pretty picture, but you must not call it Maimonides!

One key statement of Maimonides with which I would have liked to see Stern contend is this one (from *Guide* 2:47): “For only truth pleases God and only falsehood angers Him,” which implies that only truth, not the search for truth, is of value. This statement also tells against Halbertal’s provocative suggestion in his book’s conclusion that Maimonides himself allowed for all four readings of the *Guide*, a pluralistic suggestion that also appeals to the modern temper. As for the conservative and philosophical readings, are they so opposed? We must remember that the issue of creation versus eternity, unlike that of the existence and unity of God, is irresolvable. At best one option can be shown to be more probable than the other by weighing the pros and cons. Therefore, even if Maimonides genuinely believed that creation is more probable than eternity—and I see no good reason for asserting that he did not—he could not dismiss the eternity of the world as a possibility. It is for this reason, and *not* because he secretly adhered to eternity, that he reinterprets “the fundamental concepts of [Judaism] in a manner consistent with the concept of an eternal world.” It is here and only here, it seems to me, that we can speak of Maimonides’ pluralism.

As Davidson notes, Maimonides’ proofs of the existence, unity, and incorporeality of God, dependent as they are on obsolete medieval scientific premises, have “turned to sand.” Yet Mai-

monides’ method of dialectical argumentation, his scrupulous setting forth of the competing views on theological issues and weighing their pros and cons in the absence of certain knowledge, which constitutes the bulk of the *Guide*, still has much to teach us. When Josie Ashkenazi, the protagonist of Dara Horn’s recent boldly titled novel, *A Guide for the Perplexed*, is kidnapped in Cairo and held captive by Muslim terrorists with only a French translation of the *Guide* for a companion, she becomes absorbed by Maimonides’ dialectical discussion of the various opinions on divine providence. I doubt if his proofs for God’s existence would have similarly held her attention.

Here, perhaps, we arrive at the final irony: It was just this kind of non-demonstrative, give-and-take argument, and its concomitant ethic of preserving minority opinions, that Maimonides tried to eradicate in halakha with the *Mishneh Torah*! Moshe Halbertal shows how rabbinic scholars used the *Mishneh Torah* against its intentions “to gain a better grasp of the underlying Talmudic discussion,” carefully weighing its views against those of other medieval rabbinic authorities. No doubt, the Maimonides of the *Mishneh Torah* would have been dismayed to learn how his great code has been (mis)used. But perhaps the Maimonides of the *Guide*, with its more rabbinic sensibility, would have smiled and conceded the rightness of such an approach.

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Muscular Judaism

BY TODD M. ENDELMAN

Mendoza the Jew: Boxing, Manliness, and Nationalism—A Graphic History

by Ronald Schechter and Liz Clarke
Oxford University Press, 240 pp., \$19.95

The best known Jew in late-Georgian London was neither a rabbi nor a banker but a celebrated bare-knuckle prizefighter named Daniel Mendoza, who was born in 1764 and died in 1836. The son of respectable, but poor, British-born parents of *converso* background, Mendoza grew up in Aldgate, in the easternmost part of the City of London. He was educated at the school of the Spanish and Portuguese Synagogue until age 13, when he was apprenticed to a glassmaker. He never completed his apprenticeship, however, and drifted from job to job, working variously for a fruit seller, a tea dealer, a tobacconist, a candy maker, a baker, and even a smuggler.

As a young man, Mendoza was quick to take offense and often resorted to his fists to answer insults and settle accounts. This was not exceptional in the rough-and-tumble world of 18th-century London, but it did make it hard to hold a job. He fought his first professional fight in 1780 at age 15 and from then on made his living from prizefighting in one way or another. The most important matches he fought were three bouts with his one-time mentor and later bitter rival Richard Humphries (or Humphreys) in 1788, 1789, and 1790. His victories in the second and third of these matches left him the undisputed British champion.

Mendoza's fights were widely reported in the newspapers of the day, often round by round (bouts of 60 or 70 rounds were not unusual). The trenchant political caricaturist James Gillray also captured the three championship fights with Humphries, and these illustrations, as well as his full-length, fists-up portrait of Mendoza in the ring, were sold at Hannah Humphrey's well-known print shop in London. A Staffordshire pottery produced a jug portraying the Mendoza-Humphries fight of 1788, an example of which is on exhibit at The Jewish Museum in London.

Even before Mendoza retired from the ring, he exploited his celebrity. He opened a boxing academy in London, gave private lessons to gentlemen, and toured the provinces, exhibiting the poses and tactics of famous boxers of the day. In 1789 he published *The Art of Boxing* and in 1816 his memoirs. Toward the end of his life, he was landlord of the Royal Oak pub on Whitechapel Road, where he presided as a kind of elder statesman over a younger generation of Jewish prizefighters.

Like many celebrity athletes, Mendoza was not good with money. He made a small fortune in the ring but quickly dissipated it in drinking, gambling, and (probably) whoring. Frequently hounded by creditors, he spent at least six months in debtors'

prison. To make ends meet, he often took jobs that were widely reviled. In the 1790s, he worked for a time as a sheriff's officer, arresting debtors and other

The celerity with which Mendoza struck his man, exceeds all description; and was so decisive in the end that neither the superior

While opponents who were stronger than Mendoza threw punch after punch, he relied on quick footwork and exceptional balance to block or avoid their blows.

criminals, and as an army recruiting sergeant, or crimp, tracking deserters and enticing young men, by fair means or foul, to enlist. In 1809, the management of the newly rebuilt Theatre Royal in Covent Garden hired him, along with Dutch Sam and other Jewish fighters, to rough up demonstrators protesting a rise in the price of tickets and a reduction in

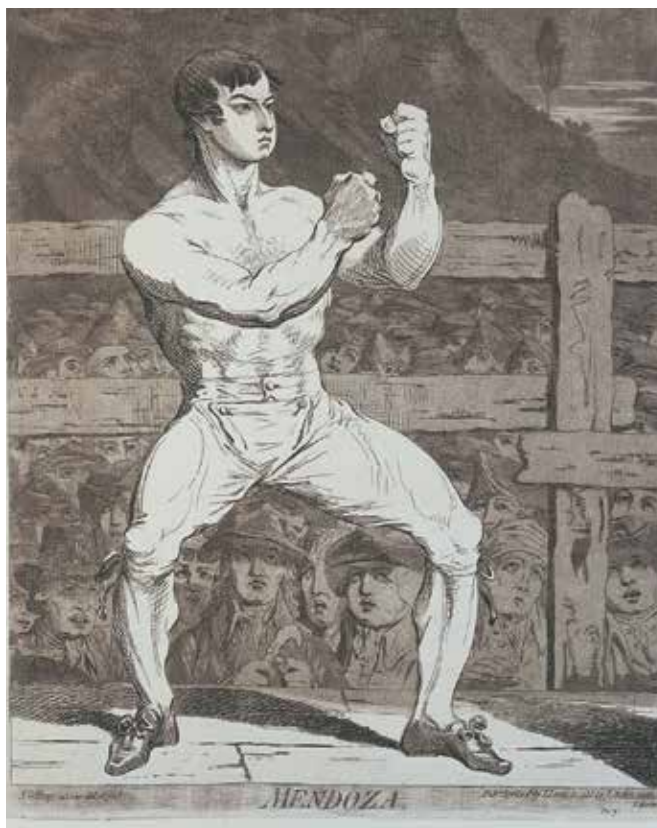
strength and weight of Humphreys, nor the reach of his arm, could defend him from the lightning of Mendoza's wrist.

Like Humphries, Mendoza's opponents frequently towered over him—he stood only 5 feet 7 inches tall and weighed 160 pounds. As a middle-weight fighting heavyweights (there were no weight divisions then), swiftness, agility, and quick-wittedness were his most important assets.

It is easy to dismiss the career of Mendoza as just a colorful footnote in modern Jewish history, but this would be a mistake. The history of Jewish boxers in England is as central to understanding the entry of Jews into European society as the better-known and much-researched history of Jewish *salonnières* and intellectuals in Berlin and Vienna who were Mendoza's contemporaries. Jewish boxers in late-Georgian London, as their accomplishments demonstrate, were as acculturated to the cultural and social norms of their time, place, and rank as Jewish salon hostesses, such as Rahel Varnhagen, were to theirs. If the entry of Jews into new spheres of activity is a hallmark of Jewish modernity, it is hard to think of a more dramatic example. More importantly, while the *salonnières* failed to achieve the recognition they craved—most eventually left the Jewish fold and became Christians, a testimony to the illiberality of old-regime Central European societies—the Jewish boxers were unambiguously successful even as

they remained Jews. Their pugilistic skills earned them the respect and friendship of Englishmen from a wide swathe of society. The Prince of Wales (the future George IV), for one, was an enthusiastic supporter of prizefighting who bet heavily and often on Mendoza.

Prizefighting was the English national sport and Mendoza was a national hero, not just a Jewish hero, however stigmatized Jewishness was in other social and cultural contexts. One sign of his acceptance in English society is that almost all of the 300-plus subscribers to his 1816 memoir were Christians. By my count, less than 15 were Jews. (One of the few Jewish subscribers was the financier Abraham Goldsmid; another was the moneylender, political radical, and rogue "Jew" King, John King, born Jacob Rey.)



Daniel Mendoza by James Gillray, ca. 1780s. (Courtesy of The Jewish Museum, London.)

the number of inexpensive seats, an episode that has come to be known as the Old Price Riots.

Despite the downward spiral of Mendoza's life outside the ring, his place in the history of boxing is secure. Historians of the sport universally credit him with introducing a more "scientific" form of the sport, one emphasizing finesse and agility rather than brute strength. While opponents who were stronger than he threw punch after punch, seeking to hammer him into submission, he relied on quick footwork and exceptional balance to block or avoid their blows. Then, when his opponents were off balance, he would land a punishing blow of his own. Reporting his second contest with Humphries, the London *General Evening Post* described his style in this way:

Together with artist Liz Clarke, Ronald Schechter, who teaches European history at the College of William & Mary, has produced an innovative new “graphic history” of Daniel Mendoza, which is, in more or less equal parts, a textbook for undergraduate students of British and European history, a historical novel, and a comic book. *Mendoza the Jew*:

Priestley. The Christian pugilist, went the inscription, proved himself “as inferior to the Jewish Hero as Dr. Priestley when opposed to the Rabbi David Levi.” The Jewish prizefighters who followed Mendoza were often described similarly. When Aby Belasco met Patrick Halton in 1823, one journal referred to the match as “Pork and Potatoes, or Ireland versus Judea.” Matches

complexity of cultural life and social behavior in the ways that conventional forms of historical narrative do. Schechter is well aware of this, which is why half of the book reads like a conventional undergraduate textbook. He is also frank about taking liberties to conform to the genre, including creating dialogue for speech bubbles. Although Schechter works to make Mendoza’s words agree with views he expressed in letters to newspapers and in his memoir and boxing manual, at times Mendoza sounds remarkably contemporary. For example, when his wife, Esther, chides him for spending money on fine clothing as quickly as he earns it, he replies: “I know, I know. I just want us to rise up in society.” Such anachronisms must have been almost impossible to avoid. Still they strike an odd note.

Graphic history must also pass muster in regard to the basic historical information it presents. Schechter’s account, while true to what is known about Mendoza, stumbles occasionally when it comes to Jewish and English history. In his treatment of the origins of the readmission of Jews to England, he mistakenly writes that Portugal expelled its Jews in 1497, when in fact it forcibly converted them en masse that year, a difference that was critical to the survival of crypto-Judaism. When he describes the Judaism of the *conversos* who remained in Spain and Portugal, the panel confusingly depicts a group of men, *tallitot* pulled over their heads, sitting at a table set with dinner plates, reading from books set before them. Perhaps they are meant to be celebrating Passover, but, if so, why are they wearing *tallitot* and why is there a lit *hanukkah* in the corner? The Jew who peers through an opening in the window slit to check for the approach of strangers conjures up descriptions of crypto-Judaism that historians discredited decades ago. Schechter and Clarke also mishandle London’s geography. The Jews of Georgian London lived mostly in the easternmost parishes of the City of London (the square-mile, self-governing, business and financial center of London) and in adjacent neighborhoods to the east of the City. On the map of “Mendoza’s London” opposite the title page, however, the City of London and streets both north and east of the City are mistakenly labelled “the East End,” a term that was not in use at the time and that never included the City. In the Anglo-Jewish context “the East End” functions like “the Lower East Side” in America, evoking the Yiddish-speaking milieu of East European Jewish settlement in the late 19th and early 20th century.

While the East End of London (like the Lower East Side) produced its own Jewish prizefighters in the early and mid-20th century—Harry Mizler, Ted “Kid” Lewis, and Jack “Kid” Berg were the most celebrated—they were products of a very different environment than that of Daniel Mendoza. Mendoza was not an “East End” Jew, but, as Schechter shows, a third-generation English-speaking Jew, whose success in the ring earned him widespread acclaim and acceptance. In his own way, he was as much an 18th-century pioneer of the modernization of the Jewish people as Rahel Varnhagen or even Moses Mendelssohn.

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Daniel Mendoza and Sam Martin in the ring. (Illustration by Liz Clarke, courtesy of Oxford University Press.)

Boxing, Manliness, and Nationalism also includes 50 pages of primary sources (mostly newspaper reports of boxing matches), several short essays on the historical context in which Mendoza’s story unfolded (for example, the place of boxing in 18th-century British society), and suggestions for writing assignments on related topics. It also includes an account of how Schechter became interested in Mendoza and how his collaboration with Clarke worked.

Schechter’s graphic history incorporates an interpretive argument about the path of Mendoza’s acceptance. He points out that boxing became identified with the essence of Britishness at a time when British national identity was taking shape. This occurred in the quarter century between the French Revolution and the Battle of Waterloo, when the British were almost constantly at war with the French, who became a useful foil for self-definition. The British boasted that other nations—and the effeminate French, in particular—settled their differences by dueling with pistols or swords, while the British did so in a more vigorous and manly (but less dangerous) way, with their bare fists. Britons who celebrated and befriended Mendoza considered him one of theirs because he literally embodied their ideal of masculinity.

At the same time, Schechter notes, Mendoza’s Jewishness also loomed large. When Mendoza fought, he was always billed as “Mendoza the Jew.” Gillray’s etching of the second Mendoza-Humphries match bore an inscription comparing Mendoza’s victory to the polemical triumphs of the Anglo-Jewish apologist David Levi in his exchanges with the Unitarian minister Joseph

like these served as a rallying point for expressions of Jewish pride. According to one report, one thousand Jews were present at the first Mendoza-Humphries fight in 1788. London’s Jewish prizefighters were, then, simultaneously British, manly, and Jewish.

One obvious downside of the graphic format is its schematic brevity. It cannot convey the messy



Daniel Mendoza contemplating his last fight. (Illustration by Liz Clarke, courtesy of Oxford University Press.)

Zionism's Forgotten Father

BY ALLAN ARKUSH

Nathan Birnbaum and Jewish Modernity: Architect of Zionism, Yiddishism, and Orthodoxy

by Jess Olson

Stanford University Press, 408 pp., \$65

When Theodor Herzl first stepped onto the Zionist stage in 1895, other actors were already on it, even in the city that served as the base of his operations. While most of the people who made up Vienna's Jewish community of more than 100,000 were anything but Jewish nationalists, the city had for more than a decade been home to a small group known as the Kadimah Society, whose members proudly identified themselves as Zionists. The very word "Zionism" was, in fact, the invention of the central figure in this society, the editor of its newspaper, Nathan Birnbaum.

Naturally, when the literary editor of Vienna's most prestigious newspaper, the *Neue Freie Presse*, unexpectedly took up their cause, the leaders of the Kadimah Society were extremely eager to make his acquaintance. Herzl, for his part, hesitated to meet with these marginal men. But Birnbaum insisted, and Herzl finally invited them to his apartment on March 3, 1896. After the meeting, Herzl had only disparaging things to say—in his diary, at any rate—about his new colleagues. "Birnbaum," in particular, he wrote, "is unmistakably jealous of me. . . . I judge Birnbaum to be an envious, vain and obstinate man. I hear that he had already turned away from Zionism and gone over to socialism when my appearance led him back again to Zion."

Birnbaum never confessed to having had the feelings Herzl ascribed to him, but who could have blamed him if he did? The two men were roughly the same age, came from roughly similar backgrounds, and had both earned law degrees at the University of Vienna before abandoning the legal profession to become writers. The difference was that Herzl was a real literary celebrity while Birnbaum scribbled away in obscurity. Herzl was also very well off (through both birth and marriage), while Birnbaum, the son of relatively impecunious and fairly traditional Jews, could barely make ends meet. It didn't help that they resembled each other: Both men had high foreheads, impressive black beards, and a clear, penetrating gaze.

That this upstart near-lookalike was now climbing to the top of *his* movement must have been hard for Birnbaum to swallow. But whatever he might have felt, he could not refrain from writing to Herzl, the day after he met him, asking him for help:

I have had the misfortune to recognize the truth of Zionism—from which you have remained shielded—already by my sixteenth year. I have

given my entire passionate personality to these ideals and have thus shut myself out of any other career in which I could have succeeded with my talents. I have pressed myself into a dark, obscure corner of literature—with the result being a constant degeneration of my financial situation. Dear honored doctor! . . . You have the influence, consideration, and power to help me. I beg you affectionately, send your advice! Although our acquaintance is still young, I believe that there is a bond woven between us that makes it acceptable for me to ask of you: save me from certain destruction, and preserve with me Zionism!

Herzl held his nose and gave him a small loan. In no time at all, Birnbaum was back, asking for more. It isn't clear whether Herzl ever again gave him anything, but he did dangle the possibility of a paid position in



Dr. Nathan Birnbaum, 1901. (Courtesy of The Nathan and Solomon Birnbaum Archives, Toronto.)

his new and still very small Zionist movement. When Birnbaum eventually did obtain the post of secretary general of the Political Actions Committee of the World Zionist Organization, however, it was more in spite of than because of Herzl, who, by this time, neither trusted nor respected him. But Herzl didn't have to put up with Birnbaum for long. By 1899 he was gone, not only from his position but from the Zionist movement altogether.

At first, Birnbaum didn't completely reject Zionist goals. Rather, he folded them into a larger Jewish nationalist vision, one that gave priority to the political and cultural reorganization of the diaspora over the settlement of Palestine. This brought him into the ideological vicinity of Ahad Ha-am, whom

he defended against Max Nordau in their bitter dispute over Herzl's *Old-New Land* in 1902, but only by misrepresenting him, as Olson puts it, as someone who "had come to realize the essential value of exile on even a cultural level." Birnbaum's increasing involvement with the Jews of Eastern Europe eventually led him to a new appreciation of the potential of the Yiddish language as a "medium of national renaissance," and, in the years before World War I, he shifted to the promotion of *Yiddishkeit* before finally making his way to Orthodox Judaism. For a time, Birnbaum even served in the upper echelons of the anti-Zionist Agudath Israel, and he ended his life as a fierce opponent of the movement he had once resented Herzl for taking away from him.

Birnbaum's unusual trajectory has reduced the space that might have been assigned to him in the history of Zionism. David Vital, in his three-volume study of the period extending from the earliest roots of Zionism to the British Mandate, describes the initial friction between Herzl and Birnbaum, but doesn't even bother to note the latter's departure from the Zionist scene. In his biography of Herzl, Ernst Pawel speaks briefly and derisively of Birnbaum's "career full of bizarre convolutions that led from traditional piety via Zionism and socialism to venomous anti-Zionism and ultra-orthodoxy." Within the ultra-Orthodox world, to be sure, Birnbaum is still honored as one of the first modern *ba'alei teshuvah*, but—needless to say—this hasn't led any of his pious admirers to attempt to understand what led him from heresy back to the correct path. Jess Olson has now written a book 408 pages long to bring to an end what he calls Birnbaum's "elision from Jewish historiography."

Olson is, perhaps, a little less than properly attentive to the historian Robert Wistrich, whose 1988 essay on Birnbaum's "strange odyssey" may have been brief (if only by Wistrich's own prodigious standards), but he is neither cursory nor dismissive. While Olson refers to Wistrich's essay here and there in his footnotes, he largely overlooks Wistrich's efforts to depict "Birnbaum's metamorphosis from political to cultural Zionist, from Pan-Judaist and Yiddishist to *Agudas Yisroel*" as a manifestation of his "lifelong search for the roots of Jewish being." This, indeed, is more or less what Olson himself has done, albeit in much greater detail, with much more nuance, and with considerable success.

Whatever part mutual distaste may have played in Birnbaum's relations with Herzl, something deeper was always at stake. For Birnbaum, from the very beginning, Zionism was more than a proposal to solve the problems posed by anti-Semitism. He had always believed, as Olson puts it, that:

the main goal of Jewish nationalism was to restore a lost authentic Jewish culture. It would not resemble the western European Jewish world, nor the world of traditional Orthodoxy,

but would be a modern rebirth of the national identity of pre-exilic Israel—or more precisely, the world of state, national culture, and language that Birnbaum and others imagined it to have been.

Such cultural ideals were far from Herzl's mind, nor did he share Birnbaum's overall attitude toward the diaspora. Moreover, even as Birnbaum envisioned a territorial and (as Herzl was aware) a socialist

Birnbaum's "strange odyssey" has reduced the space that might have been assigned to him in the history of Zionism.

answer to the Jewish problem, he simultaneously "began to advocate activism not to achieve a distant goal but rather to secure a present state of safety and rights of the Jewish people." By the time Birnbaum met Herzl, he had already "relegated the acquisition of a land for the Jewish nation to a secondary priority."

Still, Birnbaum's deep differences with Herzl did not require his departure from the new Zionist movement, as is evident from the continued presence within the World Zionist Organization of figures such as Ahad Ha-am, Martin Buber, and others whose outlook was closer to Birnbaum's than to Herzl's. What really drew him beyond Zionism were the fight for Jewish autonomy in parts of Central and Eastern Europe and his increasing appreciation for the exilic culture that he had previously derided. In 1907, he campaigned energetically as the Jewish National Party's candidate (with Zionist support) for a seat in the Austrian legislature, representing a heavily Jewish district in Galicia. His defeat, due in part to electoral fraud, deflected him from politics into cultural activity, centering on the organization of the first Yiddish language conference.

From the outset of his career as a Zionist, Birnbaum, like most Zionists, had held Yiddish in disdain, characterizing it as a "mishmash" that was "not an appropriate language of a people, not the least for the language of a people that wishes to climb up from two thousand years of exile to the heights of national independence and its previous greatness." In time, however, he came to believe that Yiddish was a "precious treasure," entirely suited to serve as the vehicle for modern self-expression for great masses of Jews and, equally importantly, as a necessary means for the "national intellectual" to be in touch with "the soul of our people, the heart of our people, the life of our people." Birnbaum didn't turn his back on Hebrew, but he now contended that it was destined to remain for the foreseeable future the preserve of a small cultural elite. Within a year of his electoral defeat, he had changed "his language of epistolary communication with his most intimate associates (especially his son, Solomon), and even of publication, to Yiddish."

This wasn't an easy thing for him to do. Like most children of Yiddish-speaking migrants to a Western or Central European metropolis, Birnbaum didn't really know the language. But he tried his best, with mixed results, at least at first. His opening speech at

the First Yiddish Conference in Czernowitz in 1908 was received with both mockery and praise:

According to Gershon Bader, writing for the New York *Yidishes Tageblatt*, "As Birnbaum did not speak any Yiddish, he read out his speech from a paper, which had the words transliterated into German characters, and the impression was not a good one; in spite of that, the speech was applauded." However, even Bader's account is not representative: Barzel noted in [the Russian-language Jewish newspaper] *Rasvet* that Birnbaum "read his first speech in Yiddish fluently from a piece of paper. The appearance: pure Yiddish, it was somewhat pedantic and businesslike in style; he read his speech in the Galician dialect."

The conference at which he delivered this speech, which was attended by many of the leading Yiddish writers of the day, was one where various grand (and incompatible) programs for the strengthening of Yiddish language and culture were presented. But, as Olson notes, it "yielded little" in the way of results, partly because Birnbaum was a poor organizer, partly because of the internal divisions among Yiddishists, but more because the Jewish world in general wasn't interested. In its aftermath, Birnbaum launched a Yiddish periodical endearingly entitled *Dr. Birnboym's Vokhenblat*, but it lasted for only six issues. "Its demise," Olson writes, "marked the nadir of Birnbaum's life as a Jewish nationalist."

He was within a few years to be reborn, however, as a Jew of a very different stripe. Birnbaum's turn to Orthodoxy was at first a very quiet and private one,

focused on mastering basic Jewish practices. Soon, however, under the tutelage of Tuvia Horowitz, a young Vishnitzer Hasid who became both his disciple and his guide, he emerged onto the Orthodox political stage—with a plan radically to transform the community he had entered. He attacked Orthodox Jews in the most abrasive manner for their passivity, insisting that they themselves "had been infected by the taint of modernity, manifested as self-involvement and selfish concern only for their own well-being." They had to rise above themselves, he proclaimed (together with Horowitz), to become "oylim" (ascenders) toward true holiness if they were to perform the mission for which they had been chosen and help to hasten the advent of the messiah.

What led to his religious awakening is something Birnbaum attempted to explain on two different occasions, in 1919 and 1924, but in not very many words. Analyzing both of these somewhat divergent religious statements, Olson comes to the convincing conclusion that "Birnbaum's turn was truly based in an intense period of internal debate and turmoil rather than solely a moment of conversionary inspiration." This internal spiritual debate was one that culminated in Birnbaum's realization that, in his words, "all of the self-invented objections" that he had once held about God "were but proofs of his inaccessibility, and did not cast doubt on his existence. . . . Now all was clear to me: my story of suffering over the years was but a single, great announcement of the All-Powerful before his entry into my consciousness." In the end, Olson observes, "he saw each period, each affiliation" in his peregrinations as "one further step of discovery, of ascertaining a transcendent foundation for his

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understanding of the nature of the Jewish people and, by extension, his own identity.”

Birnbaum’s intellectual evolution is reminiscent of Leo Strauss’ famous description in 1963 of the way in which the narrowness of strictly political Zionism points to the need for cultural Zionism, which in turn, when it “understands itself,” turns into religious Zionism. “But,” Strauss wrote, “when religious Zionism understands itself, it is in the first place Jewish faith and only secondarily Zionism.”

Birnbaum’s path did not, of course, follow exactly this route. His political Zionism was never as purely political as Herzl’s, and his move beyond cultural Zionism led, before his return to Orthodox Judaism, to a unique secular nationalist conception of the “Jewish soul.” And of course when he did ultimately make his way to religion, it was not in the form of religious Zionism but religious anti-Zionism. Still, Birnbaum’s fallback on faith as the only solid support for Jewish peoplehood seems similar to the one Strauss outlined.

Olson makes it very clear, in addition, that Birnbaum’s anti-Zionism was not as far from religious Zionism as one might imagine. He was, indeed, deeply involved with the founders of Agudath Israel and served as secretary general of the organization, but this meant opposition to the World Zionist Organization, not every aspect of the Zionist project. Indeed, as a member of the Agudah he continued to champion his own *Oylin* movement, which aimed to recruit a vanguard of ideologically committed Orthodox youth to settle in Palestine. As he said in 1920, when the future fate of Palestine was still under discussion:

Precisely *because* we are Torah Jews, *because* it is in the Land of Israel that we will see the fulfillment of our Torah ideals, *because* [there] we will come to our own, we must state it clearly and frankly. Precisely *because we will fight nonreligious nationalism with all our power, we must create a real religious nationalism in the land.* Palestine must not be given to the Zionist organization; it must be given to the Jewish people.

Olson compares Birnbaum’s response to the travails of the interwar period to that of other Central European Jewish intellectuals (including the young Strauss). What they had in common was a “sense of crisis precipitated by the rise of the radical left.” This fear initially distracted Birnbaum from the mounting threat from the radical right, which he was inclined to regard until 1930 as “just another expression of the anti-Semitic agitation against which he had struggled his entire life.”

When Birnbaum did finally grasp the nature of the Nazi menace, he saw no hope for any direct political opposition to it. There was nothing for the Jews to do, he thought, but attempt to “diminish the surface friction between us and others through traditional Jewish earnestness and religiosity, and [to] live and strive for perfection.” Beyond this call for teshuvah, Birnbaum could only continue to recommend a return to the land of Israel, preferably in the spiritually healing role of agriculturalists, but not in collaboration with the unworthy and heretical Zionists.

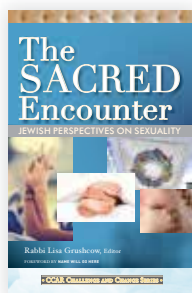
Whether Birnbaum at this time gave any thought to moving to Palestine himself is something Olson does not tell us. But this is in keeping with his general neglect of his hero’s private life in favor of his thought and activities, apart from an occasional reference to his straitened circumstances. How his wife and his already fully grown children responded to his adoption at the age of 50 of an intensely religious lifestyle is something about which we are left wondering. We do learn, however, of Birnbaum’s somewhat unusual decision to adopt Tuvia Horowitz’s “own Hasidic *minhag* (the specific form of his religious observance).” Horowitz, for his part, lovingly displayed a portrait of Birnbaum until he got into trouble with some members of his community who mistook it for a picture of Theodor Herzl.

Nathan Birnbaum was fortunate enough to die in 1937, peacefully, in the Netherlands, before the Holocaust. Had he died a few years later at the hands of the Nazis, as his close contemporary Simon Dubnow did, his fate would no doubt have seemed to those who remembered him to represent history’s verdict on his ideas. As Birnbaum’s intellectual biographer, Jess Olson does not pretend to be his judge. He neither disparages nor acclaims Birnbaum, but he does insist that his life and work were significant and deserve to be rescued from obscurity.

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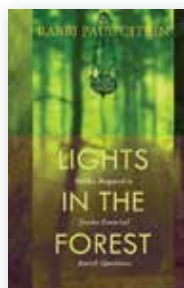


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Poland's Jewish Problem: Vodka?

BY ALLAN NADLER

Yankel's Tavern: Jews, Liquor, & Life in the Kingdom of Poland

by Glenn Dynner

Oxford University Press, 272 pp., \$24.95

According to a famous Yiddish ditty the Gentile is, to his very core, an alcoholic. By contrast, in the tune's alternating refrain we "learn" that the Jew is, by definition, genetically sober, studious, and pious:

Shiker iz der Goy (the Goy is drunk)
Shikker iz er (a drunk is he)
Trinken miz er (he must drink)
Vayl er iz a goy (because he's a Goy)
Nikhter iz der Yid (the Jew is sober)
Nikhter iz er (sober is he)
Lernen (in some versions, *Davenen*) *miz er* (he must learn, or pray)
Vayl er iz a Yid (because he is a Jew)

"*Shikker iz der Goy*" is one of the most popular and least charitable Jewish folk songs of all time. Its stanzas depict the respective hangouts of the Goy and the Yid, namely the tavern and the *beit midrash*. Its two alternating refrains, "explaining" these polar opposites by way of ethnic, even racial, determinism, reflect long-held and broadly shared biases about the sharply contrasting relationships to alcohol maintained by Gentiles and Jews. The myth of Jewish sobriety was employed by Jews to comfort, flatter, and elevate themselves above the debauched,

drunken, and at times violently anti-Semitic Eastern European peasantry. But a far more sinister and predatory version of the fable of Jewish sobriety flourished for centuries among anti-Semites, particularly the temperance-preaching Catholic clergy:

back into the liquor businesses of their European forebears, as Marni Davis' illuminating recent study of the disproportionate role of American Jews during prohibition, *Jews and Booze*, richly documents. At that time, again paradoxically enough, accusa-

The self-comforting myth of Jewish temperance was held by many Jewish immigrants to these shores—more than a few of whom went right back into the liquor businesses of their European forebears.

It was the Jews' calculated sobriety that enabled them so effectively to operate a vast monopoly over the lucrative liquor trade by intoxicating and then exploiting innocent and inebriated Christian peasants. These contrasting stereotypes remained widespread, particularly in Poland, for centuries; they persisted through the purported demise of the Jewish liquor monopoly—inaugurated by an array of highly restrictive laws in the 1830s and 1840s aimed at shutting down the ubiquitous Jewish-run taverns. This governmental policy only intensified throughout the Russian Empire—including the so-called Congress Kingdom of Poland—in the 1860s, with the emancipation of the serfs, who, it was hoped, might seriously compete with the Jewish-run liquor business. That never happened.

A mere two decades later, with the Jewish mass flight to America, these same prejudices crossed the Atlantic. The self-comforting myth of Jewish temperance was held by many Jewish immigrants to these shores—more than a few of whom went right

tions of the calculated and manipulative sobriety of the Jews inflamed the anti-Semitic rhetoric of the American Christian temperance movement, reaching an ugly apogee during the Prohibition era, when so many Jewish owners of illegal speakeasies and unlicensed taverns, to say nothing of bootleggers, did indeed make their fortunes.

Glenn Dynner's erudite, meticulously researched, and refreshingly original new book, *Yankel's Tavern: Jews, Liquor, & Life in the Kingdom of Poland*, begins by almost entirely demolishing these particular ethnic myths. He ends with a powerful polemic against the modernist biases and misconceptions held by three generations of his academic predecessors regarding 19th-century Polish-Jewish social and economic history, in which the Jewish liquor trade played such a vital role.

Dynner disagrees with the many historians who have tended to accept at face value the exaggerated claims on the part of both legislators in Congress Poland and a tiny elite of Polonized Jews that they



Gentiles dancing and drinking in a Jewish tavern. Lithograph by G. Pillati, published by A. Chlebowski in the journal *Swit* and printed by B. Wierzbicki and Sons, Warsaw. (Courtesy of the Moldovan Family Collection.)

had actually succeeded in weaning Jews away from their professional and economic addiction to alcohol by encouraging them to farm, fight for their country, and study in Polish-Jewish academies. He argues that such efforts had almost no lasting impact on the vast majority of Polish Jews. Jewish farmers commonly established drinking holes on their land; Jewish soldiers, upon discharge, could not find more lucrative work than that which the tavern offered; and graduates of so-called rabbinical schools, established by radical Jewish Polonizers,

gling, from religious celebrations to lively, and at times dangerously contentious, drunken debates. In doing so, he effectively overturns the commonly held notion that Jewish-tavern keepers were a major source of anti-Jewish resentment on the part of Poles. Unfortunately, in these chapters Dynner tends too often to bombard his readers with eye-glazing, detailed data and scores of statistics that would have more wisely been consigned to his footnotes. Still, his major conclusions represent an important revision not only of popular preju-

out of school for lack of tuition money. His wife, Liba bat Zela, beseeched Rabbi Guttmacher to “turn his heart so that he will no longer be a drunkard, for it has been several years since he became a drunkard.”

As for the men who visited Guttmacher to cure them of their alcoholism, here are two samples:

Solomon ben Reizel confessed that “he drinks a lot of liquor to the point that it makes him drunk, and because of this he has no domestic tranquility. And may God have mercy upon him and guard him so that he doesn’t drink anymore.”

Eizik ben Rachel, a widower, admitted that he “drinks more liquor than he needs, and then he beats his children, so he asks to give him a cure for this.”

Many petitioners to Guttmacher provide vivid evidence of Gentiles’ attempts to take over the Jewish-run taverns. But, as Dynner observes, “encroachments by fellow Jews occurred just as often, defying our nostalgic image of East European Jewish solidarity (or its anti-Semitic corollary, Jewish collusion).” Among the examples he cites is a long-running feud between the failing (and clearly superstitious) tavern-proprietor Aaron Hayyim ben Feigel and his new, successful competitor just down the road:

Aaron was afraid of Nathan because, he wrote, Nathan “always vexes me—may he not, God forbid, perform any sorcery against me.” For good measure, he slipped in a request for [Guttmacher’s] blessings over lottery ticket numbers 11,766 and 22,763.

In response to the allegations that the exploitative and manipulative nature of Jewish temperance greatly exacerbated tensions between Poles and Jews, Dynner presents a far more complex, indeed paradoxical, reality. He illustrates how these rowdy, often very seedy drink-holes served to cement, rather than sour, the impossibly tense and intertwined lives of Poles and Jews. Dynner recounts how more than a small number of Polish peasants celebrated their most important life-cycle events, such as weddings and post-baptismal celebrations, at Jewish-run taverns. He offers evidence that a key factor in the success of rural Jewish taverns was the degree of their proximity to the village’s church, ironically observing, in the context of his narrative about two competing Jewish establishments in the Polish countryside, that “One tavern was too far from the local church, which meant that worshippers would not find a place to rest or find shelter during bad weather after services. Another was too close, an affront to the worshippers’ religious sensibilities.”

Of course, what so many Christian worshippers really sought following services was—more than rest and shelter—fun. The taverns’ Jewish proprietors were more than happy to oblige, not only serving booze, but commonly playing the fiddle to their drunken dancing—an image seared into the romantic Polish imagination by Adam Mickiewicz’s classic ballad, *Pan Thaddeus*, whose

Jews too, we must remember, were regular clients of these taverns, especially those that were also overnight roadside resting stops—kosher, Yiddish Motel 6s.

were never taken seriously by either the Orthodox or the Enlightenment intellectuals and thus could find no pulpits to occupy.

Yankel’s Tavern highlights the remarkable resilience of the Jewish saloons that dotted the countryside and the towns of Congress Poland, despite decades of concerted official efforts to shut them down. Indeed, at the very center of Dynner’s book lies the thesis that the Jewish liquor-vending business managed to survive—despite all the legislative and judicial attempts to crush it—thanks to a variety of ingenious ruses devised by aristocratic landowners and their Jewish *arendars*, or lessees, so many of whom operated lucrative taverns.

Dynner begins his crisp narrative with a vivid portrait of the Jewish-operated “inns,” from late feudal times through the last two decades of the 19th century. His most important finding—supported by painstakingly extensive research in both Polish and Jewish archives—is that Jewish distillers and tavern-keepers served a critically important economic role in Poland, despite the many bans, taxes, and residential restrictions burdening them.

Previous historians have shown that the Polish nobility was as addicted to the Jewish tavern as its patrons were. Dynner, for his part, has demonstrated that this state of affairs continued well into the last quarter of the 19th century. He narrates in great detail how, in the end, the Jews in tandem with the Polish nobles who had for centuries entrusted them (and no one else) with the management of their inns and saloons managed to circumvent all governmental attempts to crush this most lucrative of businesses.

Dynner also devotes much attention to the role played by rabbis in issuing *heterei-shutafut*, legal fictions that allowed Jews to form partnerships with Gentiles so that their taverns’ activities would not be disrupted by Sabbaths and Jewish holidays. His explanation of the halakhic details of the rabbinical authorizations is, alas, too vague, and in a few instances, plainly wrong. Still, he does make the bottom-line case that scores of rabbis colluded with both the Polish nobility and their Jewish *arendars* in keeping the taverns open and viable.

Even more originally, in two separate chapters devoted to the complex histories of the Jewish alcohol trade in their very different urban and rural settings, Dynner portrays the Jewish tavern as a unique venue for Polish-Jewish social intermin-

ances and myths regarding this topic, but also of the standard history of the Jewish tavern business in the Russian Empire.

The opening words of “*Shikker iz der Goy*” are “*Geyt der Goy in Shenkl arayn*” (the Goy goes into the tavern). Of course, what it conveniently omits is that the Yid was there well before the Gentile, to open shop, ready and willing to ply Polish peasants with his home-made, kosher moonshine. Particularly surprising however is the large number of cases of Jewish alcoholism, which Dynner has gleaned from his major, private, Jewish (as opposed to official Polish) archival source, the more than five thousand petitions, or *kvitlekh*, presented to the non-Hasidic *ba’al shem*, Rabbi Elijah Guttmacher, a hitherto untapped resource that he discovered while toiling in the YIVO archives (described by Dynner in “Brief Kvetches: Notes to a 19th-Century Miracle Worker” in the Summer 2014 issue of this magazine).

The Guttmacher archive demonstrates that many Polish Jews not only frequented taverns but themselves imbibed frightening amounts of their brethren’s home brew, leading to widespread abuse that ruined many a Jewish life, marriage, and family. No small number of these petitionary notes to Guttmacher were written by women begging that their husbands stop their chronic drinking, and there are *kvitlekh* from more than a few men imploring the tzaddik to heal them of their alcoholism. There are also many requests to resolve disputes with the noblemen who owned the property of Jewish tavern-keepers and—most surprising—more than a few requesting a peaceful resolution to intra-Jewish conflicts about the leasing rights and government concessions offered, at times deliberately to raise the stakes, to more than one Jew by the same nobleman or government agent. A few samples give us a sense of Dynner’s rich find:

One Sarah bat Leah appealed to Guttmacher to heal her husband, Moses ben Reizel, of his chronic drunkenness. Moses, she attests is “always drunk, and he comes home and quarrels with his . . . wife. And he does damage and causes [material] losses and she has no rest when he comes home.”

Jonathan ben Feiga Reizel’s drunkenness had brought his household to the brink of starvation, and forced him to pull his children

righteous Jewish innkeeper and decent musician, Yankel, inspired the title for Dynner's book.

Jews too, we must remember, were regular clients of taverns, especially those that served as overnight roadside resting spots—a chain of kosher, Yiddish Motel 6s—and commingled with their Catholic patrons. After a few drinks, it was far from uncommon for both good-natured joking and animated debates to dominate a late night. The book includes some fine and revealing illustrations from Polish folk art of such commingling, often

Rebbe was a stronghold of staunch support for both Polish insurrections, a matter of common knowledge to this day among both Hasidim and the historians of Hasidism, Dynner cites what he terms “a most extraordinary Hasidic tradition regarding the tzaddik, Samuel Abba of Żychlin”:

And the mouth of our rabbi of blessed memory used to constantly utter that the bringing of the Messiah by our tzaddikim depended on this [Polish restoration].



Jewish Smugglers by Alexander Rizzoni, 1860. (Courtesy of the State Russian Museum.)

featuring the Jewish proprietor fiddling while his Catholic customers dance to both Slavic and Yiddish tunes.

There is a widespread prejudice, enduring to this day among many Polish historians, as well as in popular Polish collective memory, that during their two insurrections against tsarist rule (1830 and 1863), Jews constituted a vastly disproportionate number of spies, smugglers, and informants for the tsar and that they accommodated and fed countless Russian soldiers in their taverns. In shattering this myth, Dynner has done remarkably precise accounting, based on official legal records, of the relative number of Jews and Poles convicted, or merely accused, of spying, smuggling, and informing against the insurrectionists, and concludes that, “Surprisingly, such lists contain a sizeable majority of Polish Christian names.” Despite the statistical realities that Dynner has uncovered in the archives, he forlornly, if powerfully, observes: “The suspected Polish Christian spies have been effaced from Polish national history and memory, leaving only a residual memory of accused Jews. If Poland was the ‘Christ among the Nations,’ Jews were supposedly its Judas.”

In fact a surprisingly large number of Jews chose to fight alongside their “fellow Polish” insurrectionists. Moreover, there was strong support for the Polish side in many rabbinical and Hasidic circles. Aside from confirming that the court of the Kotsker

Because first, the Polish state had to have its autonomy restored as a reward for granting permission to exiled Israel to come and settle in its land, and for receiving [Israel] with open arms . . . after its expulsion from Germany and other lands, . . . and allowing it to raise the banner of Torah and Hasidism, to the extent that all of our rabbinic authorities from the *Shulhan arukh* and all of our masters of Hasidism emerged from the innards of the Polish state.

This is, without doubt, a powerful assertion, but not nearly as extraordinary as Dynner suggests. After all, Polish-Jewish literature and collective memory are replete with similar salutations, and even sacralizations, of Poland, going back to the 13th-century reign of Bolesław the Pious, who first issued a charter to Jews fleeing violence in the Germanic lands that offered unprecedented legal and religious protection, as well as quasi-autonomy for their *kehillot* and their courts. The sacralization of Polish cities, towns, and villages reached unprecedented heights with the rise of Hasidism and the intimate association of its rebbes, to this day, with those locales. And yet, despite the long history of profound Jewish gratitude to Poland, and attachment to it, as well as all the new evidence Dynner has uncovered regarding Jewish support for Polish independence, he concludes with wonderment that “it is difficult

to explain Jewish motivations for supporting a Polish cause that promised them so little.” I am less surprised.

Radical Jewish Polonizers and, later, modern historians of both Polish and Russian Jewry have maintained that the modernization of the Jews under the rule of Alexander II (1855–1881) effectively put an end to Jewish tavern-keeping by opening to Jews new, “normalized,” and less seedy careers, from fighting Polish insurrectionists to farming Russian land. Dynner contends, in his last and most forcefully argued chapter, that all of the efforts to integrate the Jews—from farming and schooling to soldiering—were, without legal emancipation and economic normalization, doomed. He concludes with a stern cautionary note to today’s historians: “By magnifying a vanguard of Polonized Jews at the expense of the traditionalist majority, we run the risk of writing ourselves into the Polish Jewish past.”

In the end, as Dynner plainly explains, it all came down to the nobility’s perennial fear of change, as well as simple inertia. He wryly observes that “the momentum of traditional practices and beliefs overcame any [modern] nationalist indignations. They [the Polish nobles] preferred to deal with Jews, just as before.” And so he concludes this fine study explaining the capacity of Jewish taverns to re-emerge and re-constitute, indeed reinvent, themselves after every imaginable attempt to crush them with this blunt assessment:

In the end, Jewish tavernkeeping survived because so few of the key players in the liquor trade—nobles, Jews, and peasant customers—could fathom why the state should have been so opposed to it.

And so it was, until the catastrophic events triggered by the Russian pogroms of the 1880s, when the lucrative historical Jewish economic collaboration with the Polish and Russian magnates came crashing down, less like a house of cards than a torrent of whiskey from broken barrels falling off the back of the *balegoleh’s* wagon.

Allan Nadler is professor of comparative religion and director of the Program in Jewish Studies at Drew University. He is currently writing a history of the concept of heresy in Jewish thought.

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Like an Elevator

BY PAUL REITTER

Three Lives: A Biography of Stefan Zweig

by Oliver Matuschek

Pushkin Press, 386 pp., \$18.95

The Impossible Exile: Stefan Zweig at the End of the World

by George Prochnik

Other Press, 400 pp., \$27.95

In the 1930s, when his fame reached its peak, Stefan Zweig had the distinction of being the most translated author in the world. He may also have been, as one critic put it, the world's "most hated" author. For many of Zweig's colleagues, his success was an object of envy, a sign of the times, and a badge of mediocrity, all at once. Zweig's prominence was a "symbol," according to Robert Musil, of the depths to which culture had sunk. Hermann Hesse complained that Zweig was "an intellectual rather than a poet." The satirist Kurt Tucholsky treated the devotion to Zweig as a kind of unflattering shorthand:

Frau Steiner isn't as young as she once was. . . . Every night she sits at her table, completely alone, wearing a different dress and reading from a finely made book. To bring this to a point, she adores the works of Stefan Zweig. Enough said? Enough said.

Another contemporary remarked that "Zweig created literature" out of "the feuilleton style—Viennese like *Sachertorte* with whipped cream, just as delicious and artful (and, unfortunately, just as sloppy)." Serious, but always accessible, close enough to the modernists to be measured against their standards, but far enough not to measure up, prolific on an industrial scale, Zweig found a sweet spot and became a lightning rod.

He wasn't the only one, of course. Hesse himself had popularizing tendencies, and he, too, both profited from and paid for them. But Zweig elicited, and continues to elicit, an entirely different order of contempt. He remains a favorite on the "most embarrassing" and "most overrated" lists in German literary publications, and one recent critic went so far as to ridicule the style of his suicide note.

It wasn't just the tricky combination of seriousness and mass consumption that put Zweig in the running for the title of most hated author in the world. Some have depicted Zweig as a nonpartisan cosmopolitan incapable of political courage. But the classic account of Zweig's politics, Hannah Arendt's 1948 essay "Stefan Zweig: Jews in the World of Yesterday," developed a more sociological critique. In

Arendt's reading, Zweig possessed a "vanity that could hardly have originated in his own character." Here, too, Zweig is a symbol, a symbol of a generation of assimilated Jews who eschewed "political values" for "cultural and personal" strivings, like the

If Zweig were really such a hack, his defenders ask, why do so many intelligent people like his works?

"idolatry of genius" and the pursuit of "fame." This was caused, in Arendt's view, by the conditions of the age, its combination of enfranchisement and exclusion. She writes, "For a Jew to be fully accepted

lebrity, which was all he had, Zweig inevitably lost his will to live. Hence, Arendt reasons, his suicide in 1942 (in which he was famously joined by his young second wife). Like so many reckonings with Zweig, Arendt's post-mortem didn't have understanding as its main aim. Of his famous elegiac autobiography, *The World of Yesterday*, completed in Brazil just before his suicide, Arendt wrote:

It is astounding, even spooky, that there were still people living among us whose ignorance was so great and whose conscience was so pure that they could continue to look on the prewar period with the eyes of the nineteenth century, and could regard the impotent pacifism of Geneva and the treacherous lull before the storm, between 1924 and 1933, as a return to normalcy. But it is gratifying and admirable that at least one of these men had the courage to record it all in detail, without hiding or prettifying anything.

Anyone looking to gain a deeper sense of how Zweig in fact saw the world, and of what fame really meant to him, would do well to consult two recent books that complement each other nicely. Oliver Matuschek's *Three Lives: A Biography of Stefan Zweig* is a cradle-to-grave, comprehensively researched affair and the most thorough Zweig biography to date. It's smoothly written but a bit straight-laced. George Prochnik's *The Impossible Exile: Stefan Zweig at the End of the World* focuses on Zweig's final decade and the questions about exile it raises, branching out, often lyrically, into a winning mix of travelogue and family memoir.

Both works manage to display an attitude of impartial sympathy. Matuschek doesn't shy away from relating many episodes in which Zweig's behavior is off-putting to say the least. We learn, for example, that when Zweig found out he and the dying Gustav Mahler were on the same Atlantic crossing, he pretended that he wanted to be of assistance to Mahler and his wife, just so he could get close enough to gawk at them. For his part, Prochnik tells us at the outset that he regards Zweig not as a writer of ge-

nius, but rather as a person whose life refracts his times in a particularly vivid way. Both authors shine in bringing to light the complexity of Zweig's life and art, blowing up, by implication, the array of clichés that Zweig's memoir and his self-slaughter have done much to encourage. Thus, Matuschek quotes a 1918 letter to the French writer Romain Rolland, in which Zweig talks about how the "double pressure"



Stefan Zweig, standing, with his brother, Alfred, in Vienna, ca. 1900. (Courtesy of Arquivo CSZ.)

into [Austrian] society, there was one and only one thing to do: become famous."

The result, according to Arendt, was a blindness that fostered disaster: "Concerned only with his personal dignity, he [Zweig] had kept himself so completely aloof from politics that . . . the catastrophe of the last ten years seemed to him like a lightning bolt from the sky." In despair over the loss of his ce-

of hatred toward Germany and hatred toward Jews will affect the collective psyche in Germany and, in turn, Zweig's social world: "People of my ilk will be destroyed. They won't even be allowed the little air they need to live." "Spooky," yes, just not in the way Arendt suggested.

Ultimately, however, Zweig's infamously weak

critics wanted to oppose, while stubbornly operating in their orbit.

Stefan Zweig was born in 1881, into a bubble of bourgeois security—about as much of it as assimilated Viennese Jews could hope to have. His father was a staid, prosperous manufacturer of tex-

relocate to Vienna after World War I, the better part of which he had spent in Switzerland, was that expressionism—or as he called it, "excessionism"—had taken hold in his home town. Instead, the newly married Zweig opted to restore and reside in a castle-like house in the hills above Salzburg, which he made into a reliquary of sorts, filling it with Beethoven's desk, drawings by Goethe, signed editions, thousands of manuscripts, and so on. Zweig saw his collecting as a service, one whose impact would eventually be greater than that of his writing. Upon meeting Arthur Schnitzler, Zweig informed him that he had been buying up his correspondence—Schnitzler hadn't even known his letters were for sale and responded by telling him that he had just burned several of his manuscripts.

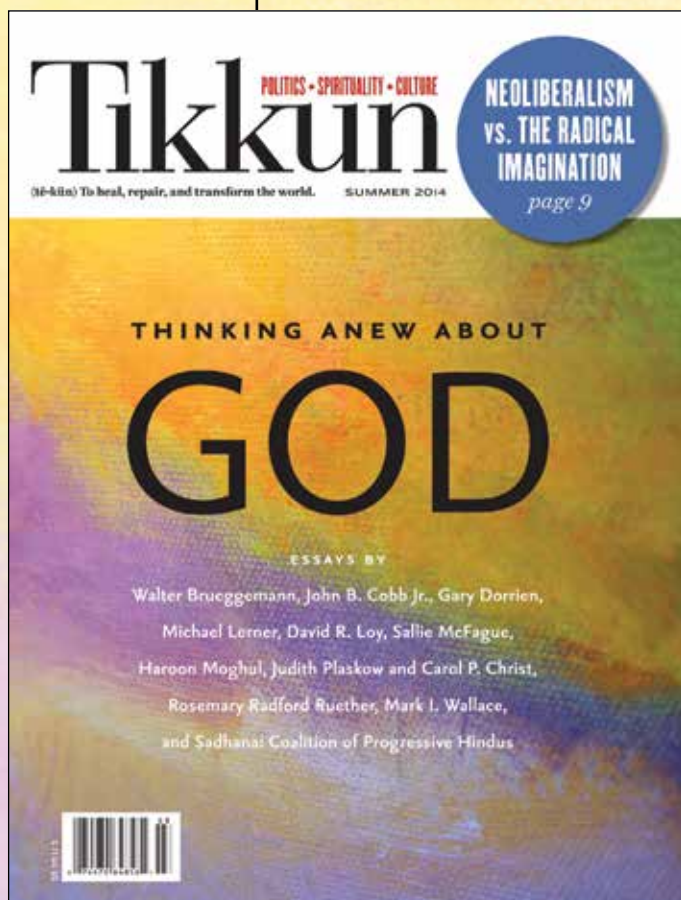
But the deeper issue is that Zweig seemed to be promoting the calcification of the German cultural ideal of *Bildung*. For late-18th-century thinkers like Wilhelm von Humboldt and Johann Herder, the term "*Bildung*" had signified a dynamic process of self-development. Herder defined it as "being your own creator." But what counted as *Bildung* had changed by Zweig's day, devolving, in the eyes of critics like Nietzsche, into a fetishized source of prestige, something that could be acquired, consumed, and displayed, like Goethe's drawings or Beethoven's desk. For a critic like Kraus, Zweig's "scribblings" about "the giants of world literature" (Montaigne, Hölderlin, Kleist, Dickens, Stendhal, Balzac, Dostoevsky, Tolstoy, Nietzsche, etc.) were of a piece with his collecting. They were presumptuous, implying, with their turgid flourishes, that their

One of the reasons Zweig decided not to relocate to Vienna after World War I was that expressionism—he called it "excessionism"—had taken hold in his home town.

response to Hitler only goes so far in explaining the intensity of the scorn that was heaped on him, because the intensity peaked at least a decade before the Nazis came to power. How, then, to make sense of the cultural phenomenon of Zweig hatred? Zweig's defenders tend to brush off the criticisms of his peers as nastiness from nasty people (Karl Kraus, Bertolt Brecht, Musil, etc.) If Zweig were really such a hack, his defenders ask, why do so many intelligent people like his works? Why the handsome new editions from Pushkin Press and The New York Review of Books Classics series? Those who find the resurgence of enthusiasm for Zweig distressing, on the other hand, cite early judgments of him as though their extraordinary biliousness were solely a function of Zweig's extraordinary artistic failure. A better historical diagnosis might be that Zweig advanced, with an energy few could match, precisely the values, norms, and beliefs that his modernist

tiles, whose ascent was a function of prudence and thrift, rather than innovation or daring. Above all, Moritz Zweig prided himself on keeping the family business out of debt. "Stefflerl," as he was known within the family, led a very different life, which had its periods of sexual adventure and bohemianism. But he also seems to have inherited something of his father's aversion to risk. Early on, Zweig wrote poetry, but he soon shelved that, and for the bulk of his career, he held closely to tried-and-true formulas for commercial success: novellas, biographies, and biographical essays, all of which seemed to pour out of him. Hence the fun that Karl Kraus, Zweig's most relentless critic, had with his name: Zweig means "branch," in German, and Kraus liked to refer to Zweig as "Erwerbszweig," or "branch of industry."

Zweig also shunned the avant-garde and wrote that one of the reasons why he decided not to



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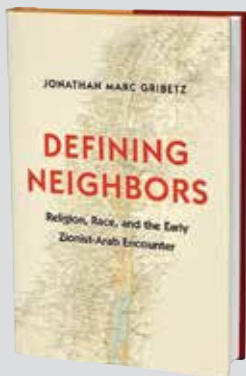
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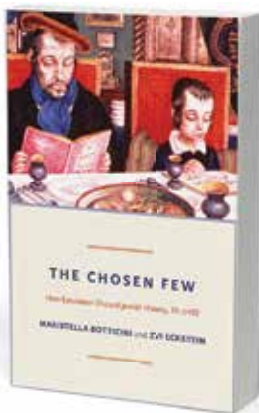
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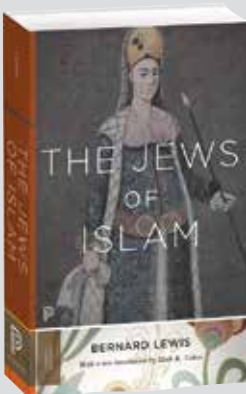
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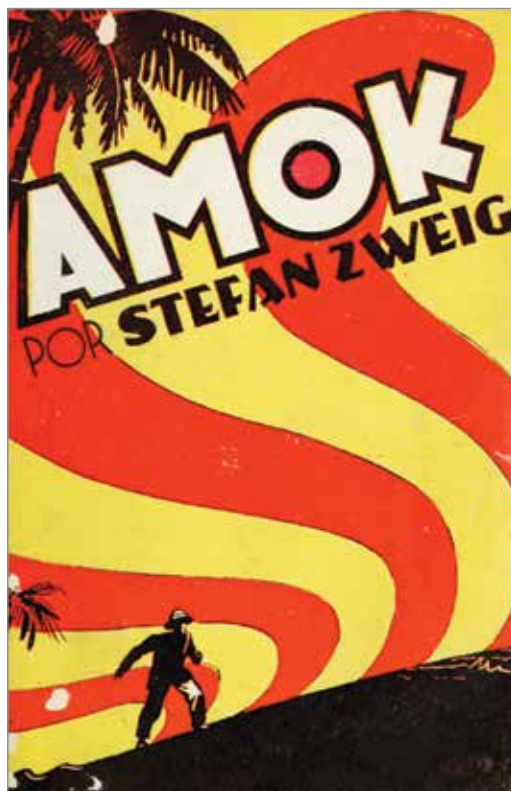
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author was "on the same level as his subjects." As Kraus saw it, Zweig was in the business of providing fake *Bildung* for "bourgeois readers." Zweig, he wrote, "decorates the gap out of which their *Bildung* consists, making it warm and cozy." He gives "an introduction to world literature with the maximal time savings." All you have to do is step in, Kraus complained, and, "like an elevator," Zweig's biographies will "lift you up to the loftiest heights."

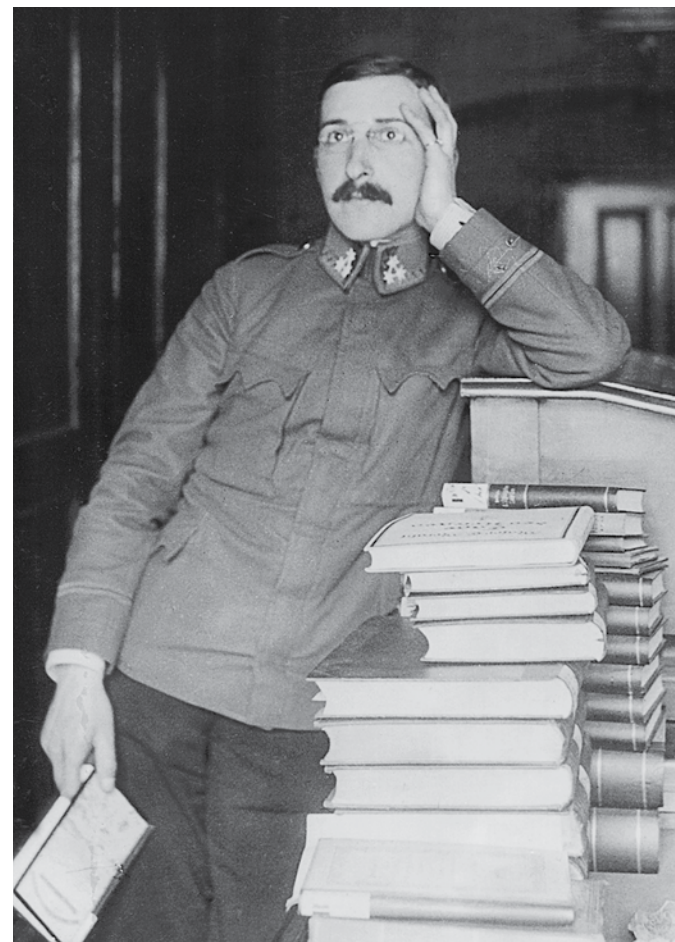
When Freud read Zweig's biographical essay on

illuminating less as a piece of socio-cultural analysis than as an example of that widespread sensitivity to the nexus of *Bildung* and Jewish integration, which Zweig, to the detriment of his reputation, exemplified as few others did. Here, again, is Arendt:

There is no better document of the Jewish situation in this period than the opening chapters of Zweig's book. They provide the most



The cover of *Amok*, by Stefan Zweig, first published in 1922. Right: Stefan Zweig in the War Archives, Vienna, ca. 1915–1916.
(© Stefan Zweig Centre, Salzburg.)



him, he was taken aback, because, as he put it, the essay overemphasized "all my bourgeois features." Moreover, Zweig liked to smooth out the disparities between artists as people and the art they created. Great accomplishments reflected internal merit, hence the idea that Zweig advanced a "stock market humanism." When a friend of Zweig's brought up Wagner's anti-Semitism, Zweig, who admired Wagner's music, blanched. He "hated dissonance," the friend recalled.

Karl Kraus begins an essay on Zweig by calling him "one of the representative schmoozers in European culture." He contrasts his own preoccupation with linguistic "details," or the aspect of his "method" that many saw as his own Jewish inheritance, with Zweig's attempt to vault himself into the ranks of "world literature" by manufacturing *Bildung*. In doing so Kraus groups Zweig together with Emil Ludwig, another best-selling German-Jewish serial biographer; later he likens a grammatical misstep of Zweig's to one committed by Felix Salten, another Jewish writer who aimed to insinuate himself into the center of Austrian culture.

This, I think, is the context against which Arendt's critique of Zweig should be read. Her portrayal of Zweig as *the* shining example of failed assimilation, the parvenu par excellence, is

impressive evidence of how fame and the will to fame motivated the youth of his generation. Their ideal was the genius that seemed incarnate in Goethe. Every Jewish youth able to rhyme passably played the young Goethe, as everyone able to draw a line was a future Rembrandt, and every musical child a demonic Beethoven.

No better document? Every Jewish youth? What would be the point of debunking Arendt's prickly overreach when, to understand the virulence with which she and others reacted to Zweig, the point is the overreach itself?

For those interested in understanding the life, work, and death of Stefan Zweig, a Vienna writer whose reputation is now on its way back up, Oliver Matuschek's biography and George Proch-nik's elegant reflections on exile provide excellent entry points.

Paul Reitter is professor of Germanic languages and literature and director of the Institute of the Humanities at The Ohio State University. He recently collaborated with Jonathan Franzen and Daniel Kehlmann on a volume of Karl Kraus' writings, *The Kraus Project: Essays by Karl Kraus* (Farrar, Straus and Giroux).

Irving Kristol on Jews and Judaism

The essential writings on Jews and Judaism by the “godfather of neoconservatism” have been collected for the first time in a handsomely produced e-book from Mosaic Books. Visit mosaicmagazine.com/books to sample and buy in all major formats, including Kindle and iBooks. Here, adapted from the introduction, are the historian Gertrude Himmelfarb’s reflections on her husband’s Jewish legacy.

My husband, Irving Kristol, died on the eve of Rosh Hashanah in 2009. Four years earlier, he started a “Commonplace” notebook. The first entry, under the date 10/16/05, was inspired by the cycle of holy days that had just concluded with Yom Kippur:

The High Holidays are gone and I am impressed once again with the two spirits that dwell in the breast of Judaism (and X’ity). First, the rationalist (in the Aristotelian sense), which provides rational explanations for religious practice, and the second which takes religious practice as primary and, contemplating it, derives profound human meanings from it. I believe the second is more authentically religious, but also the most dangerous, since it can open doors one didn’t know existed. The first, however, is more “conservative” as well as more popular with rabbis and clerics, since it provides them with plausible explanations for the laity.

When I was [editor] at Commentary [in the 1950s], we published only anthropological-rational explanations for the holidays. Even then I knew it was a sterile exercise. Judaism does not explain the holidays; the holidays explain Judaism.

The first explanation is reductive, the second expansive—reductive to the material, expansive to the spiritual.

“Spiritual”: has there ever been a human community that did not believe that, when a man died, his spirit left him? Modern science is trying hard to reduce the spiritual to the material. But the scientists themselves know damn well that when they die, something more than reduction has occurred.

Kristol’s long and productive career, devoted in large part to the secular subjects of poli-

tics and economics, foreign affairs and culture—the preoccupations that warranted his title as neoconservatism’s godfather—also produced a considerable number of penetrating and challenging essays on Jews and Judaism.

These reflections—on Jewish religion and theology, the relation of Jews to secular society and culture, the Holocaust and anti-Semitism, and the contemporary situation of Israel—are memorable in themselves. They are also memorable for the light they shed

misconception of the nature of Kristol’s “basic predisposition” to religion—that it was merely utilitarian, valuable primarily, if not entirely, as a moral and stabilizing force in society.

For Kristol, religion is that as well—but as a by-product of what is essential about it, its metaphysical and spiritual character. Religion, he held, is not just for the good of society; it is good for the individual, and not just for the sake of leading an ethical life but for the sake of a meaningful and soulful life. Nor should Kristol’s “neo-orthodoxy” be mistaken for New Age religiosity, which is personal, eclectic, ephemeral. His neo-orthodoxy is firmly Jewish, rooted in history and community, in an ancient faith and an enduring people.

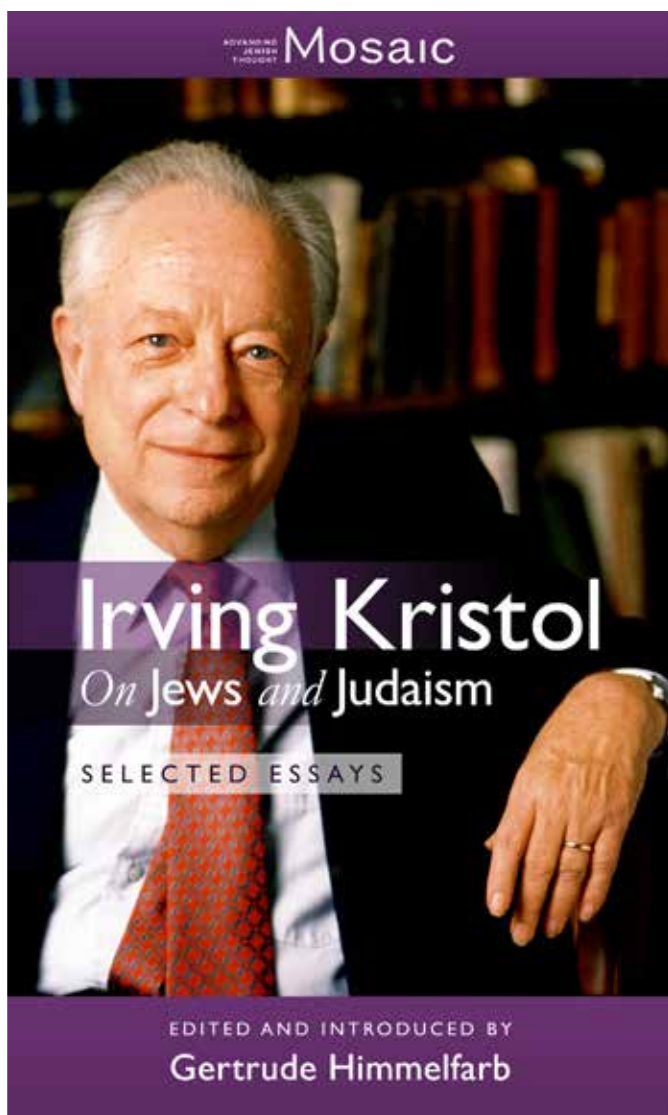
And so, too, his neo-conservatism is firmly rooted in Judaism. In an essay on Michael Oakeshott written many years later, Kristol recalled the day in 1956 when, as an editor of *Encounter* in London, he found on his desk an unsolicited manuscript by Oakeshott entitled “On Being Conservative.” It was a great coup for the magazine to receive, over the transom, an essay by that eminent philosopher. Kristol read it “with great pleasure and appreciation”—and then politely rejected it. It was, he later explained (although not to Oakeshott at the time), “irredeemably secular, as I—being a Jewish conservative—am not.” Oakeshott’s “conservative disposition,”

to enjoy and esteem the present rather than what was in the past or might be in the future, left little room for any religion, still less for Judaism:

Judaism especially, being a more this-worldly religion than Christianity, moves us to sanctify the present in our daily lives—but always reminding us that we are capable of doing so only through God’s grace to our distant forefathers. Similarly, it is incumbent upon us to link our children and grandchildren to this “great chain of being,” however suitable or unsuitable their present might be to our conservative disposition. And, of course, the whole purpose of sanctifying the present is to prepare humanity for a redemptive future.

Kristol was “born theotropic”—with a basic predisposition toward faith—and born Jewish. In a recent essay on evangelicals and Jews, Wilfred McClay has recalled a dinner when that subject came up and Kristol, “with casual assurance,” remarked: “Well, after all, religion is what you’re born with.” He was not moved by the reminder that evangelicals are not born with their religion—that, on the contrary, they have to be “born again.” Kristol’s neo-orthodoxy required no such rebirth. In “An Autobiographical Memoir,” he confessed that his “religious observance” was not always commensurate with his “religious views.” But one religious commandment he did faithfully observe: “Honor thy father and thy mother.” And thy forefathers and foremothers, and thy children and grandchildren: the Jewish heritage and the Jewish religion.

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on neoconservatism, giving a spiritual and moral dimension to the mundane issues of politics, economics, or foreign affairs. Finally, they remind us of a Kristol who is more than the godfather of neoconservatism in its familiar guise, more far-ranging and spirited, more perceptive and more provocative. These essays also correct a common

misconception of the nature of Kristol’s “basic predisposition” to religion—that it was merely utilitarian, valuable primarily, if not entirely, as a moral and stabilizing force in society.

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ADVANCING JEWISH THOUGHT **Mosaic**

The Banality of Evil: The Demise of a Legend

BY RICHARD WOLIN

Eichmann Before Jerusalem: The Unexamined Life of a Mass Murderer

by Bettina Stangneth, translated by Ruth Martin
Alfred A. Knopf, 608 pp., \$35

There have been few phrases that have proved as controversial as the famous subtitle Hannah Arendt chose to sum up her account of the 1961 trial of Adolf Eichmann. From the moment the articles that eventually comprised her book *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil* were published in *The New Yorker*, the idea that the execution of the Nazis' diabolical plans for an *Endlösung* to the "Jewish Question" could be considered "banal" offended many readers. In addition, Arendt took what seemed to be a gratuitous swipe at the conduct of the Jewish councils, which, operating under conditions of extreme duress, were forced to bargain with their Nazi overseers in the desperate hope of buying time, sacrificing some Jewish lives in the hope of saving others. Only with the benefit of hindsight do we realize that their efforts were largely futile. In her rush to judgment, Arendt made it seem as though it was the Jews themselves, rather than their Nazi persecutors, who were responsible for their own destruction. Thus, with a few careless rhetorical flourishes, she established an historical paradigm that managed simultaneously to downplay the executioners' criminal liability, which she viewed as "banal" and bureaucratic, and to exaggerate the culpability of their Jewish victims.

Arendt's astonishing conclusion that "Eichmann had no criminal motives," and the account that underlay it, might have been construed as mere journalistic overstatement, but her status as a distinguished political theorist, together with the furious controversy her account engendered—Gershom Scholem famously accused her of lacking *ahavat yisrael* (love for her fellow Jews)—helped to create an aura of brave truth-telling that has surrounded *Eichmann in Jerusalem* ever since. This image of *Eichmann in Jerusalem* as an act of an intellectual bravado, with Arendt herself cast in the role of an imperiled heroine—a latter-day Joan of Arc, persecuted by an army of inferior male detractors—was canonized in the recent and widely praised German film by Margarethe von Trotta, *Hannah Arendt*.

It is certainly true that throughout the controversy Arendt comported herself as someone who was above the fray. Often she seemed to regard the Israelis she encountered in Jerusalem with as little esteem as she did Eichmann. She dismissed the chief prosecutor, Gideon Hausner, with breathtaking condescension as a "typical Galician Jew, very unsympathetic, boring, constantly making mistakes. Probably one of those people who don't know any languages." While covering the trial she wrote to her former mentor, the philosopher Karl Jaspers:

Everything is organized by a police force that gives me the creeps, speaks only Hebrew and looks Arabic. Some downright brutal types

Again and again, one sees how readily Arendt blurred the line between victims and executioners.

among them. They would obey any order. And outside the doors, the oriental mob, as if one were in Istanbul or some other half-Asiatic country. In addition, and very visible in Jerusalem, the *peies* [sidelocks] and caftan Jews, who make life impossible for all reasonable people here.

Even setting aside the egregious racism and anti-Jewish animus, there is something very alarming



Adolf Eichmann, in an official SS photo, ca. 1942. (Courtesy of Yad Vashem Photo Archives.)

about this passage. Any reader familiar with Arendt's classic study *The Origins of Totalitarianism* knows that she described such mobs as the carriers of the totalitarian bacillus. Nor can there be any mistaking the import of her assertion that the Sephardic or Mizrahi policemen "would obey any order." With this claim, Arendt insinuated that they were the "authoritarian personalities" and "desk murderers" of the future. Again and again, one sees how readily Arendt blurred the line between victims and executioners.

Arendt's banality thesis helped to engender the so-called "functionalist" interpretation of the Holocaust, in which the role of obedient desk murderers and mindless functionaries assumed pride of place. Leading German historians such as Hans Mommsen coined nebulous phrases such as "cumulative radicalization" in order to describe a killing process that, like a *Betriebsunfall* (an industrial accident), seemed to have happened without anyone consciously willing it. But as the historian Ulrich

Herbert has pointed out, at the time the functionalist account was also culturally convenient: "For a long time there was a reluctance to name names in research on National Socialism . . . [Consequently,] there was also massive resistance to studies about the perpetrators and their relationship to German society." The upshot of this approach was that the Holocaust's character as a crime conceived and masterminded by German anti-Semitic ideologues that was perpetrated against the Jews disappeared in favor of a series of conceptual abstractions—"modernity," "bureaucracy," "mass society"—in which the Jewish (or anti-Jewish) specificity of the events in question all but disappears.

Was Eichmann, or the evil he was instrumental in perpetrating, really banal? Remarkably, it seems that Arendt had already arrived at a definitive judgment of Eichmann's character some four months before the trial even began. In another letter to Jaspers, written on December 2, 1960, she writes that the upcoming trial would offer her the opportunity "to study this walking disaster [i.e., Eichmann] face to face in all his bizarre vacuousness." But, as Bettina Stangneth shows in her well-researched and path-breaking study *Eichmann Before Jerusalem*, Eichmann was, in fact, a consummate actor. "Eichmann," she writes, "reinvented himself at every stage of his life, for each new audience and every new alarm." He becomes "subordinate, superior officer, perpetrator, fugitive, exile, and defendant."

The meek and unassuming Argentine rabbit breeder who took the witness stand in Jerusalem and described himself as "a small cog in Adolf Hitler's extermination machine" bore no resemblance to the man who, as Specialist for Jewish Affairs of the Reich Security Main Office (RSHA), reported directly to Heinrich Himmler and had avidly sown terror and destruction throughout the lands of Central Europe. Nor did he resemble the man who, under the alias of Ricardo Klement, had been the toast of Argentina's highly visible neo-Nazi community, the man who unabashedly signed photographs for fellow fugitives: "Adolf Eichmann, SS *Obersturmbannführer* (retired)." As Stangneth aptly observes, "Eichmann-in-Jerusalem was little more than a mask." Eichmann gave the performance of his life, and Hannah Arendt was entirely taken in.

In Jerusalem, Eichmann fought to save his life, and, if possible, to clear his name for posterity. But another one of his central motivations was to throw a monkey wrench into the gears of the Israeli judicial apparatus, whose staff he regarded as his Jewish "persecutors." During his proud years in the SS, combating the pernicious influence of World Jewry had

been Eichmann's *raison d'être*. With his artful performance on the witness stand in Jerusalem, Eichmann, ever the warrior, was, in effect, making his final stand. True to the SS creed of loyalty above all ("*Mein Ehre heisst Treue*"), he went down fighting.

It has long been known that the CIA had been privy to Eichmann's whereabouts after the war. Hence it was with the CIA's tacit approval that, in 1950, Eichmann, in order to avoid capture, successfully made use of the notorious "rat line" to South America. Only a few years ago, it came to light that the German Intelligence Services had also been well aware of Eichmann's various activities prior to his flight to South America. German officials also refused to lift a finger, but, for slightly different reasons. Eichmann, it seemed, knew too much about prominent ex-Nazis who had recently been elevated to the status of "notables"—politicians, opinion leaders, and scholars—in the newly conceived Federal Republic. His apprehension, they believed, would have injured the emerging German democracy. As Stangneth remarks laconically, although the trappings of constitutional democracy had been freshly implanted on German soil, the problem was that "there were no new people to administer them."

One of the main reasons that Arendt's banality of evil concept struck a nerve was that it played on widespread fears about the dehumanizing effects of "mass society." When she wrote about Eichmann, the Nazi threat was past, but, in the war's aftermath, an arguably greater menace had arisen, the threat of nuclear annihilation. This threat had been vividly driven home by the Cuban missile crisis, which took place the year before Arendt's articles on the Eichmann trial were serialized in *The New Yorker*. It was tempting and superficially plausible to interpret both events as expressions of the same general phenomenon.

But to state a truism: Mass society can be dehumanizing without its denizens being mass murderers. In his magisterial study *Nazi Germany and the Jews* Saul Friedländer describes the mentality of "redemptive anti-Semitism" that pervaded Nazi rule from its inception. What is needed to turn bureaucratic specialists into executioners is an ideological world view that underwrites racial supremacy and terror. This is the indispensable component that Nazism furnished and that, during the 1930s, re-oriented Germany as a society hell-bent on military aggression, imperial expansion, and racial purification. One of the outstanding merits of Stangneth's comprehensive account is that she shows that Eichmann was anything but a faceless cog in the machine. He fully subscribed to the ideological goals of the regime, including mass murder.

From the very beginning, Eichmann was a firm believer in the existence of a Jewish world conspiracy and thus fully partook of the murderous ethos so well described by Friedländer. In Eichmann's view, the elimination of World Jewry, far from being a matter-of-fact, bureaucratic assignment, was a sacred duty. During one of Eichmann's visits to Auschwitz, commandant Rudolf Höss confided that, upon seeing Jewish children herded into the gas chambers, his knees quivered, whereupon Eichmann rejoined that it was precisely the Jewish children who must be first sent into the gas chambers in order to ensure the wholesale elimination of the Jews as a race.

In a hastily contrived farewell speech to his subor-

dinates at the end of the war, Eichmann declared that he would die happy, knowing that he was responsible for the deaths of millions of European Jews:

I will laugh when I leap into the grave because I have the feeling that I have killed 5,000,000 Jews. That gives me great satisfaction and gratification.

Twelve years later, in the course of the alcohol-infused colloquies with a group of fugitive Nazis in Buenos Aires whose transcripts are one of Stangneth's key sources, he said: "To be frank with you, had we killed all of them, the thirteen million, I would be happy and say: 'all right, we have destroyed an enemy.'"

To describe such a person as merely a man of "revolting stupidity" (*von empörender Dummheit*), as though his lack of intelligence somehow made his status as a genocidal murderer comprehensible, as Hannah Arendt did in the course of a 1964 interview, is perilously myopic. It was as though, by alluding to Eichmann's purported intellectual failings, Arendt could make all other substantive questions and issues disappear. Perversely, the Jewish Specialist for the Reich Security Main Office ended up having the last laugh, hoodwinking Arendt into believing that he was little more than a bit player



Hannah Arendt looking over a document, ca. 1960. (© Corbis.)

on a larger political stage. Yet, in the Jewish émigré press during the late 1930s (which Stangneth believes that Arendt had read), Eichmann had already been known as the "Tsar of the Jews" and was notorious for his brutality. But Arendt had her own intellectual agenda, and perhaps out of her misplaced loyalty to her former mentor and lover, Martin Heidegger, insisted on applying the Freiburg philosopher's concept of "thoughtlessness" (*Gedankenlosigkeit*) to Eichmann. In doing so, she drastically underestimated the fanatical conviction that infused his actions.

By underestimating Eichmann's intellect, Arendt also misjudged the magnitude of his criminality. Yet, as Stangneth demonstrates convincingly, in cities across the continent, Eichmann proved himself to be a persistent and effective negotiator, and when he failed to acquire what he demanded by way of ne-

gotiations, he was adept at using threats. Thus with a relatively small staff at his disposal, Eichmann systematically forced Jews out of their residences and into makeshift ghettos. As the Final Solution began, he arranged for their long-distance transport to the far reaches of provincial Poland, where the extermination camps lay in wait. As Raul Hilberg, on whose findings Arendt relied extensively, observed:

[Arendt] did not discern the pathways that Eichmann had found in the thicket of the German administrative machine for his unprecedented actions. She did not grasp the dimensions of his deed. There was no "banality" in this "evil."

To amplify what she meant by the banality of evil, Arendt invoked the concept of "administrative murder," which, in keeping with the robotic portrait she had painted of Eichmann, was another way of establishing the primacy of the functionary or desk murderer. But there had been nothing in the least "administrative" or "banal" about the barbaric mass shootings of the *Einsatzgruppen*—whose signature was the infamous *Genickschuss* (shot in the nape of the neck)—as led by the SS's notorious "Death's Head" brigades in the 1941 invasion of the Soviet Union. These deaths occurred prior to the January 1942 Wannsee Conference, in which the logistics of the Final Solution were outlined.

Eichmann's organizational talents became especially vital and indispensable in the case of the deportation and extermination of 565,000 Hungarian Jews during the waning years of the war. The Hungarian situation was especially tricky. Even though the 1943 Warsaw ghetto uprising had been successfully and brutally suppressed by the SS, it had exposed a weakness in the Nazi machinery of extermination. In addition, the RSHA had failed in its attempts to deport Denmark's meager total of less than 8,000 Jews. Following D-Day, it had become clear that, from a German standpoint, the war was unwinnable. Thereafter, numerous individual Nazi potentates sought to scale back the Jewish deportations in the hope of receiving favorable treatment from the soon-to-be-victorious Allies. But as Stangneth shows, Eichmann would have none of it. In fall 1944, he went so far as to defy Himmler's order to halt the Hungarian deportations. Moreover, he played an especially insidious role in overseeing the "death marches" of the remaining Hungarian Jews (some 400,000 had already been transported to Auschwitz), under conditions that were indescribably brutal.

As Germany's military situation began to deteriorate, Eichmann showed himself especially adept at ensuring that the gears of the killing machine remained well oiled. To characterize Eichmann as a "desk murderer" in order to downplay his convictions as a devoted SS officer who reported directly to Reinhard Heydrich and Gestapo chief Heinrich Müller is seriously misleading. After all, the duties of office demanded that Eichmann regularly visit various killing sites.

In 1998, an immense transcript of Eichmann's conversations with Dutch collaborator and Waffen SS officer Willem Sassen from the late 1950s in Argentina was mysteriously deposited in the German Federal Archive in Koblenz. In those conversations, Eichmann told Sassen "When I reached the conclusion that it was necessary to do to the Jews what we

did, I worked with the fanaticism a man can expect from himself.” He seems to have had in mind Heinrich Himmler’s statement of the requirements of total ideological commitment within the SS at the very height of the extermination process:

These measures in the Reich cannot be carried out by a police force made up solely of bureaucrats. . . . A corps that had merely sworn an oath of allegiance would not have the necessary strength. These measures could be borne and executed only by an extreme organization of fanatic and deeply convinced National Socialists. The SS regards itself as such and declares itself as such, and therefore has taken the task upon itself.

How Arendt could believe that someone like Eichmann could thrive in an organization whose *raison d’être* was mass murder, shorn of the ideological zeal described by Himmler, is difficult to fathom. Yet, time and again, in defiance of all evidence to the contrary, she maintained that Eichmann could best be described as a mere “functionary.” “I don’t believe that ideology played much of a role,” Arendt repeatedly insisted, “to me that appears to be decisive.”

In this respect, Arendt’s findings dovetailed with a general trend in accounts of the Holocaust that downplayed the role of individual perpetrators in favor of the impersonal “structures” of modern society. But white-collar workers and “organization men” do not as a matter of course commit mass murder unless they are in the grip of an all-encompassing, exterminatory world view, such as the Nazi credo that

SS officers were obligated to internalize. As Walter Laqueur noted during the late 1990s: Arendt’s “concept of the ‘banality of evil’ . . . made it possible to put the blame for the mass murder at the door of all kind of middle level bureaucrats. The evildoer disappears, or becomes so banal as to be hardly worthy of our attention, and is replaced by . . . underlings with a bookkeeper mentality.”

Eichmann gave the performance of his life, and Hannah Arendt was entirely taken in.

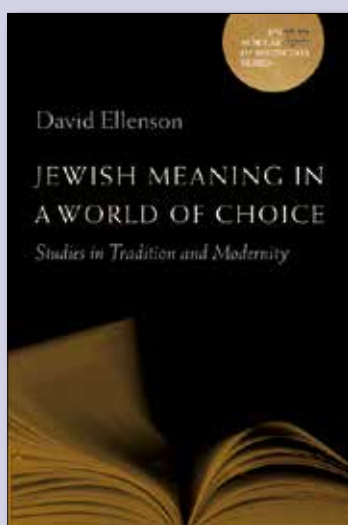
In seeking to downplay the German specificity of the Final Solution by universalizing it, Arendt also strove to safeguard the honor of the highly educated German cultural milieu from which she herself hailed. A similar impetus underlay Arendt’s contention, in her contribution to the *Festschrift* for Heidegger’s 80th birthday, that Nazism was merely a “gutter-born phenomenon” and had nothing to do with the spiritual (*geistige*) questions of culture. In light of what we now know about the extent of educated German support for the regime (not to speak of what we know about Heidegger, on which see my earlier essay “National Socialism, World Jewry, and the History of Being: Heidegger’s Black Notebooks” in this magazine) Arendt’s notion that Nazism has nothing to do with the “language of the humanities and the history of ideas” appears naïve.

In retrospect, Arendt’s application of Heidegger’s concept of “thoughtlessness” to Eichmann and his ilk seems to have been intended to absolve the Ger-

man intellectual traditions. Even Arendt’s otherwise stalwart champion, Mary McCarthy, pointed out the crucial differences between the English word “thoughtlessness,” which suggests a boorish absent-mindedness, and the German *Gedankenlosigkeit*, which literally indicates an inability to think.

At the height of his danse macabre before the judicial tribunal in Jerusalem, Eichmann went so far as to characterize himself as a “Zionist,” on the basis of his negotiations during the 1930s with Jewish officials over the emigration of Viennese and Czech Jews. For her part, Arendt seemed to buy Eichmann’s self-serving self-description wholesale. Yet, as Stangneth shows, these forced emigrations organized by Eichmann were unfailingly sadistic and brutal. In retrospect, they were, in fact, a trial run for the Europe-wide Jewish deportations that culminated in the Final Solution. Thus under Eichmann’s supervision and under the cover of “emigration,” Jews were divested of their homes, their life savings, their possessions, their livelihood, and their citizenship in exchange for the uncertainties and ignominies of forced exile.

That Eichmann smugly viewed his indispensable role in the Final Solution as a crowning achievement was an opinion he expressed on numerous occasions. British historian David Cesarani aptly describes the RSHA Nazi’s Specialist for Jewish Affairs as acting “in the spirit of a fanatical anti-Semite who is locked in a world of fantasy,” a description that historian Christopher Browning recently seconded, noting that, “*Eichmann embraced a worldview that was delusional and ‘phantasmagoric’ in its belief in a*



Jewish Meaning in a World of Choice

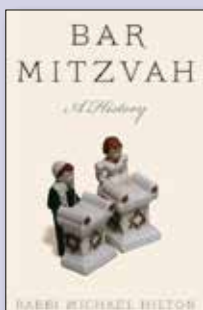
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world Jewish conspiracy that was the implacable and life-threatening enemy of Germany.” When the regime imploded in May 1945, he became a warrior-without-a-cause.

As Stangneth shows, during his Argentine exile, Eichmann and his Nazi comrades harbored delusions of the Reich’s return. At the time, one of Eichmann’s pet literary projects was the drafting of an “open letter” to Konrad Adenauer that was intended to justify the National Socialist state and its aims. In Eichmann’s view, the Federal Republic should have stopped issuing apologies since it had nothing to be ashamed of. After all, during the war, Germany had been involved in a life-or-death struggle in which it had been necessary to employ all of the means at its disposal. As Eichmann was fond of saying: “*Krieg ist Krieg*”—war is war.

In Buenos Aires, the Sassen clique published a neo-Nazi journal, one of whose main aims was to burnish the reputation of the Third Reich in the face of “calumnious accusations” on the part of World Jewry. Foremost among those purported “calumnies” was the so-called “Auschwitz lie”: the “myth” that the Third Reich had been responsible for the deaths of six million Jews. It was for this reason that, in 1956, the former Dutch SS officer Willem Sassen conducted a series of interviews with Eichmann. After all, there could be no more convincing witness than Eichmann, who, from his perch at RSHA headquarters in Berlin, had dutifully and conscientiously organized the entire affair.

Yet along the way, Sassen and company encountered a stumbling block. On the one hand, Eichmann being Eichmann, he was more than willing to relive in minute detail his halcyon days in Division IV B of the Reich Security Main Office. The problem was that the destruction of European Jewry had been Eichmann’s proudest achievement.

By the end of the taping sessions, the mismatch between Sassen’s revisionist goals and Eichmann’s compulsive braggadocio reached absurd proportions. The misunderstanding culminated in a raucous 1957 meeting at which Eichmann felt compelled to provide a final statement to all assembled of his mature ideological world view. Here are three salient passages from Eichmann’s final declaration to Sassen and company:

I must throw all caution to the wind and tell you that, before my Volk goes to ruin and bites the dust, the whole world should go to ruin and bite the dust—my Volk, only thereafter!

I say to you honestly as we conclude our sessions, I was the “conscientious bureaucrat,” I was that indeed. But I would hereby like to expand on the idea of the “conscientious bureaucrat,” perhaps to my discredit. Within the soul of this conscientious bureaucrat lay a fanatical warrior for the freedom of the race from which I stem . . . I was manifestly a conscientious bureaucrat, but one who was driven by inspiration: what my Volk requires and my Volk demands is for me a holy commandment and a holy law. *Jawohl!*

But now let me tell you, since we are almost at the end of this entire outburst [*Platzen*] . . . : I regret nothing! I will never crawl my way to the cross! . . . That is something I cannot do . . . because

my inner self bristles at the thought that we did something wrong. No, I say to you quite honestly, had we killed 10.3 million Jews out of the 10.3 million we had in our sights, I would be quite satisfied, and would say that we annihilated an enemy . . . We would have fulfilled our mission, for our race and our Volk and for the freedom of nations, had we exterminated the cleverest spirit among the spirited peoples alive today. For that is what I told [Julius] Streicher, and what I have always preached: we are fighting against an opponent who, as a result of thousands of years of practice and experience, is cleverer than we are . . .

These are the words not of a “desk murderer” but of a convinced Nazi. They represent a toxic admixture of crude social Darwinism, malicious half-truths, and ideological distortions. The highest reality is that of the volk. Weak peoples perish. The strong survive. All pretensions of international law to the contrary, it is the survival of the fittest that determines the “law of peoples.” Since, as with all of life, the goal of nations is self-preservation, it is permissible to utilize all the means at one’s disposal to attain this end. Any volk that ignores this imperative is doomed to extinction. Universal morality—Biblical injunctions (“Thou shalt not kill,” “Love thy neighbor as thyself”), Kant’s categorical imperative, democratic pretensions to universal equality—must be emphatically rejected insofar as such effete considerations expose a people to anti-*völkisch* precepts and constraints that threaten to sap its lifeblood, its will to survive. To cite Nietzsche, whose influence Eichmann at various points acknowledged, moral

considerations that transcend a volk’s drive to self-preservation are symptomatic of a “slave morality.” If nature has decreed that life is in essence a fight to the death for racial supremacy, what sense does it make to buck this trend?

In Eichmann’s view, one of the reasons why the Jews, those consummate cosmopolitans, are so dangerous is that, as a people without roots, they subsist and persevere entirely at the expense of other peoples. For this reason, they are the sworn racial enemy of the Germans *as well as of all peoples*. Hence, the National Socialist *Vernichtungskrieg* (war of annihilation) against the Jews was, on racial grounds, *entirely justified*.

Insofar as they are impervious to reason and reality, such mythological world views are self-perpetuating. The clan of believers has a vested interest in maintaining the illusion that the world view is entirely coherent and functional, since there is really no fallback position. Nazi ideology was an all-enveloping proposition. It only collapsed when, at the war’s end, the major German cities lay in ruins and Germany had become, following Hitler’s suicide, a *führerlose Gesellschaft*: a society without a leader. It is therefore difficult to understand how, shortly after the trial, Arendt, speaking of Eichmann’s actions and conduct, could assert, “I don’t think that ideology played any role.” A decade earlier, the chapters on “Ideology” and “Race” had been among Arendt’s *The Origins of Totalitarianism*’s genuine strong points.

If ever there was a “trial of the 20th century,” the Eichmann trial was it. In Europe and North America, the meaning of the trial, and thus to

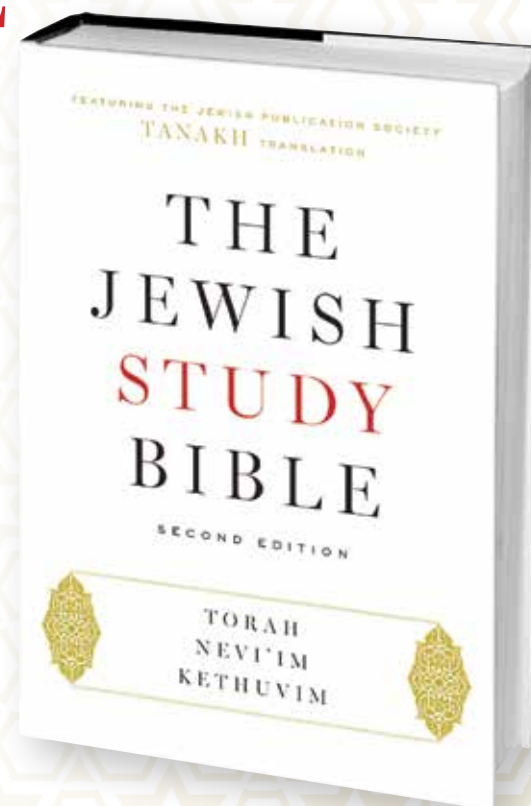
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/mō zā' ik/

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THOUGHT

a great extent the Holocaust itself, was filtered through the lens of Arendt's popular account and the contentious debate that it spawned. Her provocative subtitle, the "banality of evil," helped establish the so-called "functionalist" interpretation of the Holocaust, in which the role of obedient desk murderers and mindless functionaries assumed pride of place, producing a Holocaust strangely divested of anti-Semitism. The *reductio ad absurdum* of this approach may have finally come during the controversy over Daniel Goldhagen's book, *Hitler's Willing Executioners: Ordinary Germans and the Holocaust*. In the course of this debate, in the 1990s, Hans Mommsen, by then the recognized dean of German Third Reich scholars, said, "I don't think the perpetrators were really clear in their own minds about what they were doing when they were engaged in killing Jews." Mommsen's avowal was widely viewed as an index of how far out of touch professional historians were with the German public's need for clarity and for an honest accounting of a previous generation's horrific transgressions. In retrospect, Arendt's stress on the perpetrators' lack of animosity toward the Jews harmonized with the post-war German political agenda of parrying questions of historical responsibility. Although Arendt did not necessarily share this agenda, her correspondence reveals how sensitive she was to the tendency to equate "Germans" with "Nazis."

Although Arendt's interpretive approach, as well as the functionalist paradigm in general, identified a set of important socio-historical concerns, it also downplayed the uniqueness of the Shoah by inserting it within an overarching narrative that highlighted the dangers of "modernity," "mass society," "atomization," and so on. The Holocaust came to symbolize the risks of the transition from traditional society to the modern administrative state. But in the end this German Sociology 101 "from *Gemeinschaft* to *Gesellschaft*" approach failed to explain the historical uniqueness of the radical evil that was Nazi Germany. Here, one of the unexplained paradoxes and ironies was that in *The Origins of Totalitarianism* the figure of radical evil occupied pride of place in Arendt's interpretive scheme. In fact, she concluded the book's Preface by declaring: "if it is true that in the final stages of totalitarianism *an absolute evil appears* (absolute because it can no longer be deduced from humanly comprehensible motives), it is also true that without it we might never have known *the truly radical nature of Evil*."

As Bettina Stangneth reminds us repeatedly in *Eichmann Before Jerusalem*, when Hannah Arendt traveled to Jerusalem to cover the Eichmann trial, part of the baggage she carried was a fixed set of socio-historical predispositions and prejudgments. Nowhere was this problem more evident than in her attempt to understand Eichmann's conduct in terms of the misguided figure of the "banality of evil." What should have been clear then and should certainly be clear now is that if the Holocaust was banal, then it was not evil. And if it was evil—as it indubitably was—then it was not banal.

Richard Wolin is Distinguished Professor of History and Political Science at the CUNY Graduate Center. He is the author of many books, including *Heidegger's Children: Hannah Arendt, Karl Löwith, Hans Jonas, and Herbert Marcuse* (Princeton University Press).

Valhalla in Flames

BY PETER E. GORDON

Inhumanities: Nazi Interpretations of Western Culture

by David B. Dennis

Cambridge University Press, 553 pp., \$35.99

In his fascinating 1996 book, *Beethoven in German Politics, 1870–1989*, the historian David B. Dennis described the way that Beethoven came to serve every ideology in German political culture. The brief-lived revolutionary republic in Bavaria was inaugurated with orchestral performances of the *Leonore* and *Egmont* overtures. A few years later, Beethoven's symphonies would serve as the introductory music when the German radio announced the birthday of Adolf Hitler. It is a depressing history with a depressing lesson: Culture can be made to serve any end, even the most barbaric.

In his new book, *Inhumanities: Nazi Interpretations of Western Culture*, Dennis has now broadened his field of vision to address the way that the Nazis constructed a general canon of the German past. His historical task would be impossibly large were it not for his decision to confine himself to an historical summary of a single newspaper, the *Völkischer Beobachter* (which translates, somewhat awkwardly, as “The Folkish Observer”). The paper began as an unremarkable biweekly until, bought by the Nazis in 1920, it eventually became a daily and swelled in circulation, reaching 30,000 copies in 1929 and over one million copies upon the eve of World War II. It was, Dennis reminds us, “the most widely circulated newspaper in Nazi Germany.”

Although the *Völkischer Beobachter* was aimed at the masses, it devoted a considerable share of its attention to matters of culture and specifically to Germany's cultural heritage. In his book Dennis documents the various themes and conceits by which the Nazis sought to dignify their political ideology by constructing a cultural prehistory in its pages. In the words of the great German-Jewish émigré historian George Mosse (whose work clearly served as a model for Dennis), “building myths and heroes was an integral part of the Nazi cultural drive.” They knew they would encounter resistance, and they accordingly committed themselves to the project of redefining Nazism as the organic culmination of Germany's cultural past. Most of all (as one writer put it), “to win over to our movement spiritual leaders who think they see something distasteful in anti-Semitism, it is extremely important to present more and more evidence that great, recognized spirits shared our hatred of Jewry.”

Few writers, poets, and musicians of the past were safe from this project. In the pages of the *Völkischer Beobachter* readers could find commentaries on nearly all the great figures of both the German and the European canons, including Michelangelo,

Machiavelli, Shakespeare, Goethe, and Schiller, along with the great composers, including Bach, Mozart, Beethoven, Schubert, and Wagner. In fact, it is a bit distressing to see just how closely the Nazi canon resembles the syllabi of Western Civilization courses at, say, Reed College or Columbia University. (You can

microfilm, I may have missed some relevant content.” Possible, but unlikely. His book is so comprehensive, and its summaries so exhaustive, that one would be surprised to learn of any serious omission. A great deal of the book consists of quotations from the *Völkischer Beobachter*, and Dennis organizes these

It is a bit distressing to see just how closely the Nazi canon resembles Western Civilization courses at, say, Reed College or Columbia University.

find most of these names cut in stone on the exterior frieze of Columbia's Butler Library.)

Canons, then as now, have always helped to establish present legitimacy on the basis of past accomplishments. The Nazis, after all, began as upstarts, revolutionaries who sought to challenge the traditional political system of the Weimar Republic, and they had to manufacture not only their party symbols and uniforms but also their bond to the German past. Anti-traditionalists who craved tradition, they created the illusion of cultural continuity through constant appeals to the literary, philosophi-

quotations into different chapters, each devoted to a major theme (attitudes toward romanticism, criticism of the Enlightenment, music after Wagner, patriotic Germans, and so forth). The overall effect is that of a catalog of Nazi cultural ideology.

Unfortunately, this is not the most fruitful method for historical analysis. Dennis' exercise in content summary has the effect of portraying Nazi ideology as a more or less static phenomenon that remained unchanged, despite the transformation of the party from its early years of minority rebellion to its final decade of totalitarian control, when nearly all signs of cultural diversity had been eliminated. Did the *Völkischer Beobachter* modify its portrait of Germany's cultural heritage over the course of 25 years? Dennis quotes indiscriminately, sometimes on a single page, from essays separated by more than a decade. It may be that Nazi ideology aspired to a kind of eternity, but it is a defining characteristic of fascism that it functioned more as a party movement than a stabilized regime. Whether this restless dynamism also meant changes in cultural politics is a question that deserves further exploration.

Cultural history calls for interpretation as well as collection. But Dennis' book, though long on evidence, is rather unforthcoming on matters of significance that other scholars have addressed with greater theoretical acumen and with the conceptual resources borrowed from many disciplines. Dennis occasionally cites Eric Michaud's *The Cult of Art in Nazi Germany*, which builds upon earlier claims by Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe and Jean-Luc Nancy regarding “the Nazi myth,” but he does not adequately address the questions these scholars and others have attempted to answer. What was the deeper meaning of the Nazi appeal to a cultural heritage? Was Nazism an “aestheticization of politics,” as Walter Benjamin suggested, or is Dennis right to object that Nazism achieved a “politicization of aesthetics”? Does the latter rule out the former or should one (more plausibly, perhaps) see them as complementary strategies of fascist culture? And what distinguishes such strategies from those known to us from the history of the Eastern-bloc communist tyrannies or from the numerous attempts at cultural-religious consolidation in contemporary authoritarian movements across



Front page of Völkischer Beobachter, October 1941, celebrating military gains in Eastern Europe.

cal, and musical greats. As Dennis observes, the *Völkischer Beobachter* “repeated the main themes of Nazi culture with liturgical regularity.”

If repetition is an effective strategy for ideological indoctrination, it is also an effective way for the historian to convey the mind-numbing suasion of Nazi propaganda. The aptly titled *Inhumanities* is not a small book. In its concluding pages, Dennis offers an unusual admission: “[I]t is possible,” he writes, “that in the process of reviewing every page of a daily newspaper over a twenty-five year run, mostly on

the globe? The reader closes *Inhumanities* exhausted by the harangues of Nazi ideologues, though grateful to the author for translating and organizing the material into an accessible form. But a nagging sense of dissatisfaction will linger, a feeling that very few of these questions have been explored.

The self-reflexive question historians ought to ask themselves is how we should understand the relationship between the Nazis' genealogies of culture and our own efforts to uncover the cultural roots of National Socialism. It should unsettle us, I think, that the Nazis' own narratives bear such a striking resemblance to the cultural-historical studies of Nazism that rose to prominence after the war. Take, for example, the 1964 work by George Mosse, *The Crisis of German Ideology: The Intellectual Origins of the Third Reich*. Synthetic, broad-ranging, erudite, Mosse's was the book to read if one wished to comprehend how the delicate canons of German high culture could lend their prestige to the brutality of a modern political regime. What Mosse and distinguished colleagues such as Leonard Krieger and Georg Iggers took for granted was the conviction that National Socialism, despite all of its modern trappings and mass-media apparatus (the techniques it shared with slick advertising campaigns, its self-promotional slogans, its use of the radio) was best understood as the spawn of a distinctively German cultural inheritance. Germany, after all, was the land of *Dichter und Denker*, poets and thinkers, not to mention musicians. It should not surprise us that the learned refugee children of the German or German-Jewish cultured class (*Bildungsbürgertum*) who had fled the Nazi plague would go hunting in their own libraries for the sources of the disease. And why not? This was the evidence nearest to hand. For a scholar of erudition such as Mosse, it was tempting to see in Nazism a pathology born from the same world of letters in which he had been schooled and which had betrayed him so shamefully.

However, notwithstanding the power of this interpretative method, a new generation of historians eventually turned against Mosse and the method he helped to pioneer. By the 1970s and 1980s, a neo-Marxist trend in German historiography challenged the older paradigm according to which there was something distinctively and even exclusively "German" about Nazism, and instead they sought to revive the older conception of Nazism as a variant of fascism continuous with the politics and social-structural pathologies of modern capitalism. This was especially true of the 1984 work, *The Peculiarities of German History: Bourgeois Society and Politics in Nineteenth-Century Germany*, co-authored by two brilliant British historians, David Blackbourn and Geoff Eley. It would be hard to exaggerate the achievement of this revisionist school. Above all, it challenged the view of Nazism as a uniquely German phenomenon that had come into view when the German middle class, their revolutionary hopes defeated in 1848, had strayed from the safe path of development in the liberal-democratic West. For the revisionists, it was not hard to see that this idea of a German *Sonderweg*, or special path, had served an ideological purpose: In blaming Germany alone for fascism's rise, it granted a badge of innocence to capitalism and the cold-war West.

For Blackbourn and Eley however, there was

no such *Sonderweg* (a term, ironically, that in earlier times German nationalists had embraced). In fact, in the 19th century the various territories from which Bismarck would forge the unified German Empire began to hum and thrive. Indeed, this was a bourgeois society no less vibrant and promising

Much like the writers for the *Völkischer Beobachter*, the postwar cultural historians assumed that the ultimate significance of culture is political.

than that of France or England, from whom Germany's path had supposedly diverged.

But the revisionist argument cut two ways: If Germany was no less bourgeois than other European lands, then those other lands were no less susceptible to fascism. It therefore seemed far more plausible to seek the origins of fascism in those features shared



Cartoon of Richard Wagner, Frou Frou Wagner, 1877. (Courtesy of the Library of Congress Music Division.)

by all modern commercial societies, with the implication (often unstated) that fascism was the final stage in the crisis of capitalist modernity. Echoing a theme that had already been developed by Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer (especially in their monumental *Dialectic of Enlightenment*) the revisionist historiography was both depathologizing and pathologizing: Germany no longer stood alone under the dark shadow of its fascist past; instead, that shadow loomed as an ever-present possibility across all of modernity.

From the historian's perspective, what makes *Inhumanities* such a perplexing contribution to the literature on the Third Reich is that it serves as a powerful reminder that the Nazis themselves believed in a cultural *Sonderweg*. Laboriously, proudly, in essay after essay, their historians, literary scholars, and musicologists helped to construct a vision of the past that explained how Nazism had emerged organically out of Germany's unique cul-

tural inheritance. (Dennis does not clearly indicate where he stands on the *Sonderweg*, but at one point he asserts that the mindset of "eliminationist" anti-Semitism was already in place as early as 1923, a claim that would support a thesis of longer-term ideological continuity.)

There are, to be sure, obvious differences between the postwar cultural histories of the *Sonderweg* and the crude, tendentious articles that appeared in the pages of the *Völkischer Beobachter*. The postwar cultural historians were doing their very best to determine the actual origins of National Socialist ideology, and we cannot fault them if their efforts sometimes read a bit too much into the diverse intellectual and cultural currents of the previous century. (Was "Turnvater Jahn," the nationalist gymnastics guru of the early 19th century, really a source for the German ideology of the 20th century? Was Herder really a proto-totalitarian?) The contributors to the *Völkischer Beobachter* were, in contrast, crude ideologues, constructing a useable past even when usability demanded the most absurd historical and cultural distortions. Still, there is an uncomfortable similarity here that Dennis does not consider. Much like the writers for the *Völkischer Beobachter*, the postwar cultural historians assumed that the ultimate significance of culture is political.

The risk in this brand of cultural history is that it confirms a conventional prejudice that remains deeply rooted among historians: History is always and must remain the history of politics, and in the final analysis "culture" is always a cipher for power. The message is clear: Genuine history is political history, the history of states and international relations, economics, and ideologies, and if one studies culture it is only legitimate because culture can be exposed in the final analysis as politics by other means. What makes the cultural histories of the *Sonderweg* so distressing when one reads them today is that they had the unfortunate effect of reproducing, despite their own humane purposes, the culture-as-politics conceit that has held sway amongst cultural nationalists of every variety—not only during the Third Reich and not only in Germany.

It is hardly surprising to read that of all the heroes in the National Socialist pantheon, Richard Wagner stood supreme. Famous for his anti-Semitism and especially for the notorious screed *Judaism in Music*, Wagner remained (in the words of Joseph Goebbels) the "most German of all Germans." But here, too, the *Völkischer Beobachter* faced serious difficulties. A well-known story has it that Wagner was the illegitimate son of an actor, Ludwig Geyer, a man Richard's mother married after her first husband had died. Geyer was rumored to be a Jew, and it seems that Richard himself may have believed the story of his Jewish ancestry. A writer for the *Völkischer Beobachter* set out to vanquish this calumny once and for all by arguing in the alternative: First of all, Ludwig Geyer and Wagner's mother had refrained from

sexual relations until their marriage, so Richard could not have been Geyer's son; moreover, Geyer wasn't Jewish. It's like the old joke about the borrowed kettle, which had the hole in it from the beginning, and wasn't borrowed anyway.

The case of Wagner is illustrative of a general premise that underlay all of the writings in the *Völkischer Beobachter*: the belief that culture is essentially the property of a people. Those of us who enjoy listening to Wagner's music recognize the falsity of this conceit, even if Wagner himself, in his moments of nationalist chauvinism, betrayed the higher truth that can be heard in his musical work. Against every nationalist who boasts a bit too loudly that culture is a "heritage" and something that belongs to his own people alone, it merits repeating that aesthetic creation defies the logic of belonging.

Culture may be used as a vessel for power, but it also itself possesses another kind of power, and this powerless power—call it beauty—poses an eternal challenge to all powers that claim political

supremacy. This is why the passages Dennis quotes from the *Völkischer Beobachter* can still provoke such head-shaking disbelief in the reader. That Beethoven harbored sympathies for the French Revolution was, for instance, a source of embarrassment that the newspaper tried to minimize. Though Beethoven "suffered from revolutionary fervor," one essay explains, "his heart remained with his German *Heimat*."

It is true, as the musicologist Scott Burnham has shown, that one hears strains of the "heroic" especially in the middle period in Beethoven's career, but it is a humanistic heroism that has nothing to do with the inhumanities of the Third Reich. And, in the fragmented, broken style of his late period (as beautifully analyzed by Adorno) the composer offered the strongest retort to the barbarians of the future who would try to enlist him as a hero in their nationalist pantheon. This is a humanity stronger than the heroism ascribed to him by his "folkish observers" and stronger, even, than ideology itself.

So, too, Schubert: His music (in the words of a Bavarian cultural minister) stood as a "monument to the German soul and mind," whereas the musicologist Susan McClary has detected in his music "feminine endings," or cadences of deceptive beauty, which, in their pure aestheticism, defeat all gestures of monumental aggression. The same, finally, might even be said of Wagner's *Ring des Niebelungen*: When Brünnhilde rides into the flames and the ring is at last restored to the maidens of the Rhine, the orchestra, concluding on a D-flat chord (a whole step below the key of E-flat with which the tetralogy began), permits the violins to come to rest on a delicate and sustained note of high A-flat, and Siegfried's heroism, a heroism that was never free of brutality, is forgotten.

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Sometimes a Bag Is Just a Bag

BY SHOSHANA OLIDORT

The Fame Lunches: On Wounded Icons, Money, Sex, the Brontës, and the Importance of Handbags

by Daphne Merkin

Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 416 pp., \$28

In the introduction to her new collection of essays, *The Fame Lunches: On Wounded Icons, Money, Sex, the Brontës, and the Importance of Handbags*, Daphne Merkin says that she writes, like Virginia Woolf, to "create wholes" out of the brokenness that surrounds her and to find meaning despite the looming "specter of . . . meaninglessness" in her life. But reading through these essays one frequently wonders whether, for all her apparent ironic self-awareness, Merkin's search for meaning has been quite searching enough.

Although she is best known for her essays, Merkin is also a writer of fiction, and "The Yom Kippur Pedicure," an essay about lingering at the nail salon one Yom Kippur Eve, starts out by comparing itself to a Sholem Aleichem story:

How can it be, you might ask, that such a travesty came to pass? . . . You might ask, that is, if this were the beginning of an old-fashioned story by, say Sholem Aleichem, one that had never been exposed to those newfangled and profane literary influences that do away with all meaning, much less a divine purpose.

But the piece quickly shifts tones from the literary to the confessional, as Merkin asks: "What on earth

was I thinking? Here I had been alerting my daughter to this defining Jewish moment as though it meant something to me and by extension should to



Daphne Merkin. (Photo courtesy of Tina Turnbow.)

her, and now I was keeping her cooling her sneaker-shod heels while I sat in admiring contemplation of my toes."

Of course, there is something grotesque in the juxtaposition of toenails and religious identity, but then Merkin has made a name for herself as a pro-

vocateur, most notably with her essay "Unlikely Obsession," a piece about her spanking fetish that appeared in *The New Yorker* in 1996, and which, according to the author, "will undoubtedly dog me for the rest of my days." While the essays in her current collection—culled from 40 years of writing—are less hair-raising, there is an undercurrent of provocation throughout. This is not in itself a problem, great writing often jolts us. But what is the value of shock value that has no aim outside itself? Elsewhere in this collection, Merkin refers to self-doubt as her religion. That this is might a euphemism for narcissistic tendencies seems to escape the author.

In essays on materialism, money, and fashion—recurrent themes in this book—Merkin ascribes meaning to material objects and celebrity icons while avoiding altogether the question of how her own affluence colors her judgment. Instead, she draws sweeping conclusions about society based on her own chic life on the Upper East Side of Manhattan.

As its title suggests, "When a Bag Is Not Just a Bag" is an essay about the purported significance of the accessory, which, Merkin humorously suggests, may contain the answer to the great "Freudian question: What do women want? . . . they want bags." The piece is signature Merkin: funny, smartly written, and utterly self-indulgent. It opens with the author "scurrying along Madison Avenue," en route to Barneys, "the metropolitan mecca of all that is fabulously new and covetable, to return two bags" priced at close to \$1,000 each. Our "mania for bags" (I had no idea we had one) "defines our acquisition-mad cultural moment," she writes, but she is not making an argument against such

madness. Instead, she imbues bags with psychological meaning such that they not only “lead the way as the top fashion signifier,” but serve, too, as the “portable manifestation of a woman’s sense of self, a detailed and remarkably revealing map of her interior, an omnium-gatherum of myriad aspects of her life—the crucial Filofaxed information as well as the frivolous, lipstick stuff.”

What that means, of course, is that those of us

end is that? Merkin suggests that Beene infused his designs with a “layered and self-reflective aesthetic” that allowed her, a self-described bookish woman, to “embrace the unexpectedly cerebral pleasure of clothes.” This collection does include some essays more aligned with cerebral pursuits, among them a book review of Hermione Lee’s 1997 biography of Virginia Woolf, of which a good few paragraphs are devoted to the question of whether, in fact, anything

while Merkin makes a convincing case for the spiritual bankruptcy of her family’s practice of Judaism, she is unable, or unwilling, to transcend it. Thus, instead of seeking out a more fulfilling kind of Jewish practice, or rejecting Jewish affiliation altogether, she attends the same stuffy synagogue her parents belonged to, where the women’s balcony is a kind of catwalk for the “newly Judaicized wives of the synagogue’s multiple tycoons,” who show up once a year “buffed and lacquered,” and clothed in their “designer duds,” for the High Holidays. She wonders why her experience of religious life has failed to clarify, for her, “the essence of Jewishness” and fancies that she might “come upon the enigmatic heart of the matter one evening when the light is fading and everything seems momentarily serene, somewhere on the road between a pedicure and a prayer.” But this seems as unlikely a prospect to Merkin as it does to her reader. One doesn’t arrive at meaning without searching, which Merkin seems singularly disinclined to do, making one wonder what this exercise is really all about.

In her essay on Virginia Woolf, Merkin quotes Lee’s description of the novelist’s reading as a “means of transcending the self.” As for Merkin, she writes “largely out of emotional necessity,” which is, perhaps, an oblique way of describing writing that is driven primarily by a fascination with oneself.

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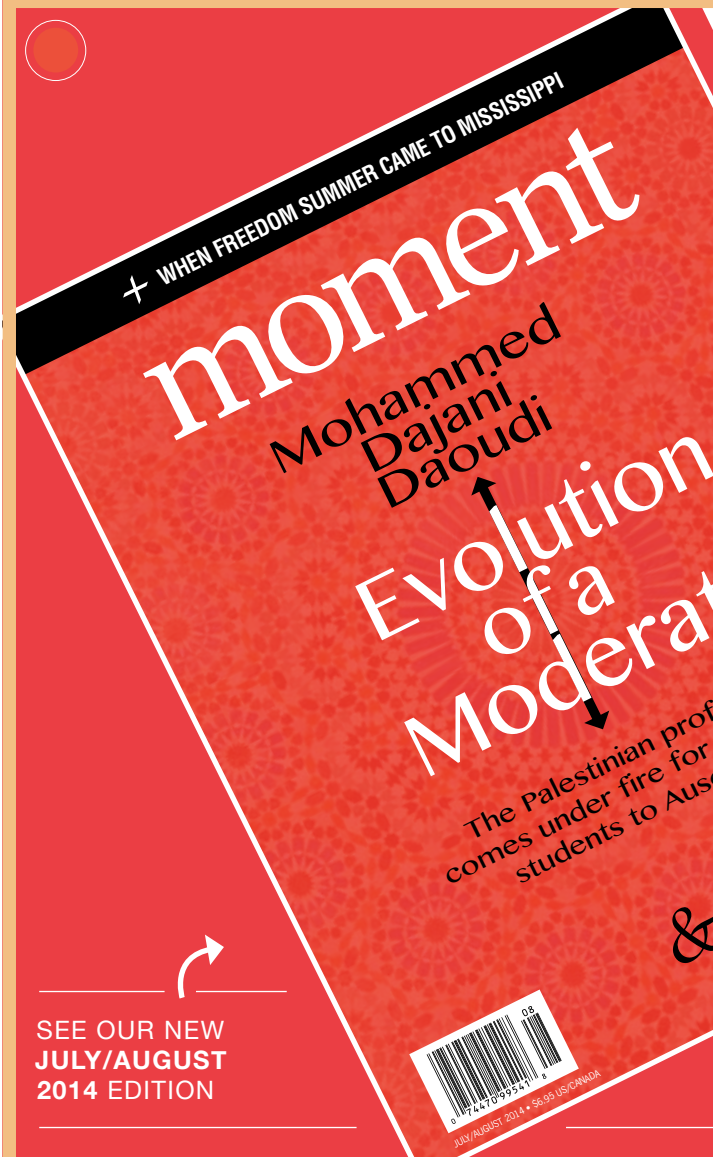
Great writing often jolts us. But what is the value of shock value that has no aim outside itself?

unable, or unwilling, to spend hundreds of dollars on a bag are somehow lacking in the kind of interiority that women who carry Chanel or Fendi possess. A survey of her friends’ bag preferences reveals the terrifying effects of material overabundance: “I would die carrying a tote,” says one. Another, who Merkin describes, somewhat bizarrely, as a “beautiful fawn-like creature” is too afraid to choose between bags “for fear of what it might say about her.” The cringeworthiness of this seems lost on Merkin, who insists that bags “tell us nothing less than where we live, who we are, and where you might metaphorically find us, carrying our portable identities in the pouch that best meets our dreams of self.”

Of the high-end fashion designer Geoffrey Beene, Merkin writes that he “was a man who thought beyond the surface, someone for whom whimsy was a means to a meaningful end.” But what

remains to be said of the famed writer. Of particular interest here is Merkin’s mention of Woolf’s “mixed feelings” about what she called “life-writing.” Merkin quotes Lee, who writes that Woolf was plagued by a “perpetual fear of egotistical self-exposure.” Merkin’s own feelings on the subject seem decidedly less mixed—but it would have been interesting to hear more from her on this.

As for self-reflection, “The Yom Kippur Pedicure” aims to be a thoughtful, introspective essay, a kind of investigation into Merkin’s fraught relationship with her Jewishness, which she traces to her upbringing in an affluent modern Orthodox family of German-Jewish extraction (Merkin is the great-great-granddaughter of Samson Raphael Hirsch) that placed a premium on “rules and more rules—as well as the solemn aesthetic context surrounding their observance” and barely spoke of God or the “vicissitudes of belief.” But



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Something Borrowed

BY AHARON LEVY

A Replacement Life: A Novel

by Boris Fishman

Harper, 336 pp., \$25.99

Does the fake have a hold on the Jewish imagination? From Moses and Esther (those ur-passers), to the many golems (clay posing as human), to modern literature's halls of mirrors (would the real Philip Roth please stand up?), subversion and manipulation of identity recur as both game and necessity.

Fakery animates Boris Fishman's debut novel, *A Replacement Life*. Protagonist Slava Gelman emigrated as a child from the Soviet Union and now wants to be a writer and an American. To do so, he has taken a job at *Century* magazine (a lightly fictionalized *New Yorker*, where Fishman himself once worked), moved to Manhattan, and cut himself off from his family: "[T]o strip from his writing the pollution that refilled it every time he returned to the swamp broth of Soviet Brooklyn . . . he would have to get away. Dialyze himself, like Grandmother's kidneys." When this grandmother, Sofia, dies, Slava is drawn back to Brooklyn and into the broth of familial guilt, resentment, and scheming. The funeral has barely ended when his grandfather Yevgeny—in both the Old World and New a bender of rules and broker of special arrangements, baffled now by his grandson's American qualms—asks Slava to write a Holocaust restitution claim letter for him. The catch is that Yevgeny, an evacuee to Central Asia, is ineligible. But if Slava could write something that borrows a few details from Sofia's life in, and escape from, the Minsk ghetto . . . Thinking that this will help him understand his grandmother's life, among other self-justifications, Slava agrees. He finds the undertaking not as distasteful as he imagined; with writerly grandiosity (and troubling, if perhaps deliberate, vagueness as to who, precisely, is having this thought), the novel declares, "The letter, this new life, had taken all of forty-five minutes. What the Nazis took away, Slava restored."

Yevgeny lines up other claims-letter clients—all of whom have suffered, though not in ways deemed worthy of compensation by the German government—and Slava takes them on with decreasing reluctance. He finds himself pulled between Brooklyn and Manhattan, family and autonomy, and the love interests Arianna (a fact-checker, an American Jew whose name happens to derive from "Aryan") and Vera (a fellow immigrant and childhood friend of Slava's, whose name means "faith" in Russian), as his inventions begin to take over his life.

Fishman's sharp prose, controlled yet ambitious, offers pleasure from the very first page. In her coffin (open at the funeral, despite the rabbi's gentle demurral), Sofia seems "unpersuaded of death . . . her face diplomatic and cautious"; when eyes turn toward the few young people present, they feel suddenly "ma-

roomed in their obviousness." He understands the serious game of family sparring, in which every blow lands but none is fatal. And Fishman excels at offering a deep, undramatized sense of character and setting, as in Slava's memory of his visit to Lenin's tomb:

On the opposite side of the glass encampment, a young boy—Slava's age but with straw-yellow hair and limpid blue eyes—also studied the dead man's face. Slava had slipped his hand free from his mother's to demonstrate his adulthood to the man under the glass and noted with pitying sympathy that the other boy still clung to his.

Pity and sympathy, mirrored children, faith and fact-checking, two countries, past and present, truth and fiction, life and death, dictated religion and cobbled-together custom, historical accuracy and emotional verity, on and on. The book is rife with such doublings, oppositions that threaten to collapse into, or imitate, one another. These echoes echo, in turn, the double burden of Slava and his fellow immigrants—"Here you're not a Jew anymore. Here you're an immigrant. *Go back where you came from, Com-mie*"—and assay fraught, and fertile, territory. Fishman, though frequently very funny, is not afraid to confront his characters with serious issues.



Deutsche Reichsmark, 1924–1948.

With such wonderful ingredients—a talented author, hefty themes, a clever and wide-ranging conceit—why does the result so often seem like a lukewarm stew? One problem is that in *A Replacement Life*, all of life's difficulties are essentially literary. It's a conceit captured most perfectly in the title (though not the text) of Keith Gessen's 2008 novel *All the Sad Young Literary Men*. Men like Slava are sad because their literary genius is not recognized, and since they are young (and perhaps because they are men), they cannot imagine a greater tragedy. In *A Replacement Life*, Sofia's death receives roughly the same emphasis as Slava's failure to get published in *Century*. In response to the restitution claim form's request to "[D]escribe, in as much detail as you can, where the Subject was during the years 1939 to 1945," Slava conjures a series of vignettes that have less to do with the question than his own sense of what might make a good story. For his grandfather's letter, he creates a tale about facing punishment for losing a

herd of partisans' cattle that ends with a pat, packaged insight: "Some irony, saved by the Germans from being killed by your own."

Literature itself is of course a perennial topic of literature, but much of this novel's text-wrestling seems denatured. The inescapable 20th-century Jewish-American writers, with their crackling incorporation of life into literature and vice versa, gave their characters the classics and (furtively, reluctantly), Jewish religious texts. By contrast Slava seems to reach only for magazine articles; he expresses surprise that Arianna has reread *The Stranger*, and when a friend mentions *The Master and Margarita*, notes that he's read Bulgakov's novel, but only "In class." Is Slava really someone passionate about the written word? Or is literature merely the locus of his inchoate ambition and aggrieved entitlement?

It's the writer's job to pare messy life into shaped narrative, but it's the writer's art to hide the artifice. As *A Replacement Life* progresses, its narrative frays. Slava seems to have no friends at all, Arianna reveals that after seven years in New York, she's never seen the ocean, and Israel Abramson, a Brooklynite client originally from Minsk (a city of close to two million) declares with wonder, "I've never been to Manhattan . . . All those lights. They show it on television. Can you sleep, with all those lights?" Slava

writes another restitution letter in an imitation of his Albanian doorman's mangled English: "[N]obody who say nice Polish girl from village give food hush-hush over wall is saying accurate. Wall was impossible. And there was not being nice Polish girls." These all seem like lapses, characters constrained by theme or sacrificed for queasy laughs.

This flattening subordination may explain why so many supporting characters are literally that: driven to praise, admire, and support Slava, assuring him of his authorial specialness. Before

they begin dating or even really speaking, Arianna is determined to help Slava's career; when he asks why, she says, "You're not like the others." On meeting Slava, Vera's friend Leonard says "You observe. It's a gift." Even the German bureaucrat who investigates Slava's faked histories is impressed with Slava and concerned about his prospects: "Are you leaving the magazine, Mr. Gelman? I think you can do anything. This is beneath you."

A Replacement Life ends with scenes of both genuine emotion and saccharine sentimentality, as if Fishman didn't quite trust his readers. One hopes that in his next book Fishman will allow his characters to proceed along paths that feel less planned, experienced as opposed to written: in a word, like life.

Aharon Levy's short stories and essays have appeared in *The Sun*, *Ecotone*, and *The Cincinnati Review*. He is working on his first novel, *The Man*.

Available Light: Pictures from Yemen

BY TOBY PERL FREILICH

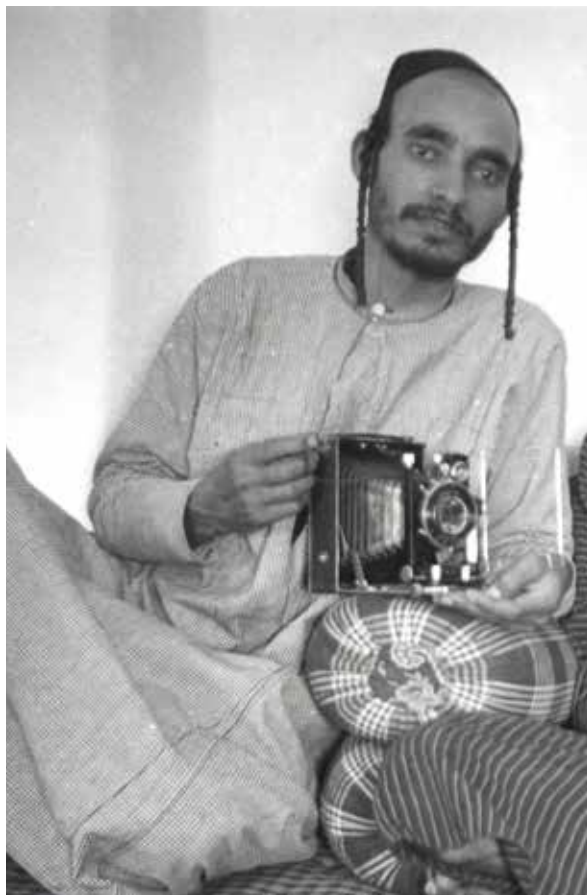
Scenes of Sana'a: Yihye Haybi's Photographs from Yemen, 1930–44

by Ester Muchawsky-Schnapper
The Israel Museum, 144 pp. \$35

In 1929, while sailing home from a trip to Italy and Eritrea to visit relatives, 18-year-old Yihye Haybi met an Italian doctor who was also on his way to Yemen. Born to a modest soap merchant family, Haybi had, for a few years, attended the modern school founded by arch-Maimonidean rationalist Rabbi Yihyah Qafih. Impressed with the bits of Italian Haybi had picked up in his travels, the doctor hired him to work as an interpreter and house manager at the medical clinic he was establishing in Haybi's hometown of Sana'a.

Bright and capable, Haybi quickly worked his way up to medical assistant, giving injections and procuring supplies from Italy. Soon the Jewish community was summoning him during medical emergencies, and he began seeing "patients" after morning *Shacharit* prayers, before reporting for work. Beloved by the clinic's staff, he was given various forbidden Western gadgets including a record player, a radio, and, fatefully, two automatic cameras.

Once he had mastered the techniques of the



Yihye Haybi in a self-portrait with his camera, ca. 1930s. (Photographs by Yihye Haybi, courtesy of the Yihye Haybi Collection, Isidore and Anne Falk Information Center for Judaica and Jewish Ethnography, The Israel Museum, Jerusalem.)

darkroom, Haybi began to photograph landscapes and events, but it was portraits that he favored and at which he excelled. His oeuvre even includes a few self-portraits, thanks to the delayed time-release feature of his cameras. A trusted liaison between the European, Muslim, and Jewish communities, Haybi was able to gain access to the highest ranks of nobility in the royal Muslim houses, his Italian employers and their families at their leisure, and the great rabbinic families and sages of the day.

Haybi's photographs, the subject of a recent exhibit at The Israel Museum's Ticho House in downtown Jerusalem, are trenchantly discussed and elegantly displayed in the accompanying book introduced and edited by curator Ester Muchawsky-Schnapper. The photos on display, spanning the years from 1930 to 1944, are an ethnographic treasure documenting the waning years of an ancient community. And, though beautiful and compelling in their own right, when viewed in light of the challenging circumstances in which he worked they also reveal a remarkable figure behind the lens.

In 1918, with the end of Ottoman rule, a medieval Shia Zaydi dynasty was reinstated in Yemen with Yahya ibn Muhammad Hamid ed-Din serving as both imam and king. Western influences were viewed with suspicion, and the Jews' inferior *dhimmi* status was restored. Most daunting of all to a budding cameraman, photography was illegal,



"Interior of the Al-Kissar Synagogue," showcasing its ornate Torah case.

deemed both an act of espionage and a violation of Muslim religious practice. Only one other indigenous Jewish photographer, David Arusi, is known to have taken pictures of the community in Yemen in the early 20th century, and only a handful of those photos survive. All other extant photographs were

Shooting indoors using available light at a slow shutter speed, Haybi reveals his gifts as a cameraman working under difficult conditions and with limited technical means.

taken by Europeans, who shot, as it were, through an Occidental lens. In that regard the Haybi collection, wide-ranging in subject matter and following the inquisitive gaze of one of its own, offers a fresh and authentic look at this unique Mizrachi Jewish community in its waning moments. Numbering some 55,000 in Haybi's day, today it is estimated at no more than 200.

Forced to circumvent the government ban, Haybi still managed to cover a great deal of ground. In one photograph furtively shot from a window we glimpse the procession of the Yemenite king on its way to prayers. The procession is caught as it passes through the Jewish quarter, with its mandatory low, unadorned walls contrasting with the high, ornate buildings of the Muslim neighborhood document-

ed in other photos. It is this documentary impulse, coupled with an intuitive and idiosyncratic eye, that mark Haybi as a gifted and important photographer.

In 1922, four years after the Zaydi dynasty known for its long legacy of anti-Jewish edicts resumed the



Rabbi Yihye Ghiyath.

throne, the government of Yemen reintroduced the medieval Islamic law requiring Jewish orphans under age 12 to be forcibly converted to Islam (*gezeirat ha-yitomim*). Haybi captures one such unfortunate child, earlocks shorn, surrounded by his Muslim guards. (Ironically, the traditional Jewish practice of wearing earlocks, or *pe'ot*, was forced upon Jewish men as an act of humiliation, because they were regarded as effeminate.)

In another, Jewish men are seen engaged in the demeaning task of disposing of animal carcasses outside the city walls. Vultures crowd the foreground of the picture frame, flapping their wings and kicking up the dust, adding to the sense of filth and abasement. In a kind of topographical palimpsest that may have been a tribute to the community's tragic past, Haybi even photographed the dry Al-Sayileh riverbed where Sana'a's Jews lived until their expulsion in 1679. Upon their return a year later they were confined to a swampy area of the city where they constructed the Jewish ghetto.

In other photos, though, the proud traditions of the community are on display. His "Interior of the Al-Kissar Synagogue" showcases the ornate, silver filigreed Torah case. Barred from decorating building exteriors, the considerable artistry of Yemenite Jewry was devoted to ritual objects. Shooting indoors using available light at a slow shutter speed, Haybi reveals his gifts as a cameraman working under difficult conditions and with limited technical means. Focus falls away centrifugally from the foreground and center given the narrow depth of field, but the Torah, at the precise center of the picture frame, can be seen in all its glorious detail.

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Left: Haybi and an Arab cook pose with a poster of Mussolini. Above: The court jester sitting on the imam's throne. (Photographs by Yihye Haybi, courtesy of the Yihye Haybi Collection, Isidore and Anne Falk Information Center for Judaica and Jewish Ethnography, The Israel Museum, Jerusalem.)

With no photographic tradition to refer to, Haybi instinctively grasped how best to position his subjects. The great sage and healer, Rabbi Yihye Ghyath, is posed against a dark curtain wrapped in the light-colored Western-style *tallit* introduced to Yemen in the early 20th century, an open Talmud resting on a stave of rough wood before him. The spare and simple props effectively guide the viewer's eye to the rabbi's face and hands. It is a beautiful and stark representation of the man, conveying at a glance his intelligence, gentleness, and authority.

A portrait of the Italian doctors and engineers playing cards is composed as casually as the game they're enjoying, but to artful effect. Grouped loosely around a table, one is wearing what appear to be lounge pajamas, another has a cigarette dangling from his lips, and the third slouches, gazing at the camera out of the corner of his eye. Only the armed and turbaned Yemenite guard at their feet sits upright facing the camera, gazing intently, a swarthy, formal contrast to the white-shirted, light-skinned, blasé Europeans.

As his reputation grew, local Jews started enlisting Haybi for family portraits, eager to send pictures to their relatives in Palestine, to which a trickle of Jews had been immigrating since the late 19th century. The wealthy extended Arussi family is formally posed in their upper courtyard, a space typical to Jewish homes and a favorite setting of Haybi's because the exterior light was ample and it was free from prying eyes. The elaborate and exotic hair-covering of the girls and women, the males posing in their *tallitot*, and the amulet-laden children with painted faces to ward off the evil eye remind us that this was a deeply superstitious and traditional society.

Nonetheless, it's shocking to see a wedding picture featuring a newly married 10-year-old bride, though child brides were not uncommon. Shot inside an elegant home, soft sunlight bathing the

background, Haybi achieves a remarkable range of focus despite the limited light. The gazes of the groom and other guests are eager and curious as they stare into the unfamiliar apparatus. Not so, the

frightened and bewildered look of the little bride. Haybi shot a fair number of Sana'a's weddings, though never the ceremony itself, which would have been considered an invitation to the evil

eye. We see Haybi posing his already-married sister in her ornamental bridal dress in a picture that has become somewhat iconic, given Sana'a's renown for its distinctive and highly elaborate bridal wear. Another more spontaneous picture of a giggling bride with her friends in an inner courtyard captures a wonderfully carefree and rare moment since marriage was considered a very solemn affair—particularly for the bride.

The authorities turned a blind eye to Haybi's Jewish and European portraits, but opportunity and daring drove him to recruit members of the Muslim upper classes to sit for him as well. Sent frequently by his Italian employers to the homes of the royals and nobles whom they treated, his photographic instincts proved equally canny with these subjects. He poses two child princes in highly ornate dress side by side in a garden, every detail of their sumptuous brocade outfits in crisp focus down to the Arabic calligraphy



The groom, Shmuel Shiryan, poses between his father and his 10-year-old bride, who wears the festive outfit of Sana'ani married women.



A smiling Jewish bride, right, in full wedding attire.

on their caps and the ornamented daggers in their belts, as befitted their rank.

Drawn to secular public occasions as well, Haybi was careful to shoot those events surreptitiously so the authorities would remain ignorant of his activities. He would have achieved a photojournalistic coup when he captured the moment a saber descended to behead a convicted criminal at a public execution. But shot on the sly, the grainy photo locates the central event in the lower right-hand



Two child princes wearing the regal attire attesting to their high rank.



Doctors and engineers from the Italian delegation at leisure, accompanied by their Yemenite attendant.

corner while most of the picture frame is filled with spectators. Nevertheless, Haybi can be playful even when taking extraordinary chances. He can't resist snapping a picture of the king's court jester, for example, plunked down irreverently on his master's throne, surrounded by his cronies.

Given the span of history covered by the exhibit, it is unsettling to see only one photograph that indirectly conjures up the shadow of events in the Jewish communities of Europe at this time, half a world away. Suggesting the insularity of the Yemenite Jewish community, it depicts a smiling Haybi, earlocks tucked, and the Muslim cook at the

clinic holding up a framed poster of Mussolini—a favorite of their Italian employers.

In 1943 Yemen's Jewish community finally was able to procure an official photography permit for Haybi. Ester Muchawsky-Schnapper speculates that his work was already beginning to be threatened by the authorities and an official permit seemed prudent. But only a year later anti-Jewish outbreaks had increased in frequency and intensity, and Haybi fled Yemen, making aliyah with his family.

In Palestine Haybi's fate was typical of the multitudes of Yemenite Jews who followed him a few years later in Operation Magic Carpet, a rescue effort following pogroms in Yemen that brought virtually the entire remaining Yemenite Jewish community to the newly established state of Israel. After a few months in a tent camp, he was given temporary agricultural work before finding permanent employment in a laundry in Ra'anana. A photograph of the Haybi family in Western clothes taken a few years after they immigrated to Israel shows the radical cultural change they have undergone. The air of self-assurance so dominant in self-portraits Haybi snapped in Yemen only a decade earlier is gone; he appears shrunken and diffident.

Yihye Haybi continued to take pictures in Israel, but he was no longer the sole community photographer at the crossroads of overlapping cultures. Hoping to publish his trove of pictures once he became a pensioner, he died of a heart attack only a month after his retirement, at the age of 66. His widow, Rumiye, eventually succeeded in publishing his life's work from which the priceless photographs of this exhibit and book were drawn. We owe her a debt of gratitude.



Haybi, his wife, Rumiye, and their children in British Mandate Palestine, ca. mid-1940s.

*Toby Perl Freilich is a film-maker and writer based in Jerusalem and New York. Her most recent film is *Inventing Our Life: The Kibbutz Experiment*. She is currently at work on a documentary about the late New York senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan.*

Shaking Up Israel's Kosher Certification System

BY TIMOTHY D. LYTTON AND MOTTI TALIAS

After graduating from Brandeis in the mid-1970s, Ilana Raskin moved to Jerusalem and got a master's degree in counseling. When she grew bored with social work, she began taking belly-dancing lessons from a friend in Tel Aviv and developed a successful second career dancing at parties, weddings, and bar mitzvahs. Then, suddenly, in 1988, her business took a downturn.

When Raskin asked restaurant and banquet hall owners what had changed, they explained that Jerusalem's religious council disapproved of belly dancing and had threatened to revoke their kosher certification. One owner showed her a letter from the council containing new guidelines prohibiting owners from "arranging or permitting immodest performances" on their premises. Raskin filed a lawsuit against the council, alleging that its kosher certification authority extended only to the food under its supervision. The council's no-belly-dancing policy was, she told *The New York Times*, "just one more area where they want to exercise control and their way of thinking on people." Raskin's lawyers argued that "Eastern-style dancing may not be to the rabbis' taste, but there is no connection between it and the *kashrut* of the food served in banquet halls."

In a landmark 1989 decision, the Supreme Court of Israel ruled in favor of Raskin. The court held that religious officials' authority to impose kosher certification standards under Israel's kosher fraud law is limited by the law's purpose, which is to protect consumers. Restrictions on the style of entertainment in a restaurant or banquet hall are unrelated to preventing fraud, said the court. The religious council had asserted that immodest performances interfered with proper kosher supervision, because they precluded the presence of an inspector during the show, but the court rejected this argument, pointing out that entertainment does not interfere with supervision of food preparation before the show, and that it would be possible to suspend food service during the performance rather than ban the show altogether.

The Raskin case exposed how government involvement in Israel's kosher certification system fuels dissatisfaction across the religious spectrum. Israeli law makes it a crime to sell food as kosher without government certification, and government agencies—like Jerusalem's religious council—set mandatory minimum standards for kosher certification. This leaves those who wish to observe less stringent standards limited options: They can resentfully accept the official standard, file a lawsuit to overturn the standard, or ignore the standard and seek illegal private certification—all of which, over time, erode consumer confidence in the system.

Moreover, like other government regulatory agencies, religious councils are subject to judicial oversight to make sure that they do not exceed their statutory authority. In the Raskin case, the court believed that the religious council had overstepped its authority, and the court replaced a rabbinic ruling

with a standard imposed by a secular court. Such decisions undermine rabbinic authority and degrade the religious integrity of official kosher standards. This is one reason many kosher-observant consumers consider government standards inadequate and rely instead on stricter private standards, which they view as more authentic

Today, 25 years after the Raskin affair, Israel's government-run kosher supervision system is in crisis. In addition to widespread dissatisfaction with government standards, revelations of ineffectiveness and corruption have fueled calls for reform, the implications of which extend far beyond dietary restrictions. Competing proposals for how to restore public confidence in the system are now at the center of larger debates about religious and economic liberalization. Kosher reform raises deep questions about the country's long-standing commitments to a strong role for the state in religious matters and economic regulation.



Ilana Raskin, Jerusalem, 1989. (Courtesy of Associated Press.)

Israel's chief rabbinate consists of a rotating presidency between the Ashkenazi and Sephardi chief rabbis who supervise a chief rabbinate council and a network of local chief rabbis. It serves as the ultimate authority on matters of Jewish law, including kosher certification. The Ministry of Religious Services, presided over by a cabinet minister, appoints and partially funds municipal and regional religious councils, which administer kosher certification locally. A restaurant or banquet hall seeking kosher certification must apply to its local religious council. The council sends a staff member to conduct an initial inspection of the applicant's facility. If the council approves, it refers the application to the local chief rabbi, who formally grants certification by signing a certificate. The council then assigns a qualified inspector to provide ongoing supervision. These kosher inspectors must pass a test administered by the chief rabbinate. The certified business pays an annual fee to the council to maintain its certification. Fees to the council range from \$100 for a small restaurant to \$3,500 for a large hotel. In addition, the business pays the inspector an hourly wage set by the chief rabbinate of approximately \$10.50.

But, as government audits, public commissions, and ongoing press coverage have shown, there are problems. To begin with, since kosher inspectors are paid directly by the restaurants and banquet halls that they supervise, the inspectors have a conflict of interest. A business owner who isn't happy with an inspector can request a different one. Thus, inspectors have an incentive not to be too rigorous for fear that the business owner will replace them.

Another problem is absenteeism. In May and June 2007, Israel's state comptroller made unannounced visits to 54 businesses under the supervision of Jerusalem's religious council. During morning hours, investigators found inspectors present in only six locations; in the afternoon, they found none at all. The comptroller's report also noted a general lack of documentation, such as timesheets for inspectors and inspection reports. Private complaints and press accounts of kosher inspectors who show up infrequently (or not at all) are, in fact, common. One business owner quoted in *Haaretz* described his inspector as coming "to the restaurant daily, sometimes every two days. When his wife's father died, he sat shiva and didn't come all week. Whenever he did arrive, he'd come for exactly 40 seconds. He'd come, say good morning, go to the drawer, check the invoices, and leave." Rabbi Shimon Biton, a whistle-blower who formerly served as chairman of the Petah Tikva religious council, has also recently detailed allegations of nepotism in the employment of kosher inspectors and described cases of inspectors drawing multiple salaries by holding several supervisory jobs simultaneously while working at none of them.

A third problem is lack of transparency. Standards and policies—like the Jerusalem religious council's anti-belly-dancing "guidelines"—are frequently not published or part of any public record. Moreover, local variation between religious councils is common. For example, a chain restaurant can get kosher certification in one municipality but be denied in another. This exacerbates a perception that rules are arbitrary or, worse, manipulated to favor some and disadvantage others. It has also recently been reported that religious councils use this lack of transparency to hide anti-competitive practices

and other forms of corruption. In February, *Ha'aretz* published allegations that Be'er Sheva's chief rabbi, Yehuda Deri, who is the brother of Shas party chairman and Knesset member Aryeh Deri, controls Be'er Sheva's kosher beef business by conditioning certification on wholesalers' willingness to sell their products only in retail stores where he directs them to be sold. According to a beef producer in Haifa quoted by *Ha'aretz*, "They don't want to let me in Be'er Sheva. That's how it is. The rabbinate determines which meat will be sold in which city, and in Be'er Sheva, the largest city in the south, there is Deri who decided that he's not prepared to receive meat from my slaughterhouse because he has enough."

A police investigation of Rabbi Avraham Yosef—chief rabbi of Holon and son of the renowned former chief rabbi and spiritual leader of the Shas

other products certified by a religious court—*Beit Yosef*—owned by the Yosef family and run by his younger brother Moshe. It was further reported that Shas representatives on local religious councils threatened to revoke the kosher certification of supermarkets that refused to give priority to a particular *Beit Yosef*-certified brand of meat—which costs 30 percent more than competing brands.

Israeli Minister of Religious Services Naftali Bennett has announced efforts to address these problems through a series of reforms that are part

Naftali Bennett's push for kosher reform is part of a larger effort to move Israel towards a new, market-oriented philosophy.



Rabbi Avraham Yosef, Jerusalem 2013. (Photo by Flash90.)

of a larger "revolution in religious services" that he announced upon taking office in 2013. Bennett proposes to improve oversight by outsourcing management of kosher inspectors to private corporations that will administer uniform salary and benefits arrangements, monitor quality control of inspection services, and address concerns raised by business owners. The corporations would work under contract with local religious councils. This public-private partnership would, according to Bennett, reduce inspectors' conflicts of interest and absenteeism by putting corporations working for local religious councils in charge of paying and supervising them.

In order to promote greater uniformity while at the same time accommodating different consumer preferences, Bennett proposes clearer guidelines that would define three levels of government kosher certification: kosher (the current standard), kosher *mehadrin* ("special"), and kosher *lemehadrin min*

sprinkling, that is trying to create some kind of alternative kashrut [which] can't replace the chief rabbin-ate's kashrut." He pledged to "enforce the law by which the state is the one to issue kashrut certificates . . . and those who do not obey should be punished."

The ministry's crackdown does not include all forms of private kosher certification. Israeli law allows for private certification, provided that it is *in addition* to government certification. The most common such certification is issued by ultra-Orthodox organizations known by the generic name BADATZ—an acronym that stands for *beit din tzedek*, meaning "court of justice," and dates back to before the establishment of the state. Originally, a single certification issued by the Jerusalem-based ultra-Orthodox communal organization, *Edah Ha-haredit*, there are, today, 24 independent BADATZ certifications. Overlapping membership in religious councils and BADATZ organizations is common and, in some localities, they are one and the same. They frequently employ the same inspectors.

The Ministry's beef is with businesses that adopt private certification *instead* of government certification. Ben-Dahan's tough rhetoric notwithstanding, however, the government has failed to crack down on independent kosher certifiers. For years, government authorities have turned a blind eye to businesses in ultra-Orthodox communities, like Jerusalem's Meah Shearim neighborhood, that employ private certification by community rabbis. In 2012, it appeared as if things were about to change. In that year, the Jerusalem religious council fined five restaurant owners for representing their food as kosher without government certification. The owners had stated publicly that they were unhappy with government certification and would not obtain it. When they contested the fines—which ranged between \$270 and \$500—the council, surprisingly, did not pursue the matter.

Aaron Leibowitz, an American-born rabbi in Jerusalem who has been a vocal critic of government certification and a prominent organizer in the growing movement for private certification, speculates that the government is afraid that if it pushes the issue in the secular court system, it could lose a lot more than particular cases. According to Leibowitz, a secular judge might require the government to prove not merely that the restaurants defrauded the public by representing their food as kosher without government certification, but also that the food itself was not kosher, which would be more difficult. It would also



From left: Rabbi Eli Ben-Dahan, Israel's Deputy Minister of Religious Affairs; Naftali Bennett, Minister of Religious Services; and Chief Rabbi David Lau at a press conference, February 2014. The banner behind them reads "The Revolution in Religious Services." (Photo by Yonatan Sindel/Flash90.)

party, the late Rav Ovadia Yosef—found sufficient evidence of "extortion, fraud, and breach of trust" to recommend criminal prosecution. The investigation found that Avraham Yosef required businesses seeking *mehadrin* kosher certification—a stricter level of private certification—to purchase meat and

hamehadrin ("extra special"). Local chief rabbis who depart from these guidelines would be disciplined or replaced. Bennett hopes to increase transparency by developing a public website that would provide information about each certified business and alert consumers to any problems.

open the door to the defense that the food in question was, in fact, kosher even without government certification, effectively undoing the government's exclusive certification authority.

For the last several years, a restaurant in Tiberias has openly defied the chief rabbinate and the kosher fraud law by displaying a certificate in its front window that states in Hebrew *Ba-hashgacha shel Ha-kadosh Baruch Hu*—"Under the Supervision of the Holy One, Blessed Be He." Although not every kosher rebel appeals to such a high authority, a growing number of restaurant owners and activists—primarily in Jerusalem—have begun developing private alternatives to government kosher certification. In October 2012, they established a Facebook page called "Kosher without a Certificate" to advertise restaurants that wish to represent their food as kosher without government certification. They followed with a highly publicized demonstration to protest alleged absenteeism and corruption in government kosher supervision. In a play on words based on the popular Israeli song "*Mashiach Lo Ba*"—"the Messiah is not coming"—they called the event *Mashgiach Lo Ba*—"the kosher inspector is not coming."

Proposals for reform of Israel's kosher certification system fall along a spectrum. Radical reformers call for drastically reducing government involvement and allowing a free market in private certification. Uri Regev, a Reform rabbi who heads

organizations to issue kosher certification. Under this proposal, the state would support non-Orthodox kosher certification organizations, which could employ standards "in accordance with their customs," provided that they submit their standards in writing and that their certificates and symbols are distinguishable. By contrast, the Ministry of Religious Services' proposals preserve the government's monopoly over kosher certification while seeking to make its administration more efficient and accountable. When compared to more radical proposals, Bennett's reforms look less like a "revolution" than a consolidation of government power over kosher certification.

Government reformers like Bennett and Ben-Dahan fear that privatization of kosher certification would result in anarchy and widespread consumer fraud. But the example of the U.S. kosher certification system suggests otherwise. In the United States, a network of over 300 private certification agencies reliably ensures the kosher status of more than 135,000 retail products manufactured by some 10,000 companies. The system also provides certification to thousands of food service operations—such as restaurants, caterers, and hospitals—throughout the United States. Competition between agencies, which depend upon their good reputation among consumers and the quality of their service to clients to remain in business, makes the agencies eager to avoid mistakes and misconduct before they happen and to report them promptly when they do

occur. Moreover, agencies are quick to publicize the problems of rival agencies. Despite the competition, American kosher certification agencies are also highly interdependent—certifiers of finished products or food service operations rely on other agencies' certification of ingredients further upstream in the production chain—which leads them to closely scrutinize each other's operations, creating a network of interagency oversight.

The United States government's role in all of this is minimal. It simply provides civil laws and court systems that make it possible for private kosher certification

agencies to make binding contracts with their clients and pursue trademark claims against fraudulent use of their certification symbols. In rare cases of intentional misconduct by uncooperative companies, state prosecutors can subpoena information, order the seizure of goods, and impose criminal sanctions. In addition, courts can award compensation to consumers who fall victim to fraud.

The contrast between the Israeli and U.S. systems is highlighted by the American analog to the belly-dancing battle in Jerusalem. In 1990, a year after the Raskin decision, controversy erupted over mixed dancing during evening cruises on the Hudson River on a ship called the "Glatt Yacht." A rabbi from the private agency certifying the ship's food insisted, "When we certify an establishment as kosher, it must

meet all of the regulations of Jewish law, including the entertainment." Mixed dancing was not permissible. "The Rabbi should be in the kitchen," an outraged passenger who was asked to stop dancing told *The New York Times*. When the ship owner refused to prohibit dancing, the agency withdrew its certification. Instead of giving in, or filing a lawsuit, or engaging in civil disobedience—the options available to an Israeli business owner in the same position—he simply obtained the services of an alternative agency with standards more to his liking. While the U.S. kosher certification system is not perfect, its accommodation of diverse consumer preferences has not resulted in anarchy or rampant fraud.

There is more at stake here than consumer protection. Naftali Bennett's push for kosher reform is part of a larger effort to move Israel away from an old, socialist, command-and-control approach to government regulation towards a new, market-oriented philosophy. Outsourcing government oversight to private corporations and relying more heavily on information disclosure to consumers are standard neo-liberal regulatory reforms. Given Prime Minister Netanyahu's decades-long ambition to promote privatization and limit government regulation of the Israeli economy, as well as Bennett's background as a very successful high-tech entrepreneur in New York City, this shift in regulatory approach is not surprising.

Nonetheless, Bennett has emphatically rejected the option to privatize kosher certification completely. In addition to being partial to neo-liberal regulatory philosophy, he is also committed to a religious ideology that is more modern and nationalistic than that of the ultra-Orthodox establishment, which dominates public religious institutions like the chief rabbinate and has often played a pivotal role in governing coalition politics. Bennett's Bayit Yehudi (Jewish Home) religious Zionist political party outflanked the ultra-Orthodox parties in forming a government coalition with Netanyahu's Likud party following the 2013 elections. Shortly thereafter, Bennett's forces lost a bruising contest for the chief rabbinate, which was once again captured by the ultra-Orthodox camp. As Minister of Religious Services, Bennett is engaged not only in regulatory reform but also a power struggle against the ultra-Orthodox establishment.

A neo-liberal when it comes to economic regulation, Bennett is a supporter of established religion, and his party has been steadfast advocating reforms that will "strengthen the state kashrut system." Whether this hybrid—or, from a classical liberal perspective, schizophrenic—approach will restore confidence in Israel's kosher certification system remains to be seen. Its success in kosher reform may prove to be a testing ground for Israel's attempt to reconcile neo-liberal economic policy with established religion.



A popular Jerusalem restaurant under illegal private kosher certification. (Photo courtesy of Timothy Lytton.)

Hiddush—an organization that advocates religious pluralism—insists that "the institution of the Rabbinate should be eliminated." Regev recommends a minimal role for government as a regulator of private certification—the government would accredit private agencies and merely require them to "declare their policies and abide by them."

Ruth Gavison, a law professor and leading civil rights authority, and Yaacov Medan, an Orthodox rabbi and prominent figure in the yeshiva world, published a *Foundation for a New Covenant among Jews in Matters of Religion and State in Israel* in 2003 under the auspices of the Avi Chai Foundation and The Israel Democracy Institute, in which they advocate a national kosher authority that would set minimum standards and approve and fund private

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Sephardi Lives: From Ottoman Salonica to Rosario, Argentina

BY SARAH ABREVAYA STEIN AND JULIA PHILLIPS COHEN

In their new anthology, *Sephardi Lives: A Documentary History, 1700–1950* (Stanford University Press, 2014), Professors Julia Phillips Cohen and Sarah Abrevaya Stein present a vivid picture of the diverse ways in which the Jews residing in (and migrating from) what they call the “Judeo-Spanish heartland of Southeastern Europe, Anatolia, and the Levant” adjusted to the profound changes of their eras. Drawing on memoirs, newspapers, and a variety of archival sources written in 15 different languages, they give us a broad overview of a world that is in danger of being forgotten. From this rich collection we have selected a few documents that are particularly striking. Two letters published in the French newspaper *Journal de Salonique* in 1910, shortly after the Ottoman Parliament extended mandatory military service for the first time to non-Muslim minorities, demonstrate the enthusiasm felt by some Ottoman Jews for this reform. One wonders whether their enthusiasm—or indeed they themselves—survived the Italo-Turkish War (1911–1912), the Balkan Wars (1912 and 1913), the First World War (1914–1918), and World War II (1939–1945). Our next selection is an editorial from the Ladino newspaper *La Epoka* of Salonica, which denounces two young Jewish women for engaging in artistic activity that was considered disreputable and religiously impermissible, but was condoned, outrageously enough, by their mothers. The last document reflects the fact that large numbers of Jews emigrated from the Ottoman Empire around this time, whether they did so in order to avoid getting killed in battle, to sing freely, or for other reasons. They headed not only for the United States, Western Europe, and parts of Africa, but also for remote corners of South America. It was from a Jewish agricultural colony established in Argentina by the Jewish Colonization Association that the recent emigré David Pisanté wrote home to the chief rabbi of Istanbul for help in dealing with a question of observance unique to the Southern Hemisphere.

Letters from Jewish Conscripts to the Ottoman Army

“*Lettres des conscrits*,” *Journal de Salonique*, March 24, 1910, translated from French by Alma Rachel Heckman

I was on leave last Saturday so I took a boat ride. Seeing a vendor on the bridge, I bought the *Osmanischer Lloyd* from him and began to read. At the same time a group of travelers circled around me. They found it strange that a simple khaki [soldier] would know how to read, and a Western language at that.

The Constantinopolitans [Istanbulites] didn’t take long to understand that they were in the presence of a recruit from the new regime, and they overwhelmed me with questions. The word Salonica has the power to fascinate all these good people, who believe our city to be akin to Paris or New York . . .

My superior officer had me go every day to the workshops of the Oriental Railroad. All the khakis that know a trade are put to work and receive a daily salary of three to five piastres.

Military life, such as we live it, is a dream. If it goes on this way, we will return home big and fat, healthy in body and spirit, and bearing fond memories of the barracks . . .

Isaac Montequio

We could not be more satisfied with our lives as soldiers in the Azap Kapı barracks. Last Saturday I received permission to stroll through the neighborhood, which is densely populated by Jews. Upon recognizing me my coreligionists welcomed me warmly and insisted that I join them in their homes.

In the one dormitory we are seven Greeks, two

Bulgarians, two Jews and thirty-seven Muslims. We live together like true brothers. But there is a downside: during meals the tables are set with [non-kosher] bowls of soup, including vegetables and rice. Our companions from the countryside delight in it. For us [Jews], it is still very difficult to [bring ourselves to] eat it. . . . If the government could find a solution to the question of food, I am convinced that many Jews would not only perform their service joyfully but that others would ask to register as volunteers.

At night in the dormitory a sergeant stands guard, and every time he sees a soldier who is not

well covered, he tucks him in with care. The minister has ordered beds and new blankets.

I must also take advantage of this opportunity to ask you to thank the valiant members of the Club des Intimes through the pages of *La Epoka*. We are indebted to them for having undertaken their work armed with superhuman courage. The beautiful and unforgettable celebrations that the Club des Intimes organized on our behalf remain engraved in our hearts and will never be erased . . .

Abram Aruh



Roza Eskenazi, right, performing in a café, ca. 1940.

A Newspaper in Salonica Condemns Women’s Singing in Cafés on the Sabbath

“*El repozo de Shabat*,” *La Epoka*, August 10, 1900, translated from the Ladino by Julia Phillips Cohen

Along the quay, near the White Tower, there is a café where two young Jewish girls from Salonica sing every day, including Shabbat. In truth we do not find their behavior as low as that of other young women, since [in this case] it is driven by pure necessity. What we cannot tolerate is the presence of their mothers in their *kofyas*, *antares*, and *devantales* [traditional Sephardic women’s clothing] at their daughters’ concerts.

Let us explain our position. It is not enough that these women, who call themselves Jews, take great pleasure in permitting their daughters’ shameful performances. By asking them to work on Shabbat they also commit a thousand base deeds that bring no honor whatsoever to our nation [the Jews].

We felt it was our duty to call the attention of the

authorities to this matter. We ask that they do everything in their power to protect us from condemnation. We have been informed that there exists a group of young men willing to present themselves to the chief rabbinate in order to bring forward further information about this issue so as to prevent a great desecration of God's name and of the name of our people.

How Should One Pray South of the Equator? Argentine Immigrants Seek Rabbinic Judgment from Istanbul

Letter from David Pisanté in Rosario to Haim Nahum in Istanbul, June 16, 1914, from *The Central Archives for the History of the Jewish People* (Jerusalem), translated from Spanish by Devi Mays

Rosario, Argentina, June 16, 1914

Your Eminence, Permit me to bother you in the name of the Jewish collective of Rosario, because of a divergence of opinion arising between us, about which we desire your guidance. I am referring to a verse in our daily prayers, "Who causes the wind to blow and the rain and the dew to fall."

First I have the duty to remind you, as you will already know, that the seasons in South America are the opposite of those of Europe; that is to say that from Passover to Sukkot it is autumn and winter, and from Sukkot to Passover it is spring and summer. As the abovementioned verse refers to the seasons from Passover to Sukkot, it is our obligation to read the prayer inversely.

Permit me to express the reasons that are invoked in opinions contrary to the abovementioned one. Some men say that, as we are Europeans who have always maintained the conviction of returning to our maternal land and who have not encountered upon our arrival in the Republic of Argentina any established community of Argentine coreligionists, and because we ourselves have been the founders of this community, we must follow the European custom.

The answer to these men is that it is not possible to ask Providence for the dew and rain of the summer when here it is wintertime, just as one cannot ask for the contrary.

One of our Arab coreligionists from Beirut tells me that we must conform to the custom of those from Jerusalem, as we are always aspiring to the Promised Land, and this is proved by our motto, which we never forget and which we repeat in every circumstance, "If I forget you, O Jerusalem, let my right hand wither . . . "Next Year in Jerusalem" . . .

I had to tell this man that this has nothing to do with history and that it pertains only to the divisions of the seasons. Each person must pray according to the zone in which he lives.

The third group invokes the reasoning that the holidays of Passover and Sukkot serve as the point

of departure for these verses. The first heralds the summer and the second, the winter, and we must conform ourselves to them.

My response to them as well was that this is in conformity with the European seasons and not with the South American ones, and that doing as these men say would cause harm to our coreligionists, who are mostly grain traders, as well as to those of diverse nationalities who find themselves in Latin America. As a result, while we maintain legitimate aspirations toward the state of our birth as well as toward our Promised Land, as long as we find ourselves in the Argentine Republic, we should ask that God give his natural gifts according to the South American seasons rather than the European ones.

Should it please your Eminence to deign to honor me with an answer to the address indicated, I offer the illustrious representative of our creed my highest consideration.

Your faithful servant,
David Pisanté

Sarah Abrevaya Stein is professor of history and Maurice Amado Chair in Sephardic Studies at UCLA. Her books include Saharan Jews and the Fate of French Algeria (University of Chicago Press) and Plumes: Ostrich Feathers, Jews, and a Lost World of Global Commerce (Yale University Press).

Julia Phillips Cohen is assistant professor of Jewish studies and history at Vanderbilt University. She is the author of Becoming Ottomans: Sephardi Jews and Imperial Citizenship in the Modern Era (Oxford University Press).



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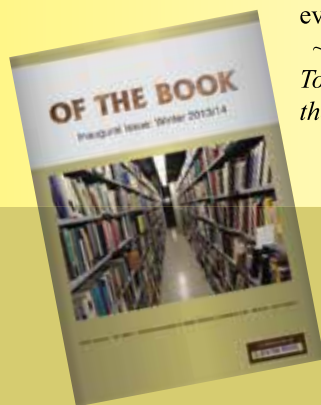
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Killer Backdrop: A Response

BY ERIKA DREIFUS

As an avid reader of novels and short stories, and as the author of a story collection myself, I am always pleased to see fiction discussed within the *JRB*'s pages. But in the case of Amy Newman Smith's "Killer Backdrop" (Summer 2014), my initial pleasure was tempered by an increasing sense of discomfort.

In part, the trouble stemmed from my difficulty understanding the exact focus of Ms. Smith's opprobrium. Does she object to all "new works of Holocaust fiction" because they are not nonfiction? Fair enough. Some people don't ascribe any value to Holocaust-related fiction; I am not among them. But are there *any* examples of Holocaust-related fiction that might meet with Ms. Smith's approval? Novels by the late Arnošt Lustig? Cynthia Ozick's now-classic "The Shawl"?

Or is Ms. Smith in fact targeting only what she calls "Holocaust genre fiction," with an apparent emphasis on romance? If so, how are readers to understand such distinctions? How does Ms. Smith do so? Should readers assume, for example, that all of the books cited within Ms. Smith's piece, as well as those pictured in the photograph that accompanies it, represent examples of "Holocaust genre fiction"? As it happens, the two groups of books—those depicted in the photo and those mentioned in the article text—overlap only partially. Moreover, and mindful of both the oft-repeated notion that "all stories are love stories" and the perennial arguments within communities of writers and readers regarding the labels of "literary," "commercial," and "genre" fiction, I suspect that some of these books' publishers would be surprised to find that their titles are considered anything other than the "higher-end" sort to which Ms. Smith alludes.

My dismay and confusion increased when I reached the paragraph devoted to Rhidian Brook's *The Aftermath*. First, I wouldn't classify this novel as "Holocaust fiction," although it does an admirable

job conveying a sense of *postwar* Hamburg. In fact, as I suggested in a review for *The Washington Post* last year, the book says remarkably little about the Holocaust or its victims. Perhaps it may be worth considering that although "Holocaust fiction" may well belong under the umbrella of "World War II fiction," not every novel about the war in Europe (or, again, in the case of *The Aftermath*, the postwar period) is "about" the Holocaust. On a more technical point, and contrary to the implication within Ms. Smith's essay, Knopf published this book in the United States a year ago; its inclusion in the Knopf/Vintage catalog for fall 2014 is likely due to the release of a subsequent paperback edition.

I have read several of the books mentioned in or pictured alongside Ms. Smith's essay. In some cases, I'm no more likely to champion them than she appears to be. But my reasons are less concerned with the books' subject matter than with problems of literary skill and technique. Perhaps that is why as I read Ms. Smith's essay I kept thinking of Henry James's famous dictum in "The Art of Fiction":

We must grant the artist his subject, his idea, his *donnée*: our criticism is applied only to what he makes of it. Naturally I do not mean that we are bound to like it or find it interesting: in case we do not our course is perfectly simple—to let it alone. We may believe that of a certain idea even the most sincere novelist can make nothing at all, and the event may perfectly justify our belief; but the failure will have been a failure to execute, and it is in the execution that the fatal weakness is recorded.

One last source of distress: The end of Ms. Smith's piece suggests that many, if not all authors of Holocaust-related fiction are rather vile people:

If you write a novel set in the Holocaust, if you promote it, blurb it, or shill for it, and you do not know how children spent their last moments in Treblinka, or other equally terrible facts, then you should stop now. If you do know and nonetheless continue with your work, then there is probably little any of us can say.

That is a searing indictment, and it is starkly at odds with my impression of many fiction writers whose work reflects an engagement with the subject (which is often part of their own family history).

Of course, the fiction writer whose experience I know most intimately is me. My story collection, *Quiet Americans*, is inspired largely by the experiences and histories of my paternal grandparents, German Jews who fled to the United States in the late 1930s, and by my reactions to this familial legacy. The stories stretch in time and place from Imperial Germany to 21st-century New York. Is mine a book of "Holocaust fiction"? Partly. Has my lifetime of reading survivor testimonies and scholarly histories (in addition to novels and short stories) made my writing less "tone-deaf" than it might otherwise have been? I hope so. Have I been "shilling" when publicizing and promoting the book? I hope not. Perhaps the fact that I've been donating portions of any proceeds from book sales to The Blue Card may inoculate me against that particular criticism.

I look forward to continuing to read incisive reviews and essays on fiction in the *JRB* for a long time to come. And I'll continue to believe that Holocaust-related fiction can merit such attention.

Erika Dreifus is the author of Quiet Americans: Stories (Last Light Studio).

Killer Backdrop: A Rejoinder

BY AMY NEWMAN SMITH

There are, of course, excellent works of fiction about the Holocaust and the Nazi era. The distinction I would draw, to answer Ms. Dreifus' question, is simple: "is the author aiming at careful reconstruction or crass exploitation?"

Like Ms. Dreifus (and Henry James) I am concerned with matters of literary skill and technique. I agree with James wholeheartedly when he writes in "The Art of Fiction" (from the same paragraph Ms. Dreifus quotes), "I can think of no obligation to which the 'romancer' would not be held equally with the novelist; the standard of execution is equally high for each." I did not say that the events in Czechoslovakia following the Nazi invasion are inappropriate subject matter for a work of fiction. But an author who blithely portrays a German soldier carrying on an

open affair with a Jewish woman in 1938, three years after the Nuremberg Laws made such relationships illegal (as Alison Pick does in *Far to Go*), is stretching matters for the sake of salaciousness (and sales).

The Knopf catalog does indeed refer to the paperback version of Rhidian Brook's *The Aftermath*, which, while flawed, is certainly a more artfully executed example of the genre than the three books I discussed in some detail. But it is Holocaust fiction. Germany pursued the war and the Holocaust in tandem. Without the Holocaust, there is no aftermath in Hamburg, and as Ms. Dreifus noted in her own *Washington Post* review, the book does include mention both of "the concentration camps and their victims," although, in her estimation, amount or insufficiently given the book's subject matter.

Of course, serious Holocaust fiction is worthy of critical attention, including Ms. Dreifus's moving story "Homecomings" in *Quiet Americans*. But when what publishers provide are badly executed, basely commercial works of genre fiction, the criticism called for is that of moral and aesthetic condemnation. Readers will choose a limited number works about the Nazi era to read. As a person who is deeply immersed in the history of Nazi Germany and its representation, Ms. Dreifus is, I assume, as concerned as I am at the possibility that Anna Funder's *All That I Am* is all that they know.

Amy Newman Smith is the associate editor of the Jewish Review of Books.

Poland Is Not Ukraine: A Response to Konstanty Gebert's "The Ukrainian Question"

BY DOVID KATZ

Konstanty Gebert, a hero of Poland's Solidarity period and more recently of the movement to reinvigorate Jewish life in the country, presents a stark alternative in "The Ukrainian Question" (Summer 2014) that few others have dared to spell out:

Are Jewish interests and values better served by the emergence of a democratic independent state, even if it is steeped in nationalist ideology? Or are they better served by the triumph of Russian regional imperialism, even if it is tempered by a demonstrated opposition to anti-Semitism?

Many Western readers will be surprised by Gebert's formulation, but it is right on the mark and not just with respect to Ukraine. Take Belarus, which Gebert calls "a grotesque Stalinist parody of a state." There, the legacy of World War II is very much alive, starting with town-center monuments to the Red Army's defeat of the Hitlerite invaders of 1941–1944. Jewish war veterans are honored along with all the others, while the Nazis and their local collaborators in genocide continue to be held in utter contempt.

But head west across the border into Lithuania or Latvia (by the way, it's part of the new east-west "Berlin Wall," and you may be stuck for a few hours), and you are in the European Union wonderland, with English-speaking youth, every modern convenience, and plenty of cool people, young and old. You can have a great time without worrying about harassment from Soviet-style police, but what you will be told about the World War II era is disconcerting. It goes something like this:

Those were very complicated times. There were two equally evil empires, the Soviets and the Nazis, and our freedom fighters thought that if they helped the German invaders in 1941, we would get our independence back [the Baltics had been occupied by the Soviets in the summer of 1940]; we are very sorry about what happened to the Jews; our government now sponsors Yiddish concerts and we have some memorial plaques for famous Jews over there.

That, at least, is what you hear from non-Jews. Jews will tell you about the massive and voluntary collaboration of Lithuania's (or Latvia's, or Estonia's) "national heroes" in the destruction of their country's Jewish communities, starting in the hours and days after Hitler's attack on the USSR on June 22, 1941, often before the first German forces even arrived).

Poland, arguably the most successful major new EU-NATO state, is very different in this respect

from both sets of its easterly neighbors. There is an ongoing collective memory of what the Nazis did to the Polish people. For Poles, Nazis are the initial invaders who perpetrated boundless evil. Among the Balts (and others), on the other hand, they are still remembered as the "liberators" (in 1941) who brought—as a former foreign minister of Lithuania put it several years ago—"respite" from Commu-

the Soviets, for all their many crimes, left robust nations, languages, and cultures ready to join the EU and NATO not long after the fall of Communism. And never mind the moral incongruity of saying that those who liberated Auschwitz are "equal" to those who committed the genocide there. (Not many Americans know that a resolution favoring a single day to commemorate the victims of Nazism

When it comes to the basic ethical issue of how we think about the Nazis and their local reliable killers, the bad guys are the good guys and the good guys are the bad guys.

nism and whose defeat (in 1944 or 1945) signaled the return of Communist rule to their country that lasted close to half a century.

When the Baltic countries were groping their way toward European Union and NATO membership at the turn of the new century, they needed to adopt at least some measure of the Holocaust consciousness pervading the West they sought to join. So they started to equate Nazi and Soviet crimes. This tendency's constitutional document is the 2008 "Prague Declaration" initiated by the Czech government that employs the word "same" five times, including a quite incredible requirement (right out of Orwell) that "all European minds" accept the "same"ness of Nazi and Soviet crimes. Never mind that the Nazis and their local collaborators annihilated the Jewish civilization of Eastern Europe, while

and Communism was slipped under the radar into the U.S. Congress in May 2014.)

If you look at any map of Europe between the two world wars, you'll see that the western parts of today's Ukraine were then part of Poland. They are basically the territories seized by the Soviets in their invasion of eastern Poland in September 1939 that were subsequently overrun by the Nazis in June 1941 and were then recaptured and re-incorporated into the USSR in 1944 (a history similar to that of the Baltic nations). By contrast, the eastern part of today's Ukraine had been part of the new USSR since the years immediately following the Russian revolution of 1917. Many westerners are Ukrainian nationalists, for whom Ukrainian is their first language. Many easterners are primarily Russian speakers, though people throughout the



Ukrainian nationalists march to commemorate the 104th anniversary of the birth of Stepan Bandera, Kiev, January 1, 2013. (Photo courtesy of Genya Savilov/AFP/Getty Images.)

country are casually bilingual. (Russian and Ukrainian are, of course, closely related Slavic languages.)

What most in the West do not and cannot understand is what it is that Russian-speaking Ukrainians have against joining the European Union, NATO, and the U.S.-led Western alliance of our 21st century. The answer, in one word, is *nothing*. They would love to have their children grow up in a free economy with the world at their fingertips like the children of their cousins and friends in Western countries. What's the problem? In one word: (ultra)nationalism. The Aryanist-inspired racist theories of some Ukrainian nationalists give the impression that these people only want to advance ethnic Ukrainians, and that they have a particular dislike for Jews, Poles, and Russians (in any order, though the Jews have a politically symbolic significance, despite their small numbers). They want to stand with those who stood up to Hitler, not those who still regard Hitler's local accomplices as "national heroes." In nationalist parts of western Ukraine, there is much adulation of (among others) the mass murderer Stepan Bandera (1909–1959). The organizations in which he played a leading role carried out the killing of (at least) tens of thousands of Jews and Poles on the basis of eth-

nicity and in unstinting loyalty to the Nazi ideals of establishing states of exclusively ethnically pure citizens. To make a hero of Bandera is to say, without putting it in so many words, that the minorities that he helped to eradicate were comprised of disposable people.

Back in 2010, "good guy" (pro-Western) Ukrainian president Viktor Yushchenko awarded Bandera the posthumous "Hero of Ukraine" award. After the European Union and Jewish, Polish, and Russian organizations condemned this move, the "bad guy" (pro-Russian) president, Viktor Yanukovich, deposed earlier this year, saw to it in 2011 that the award was annulled on his watch. In other words, when it comes to the basic ethical issue of how we think about the Nazis and their local reliable killers, the bad guys are the good guys and the good guys are the bad guys. A question facing American foreign policy makers now is whether to forthrightly oppose attempts to sanitize the local Nazi collaborators and turn Holocaust history into a twisted tool of current anti-Russia politics.

What the newly elected president, Petro Poroshenko, will say and do about the many monuments to Bandera and other Nazi collaborators in his nation's town centers remains to be seen. Of course,

he now has a grand opportunity to show his people that they have many real heroes, from poets to artists to scientists, and to show Ukrainians what an ethical civic culture looks like, which brings us to another major point of Gebert's important article. Gebert writes:

The nations of Central and Eastern Europe are left with the unpleasant history—and heroes—that they have, and they will not reject them. One can hope, however, that they will reject some of the things they stood for.

That is fine for Poland, because that country's pantheon of national heroes does not include mass murderers of Jews (or others), even if it includes some narrow nationalists. The line which divides such figures from Nazi collaborators and outright perpetrators is one that we are morally obligated to draw. To put it differently, we have to draw the line between Poland and Ukraine.

Dovid Katz (www.dovidkatz.net), formerly a professor of Yiddish, is an independent researcher based in Vilnius, where he edits DefendingHistory.com.

What We Talk About When We Talk About Stepan Bandera: A Rejoinder to Dovid Katz

BY KONSTANTY GEBERT

Dovid Katz has had a long and distinguished career in reestablishing Jewish learning and *Yiddishkeit* in Lithuania and in fighting Shoah revisionism and denial across Eastern Europe. He deserves ample credit for both, so it is especially disappointing when he adopts, in his response to my article, the position that his—and our—enemies are his friends. "In other words," he writes, "when it comes to the basic ethical issue of how we think about the Nazis and their local reliable killers, the bad guys are the good guys and the good guys are the bad guys." Vladimir Putin, his allies in the Baltic states, and the eastern Ukrainian separatists are the "the good guys" in their rejection of an anti-Semitic Nazi collaborationist past, while the Ukrainian nationalists are "the bad guys."

It would be easy to use the shooting down of flight MH17 over Donetsk—which occurred after Katz had written his comments but before I had the chance of penning this reply—to rebut him. But even though it is all but certain that the "antifascist" separatists and their Russian patrons are guilty of this heinous crime, this does not affect Katz's main argument; easy does not necessarily mean fair.

The reason that I miss the crucial moral and political distinction between Ukrainian nationalists and Russian-supported separatists, Katz argues, is that I am blinded by the example of my own country. The Jewish gamble to support the Polish democratic na-

tionalist movement in the 1980s paid off, he suggests, because, unlike western Ukraine and the Baltic states, Poland's patriotic tradition does not include heroes who were Jew-killers. However, supporting the democratic nationalist movement in Ukraine means supporting those who, to say the least, do not mind that their heroes were, in fact, Jew-killers who collaborated with the Nazis, which should be unacceptable not only to Jews but to all decent people. The monuments erected all over Western Ukraine to Stepan Bandera, he says, prove his point.

Katz is largely right when he says that the Polish democratic tradition is far richer and more developed than that of the nations east of it. But this did not prevent monuments to decidedly unsavory characters being built after the fall of Communism. Roman Dmowski, the leader of the interwar National-Democratic Party and Poland's successful negotiator at Versailles, was a rabid anti-Semite. His monument stands next to the prime minister's office in Warsaw; it is the focal point of all extreme-right demonstrations. And Józef Kuraś, a partisan who fought the Germans during World War II and then the communists after briefly throwing in with them, is mainly remembered as killer of Slovaks and Jews on the country's southern border. His monument was unveiled by then-President Lech Kaczyński in Zakopane in 2006. Kuraś was not as bad as Stepan Bandera, who was responsible for the deaths of tens of thousands in

the Ukraine, but the line is thin.

This is not to damn Poland, but simply to indicate that countries tend to integrate their past, such as it is, into collective memory. Both the Dmowski and the Kuraś monuments have been amply criticized in Polish public debate; today, they are remembered as controversial heroes. Had they not been thus recognized, they would be remembered by many as men whose heroism was suppressed and whose memories had been trampled. This would have been less, not more, conducive to the acceptance of criticism of their actions.

Katz is wrong, however, to imply that eastern Ukrainian separatists would embrace the democratic values of the EU and membership in NATO if only the western Ukrainian fascists had not hijacked that noble cause. In a May 2014 poll, conducted by the Ukrainian company SOCIS, slightly over 50 percent of Ukrainians supported joining the EU, while 31 percent preferred Moscow's Custom Union. This is a legitimate disagreement, since EU membership will put a heavy burden on the country's economy. As for NATO, a Razumkov Centre poll in April showed only 37 percent in favor of joining, with 42 percent opposed. Who knows what the numbers are now, but it is clear that NATO membership would heighten tensions with Russia yet further. Both issues are for Ukraine to decide through its democratic institutions, not by force of arms.

It is wrong to pretend that the Ukrainian separatists are democrats-in-waiting with antifascist scruples, but it is even more wrong to paint the rest of the country as nostalgic for the far-right fascism of Stepan Bandera. In the presidential elections of May 2014, the only two candidates of whom this could be said were Dmytro Yarosh of Pravy Sektor (Right Sector) and Oleh Tyahnybok of Svoboda (Freedom). As I noted in my original article, together, the two candidates polled just 1.76 percent of the vote. This was notwithstanding all the legitimate credit their organizations had gained in the bloody defense of the Maidan in Kiev against the

The laudable antifascism of Belarus and Russia depends, in both cases, on a dictator's whim.

goons of then-President Viktor Yanukovich (who was not a “good guy” even if he did annul Bandera’s posthumous “Hero of Ukraine” award). Meanwhile, another marginal candidate, businessman Vadim Rabinovich, whose sole public salience was his presidency of the Ukrainian Jewish Parliament, scored 2.25 percent. Even if one were to assume that all Jewish voters (0.25 percent of the total electorate) chose Rabinovich (they didn’t), this would still leave 2 percent of the electorate who voted for a successful Jew, while 1.76 percent voted for candidates opposed to Jews, successful ones in particular.

All this, of course, offers no guarantee that Ukraine will emerge democratic, with a safe and thriving Jewish population. But the example of Po-



Roman Dmowski monument, Warsaw, Poland.

land—which 25 years ago enjoyed a reputation no better than that of Ukraine today—shows that it is a distinct possibility.

What are the other options? In Belarus, Katz writes Jewish veterans of World War II are honored in “town-center monuments to the Red Army’s defeat of the Hitlerite invaders of 1941–1944 . . .

while the Nazis and their local collaborators in genocide continue to be held in utter contempt.” True, but one needs to remember that these monuments first honor the Red Army’s defeat of the Polish Army in 1939, when the USSR was an ally of Hitler—and that Jewish war veterans are honored in Ukraine as well. Meanwhile, the alleged contempt in which Nazis are held in Belarus is somewhat mitigated by the occasional comments of its Stalinesque dictator, President Alexander Lukashenko. Lukashenko has said that “not everything connected with . . . Adolf Hitler, was bad. German order evolved over the centuries and under Hitler it attained its peak” (Russian television interview, November 1995). A few years ago he remarked that “Jews are not concerned for the place they live in. They have turned Bobruisk into a pigsty. Look at Israel—I was there” (Belarus State Radio, October 2007). Small wonder that levels of anti-Semitism in Belarus were, according to a 2008 European Values Study survey, higher than in Latvia, Ukraine, Russia, or Poland (but lower than in Lithuania).

Luckily, Lukashenko dislikes his opponents more than he does Jews, which keeps the latter safe for now. The laudable antifascism of Belarus and Russia depends, in both cases, on a dictator’s whim. It is true, of course, that the rejection of fascism by democratic countries depends upon public opinion, but as whims go, I’ll take the latter—even if the danger of fascism in Ukraine is greater than it is, say, in the UK.

Stalinist Russia and Nazi Germany were not the same, as Katz rightly argues. But, as he seems reluctant to admit, they were both genocidal dictatorships. A comparative discussion would require more space than I have here, nor would it really pertain to the issues at hand. Does expressing a relative preference for one of these historical monstrosities over the other imply wholehearted contemporary endorsement? If so, then Katz is right in claiming that present-day Ukrainians who admire Bandera necessarily accept and endorse all that he said or did, including the mass murder of Jews and Poles (even though Bandera himself eventually gave up on mass murder, broke with the Germans, and ended up their prisoner in the Sachsenhausen concentration camp). But it would also mean that Dovid Katz, who lauds the antifascist victories of the Red Army, also retrospectively approves of the bloody pacification of Ukraine, the occupation of the Baltic States, the Gulag, and ultimately Stalin himself.

This would, of course, be unfair. Dovid Katz is no Stalinist, though I am sure that he has been called that by some of his Eastern European critics. But this same sense of fairness requires us to ask why those Ukrainians who celebrate Bandera do so. Is it because he ordered the killing of Jews and Poles or because he attempted to set up an independent Ukraine? What, in short, do we talk about when we talk about Stepan Bandera? Unless we ask the question with an open mind, we’ll never know the answer.

Konstanty Gebert is an international reporter and columnist at Gazeta Wyborcza, Poland’s largest daily. In the 1970s and 1980s, he was a democratic opposition activist, underground journalist, and organizer of the Jewish Flying University. He is the founder of the Polish Jewish intellectual monthly Midrasz.

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Commentary

The Digression

BY ABRAHAM SOCHER

A doctor walks into the examination room and tells his patient that the drugs aren't working and there isn't anything else to try.

Doctor: You'll be taken off all medication and restricted to a diet of flapjacks and flounders.

Patient: [With hope] Is that some kind of special diet?

Doctor: No—just the only food thin enough for the nurse to slide under your door.

My father, David Socher, *alav ha-shalom* (or as he would have pronounced it in his L.A.-Ashkenazi accent, *olive ha-sholom*—though no one ever pronounces *that* peace upon himself), loved that joke. Five years ago when the oncologist uttered the word “hospice” and fled the room, my dad turned to me and my mother and said “Well . . . flapjacks and flounders.”

The last three months had been a sudden, long fall. I had read Homer with my son Coby in the summer before 10th grade, and during my father's illness I sometimes thought of what Hephaestus said about Zeus hurling him down from the heavens: “All day long I fell.” Of course, he was Zeus' son and it was my father who was falling, falling.

I asked him if there was anything he felt was left unfinished or that he wanted to do. It felt trite and unlike us but also important to ask. He was weak and grey from the chemo, but also uncharacteristically nervous, jiggling his legs up and down like a runner before a race. “Well,” he said, “I can't remember which part of the dialogue in the *Theaetetus* is the part that the Plato guys call ‘The Digression.’”

My father's mind caught fire in 1960. In an Intro to Philosophy course at San Fernando Valley State, Donald Henze read a passage aloud from the first chapter of Bertrand Russell's *The Problems of Philosophy*:

[I]f we take any common object of the sort that is supposed to be known by the senses, what the senses *immediately* tell us is not the truth about the object as it is apart from us . . . what we directly see and feel is merely “appearance,” which we believe to be a sign of some “reality” behind. But if the reality is not what appears, have we any means of knowing whether there is any reality at all?

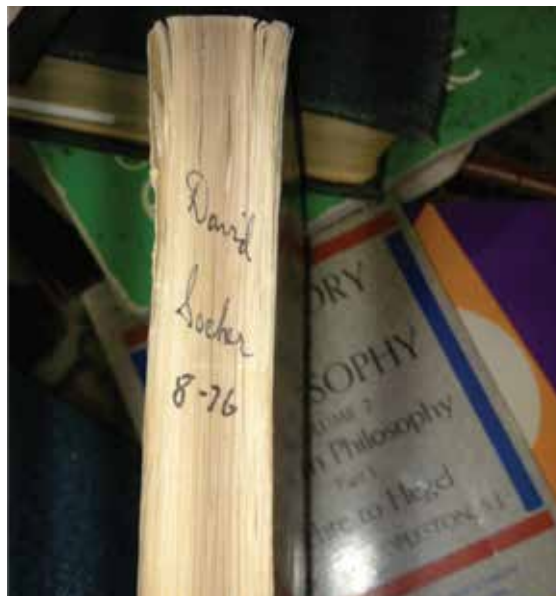
Then Henze paused a beat and said “kind of spooky, huh?” and my dad was hooked. Although he didn't end up getting a PhD and never worked as an academic philosopher, it is almost impossible for me to imagine what he was like before then.

My mother moved this summer and I've been packing up my father's books: most of the classics of Western philosophy, those great Doubleday Anchor paperbacks of the 1950s and 1960s, the little Fontana Modern Masters books from the 70s, the works of Wittgenstein, commentaries on Wittgenstein, Wittgensteinian commentaries on others,

virtually all of the must-reads of 20th-century analytic philosophy, multiple copies of the little Dover Thrift Editions he loved to teach from (*The Hound of the Baskervilles*, *Flatland*)—many of them with his notes, both discriminating and indiscriminate.

My father was not easy on his books. He often wrote his name across the outer edge of their pages along with the date of purchase, so that you separated and re-formed the letters as you opened and closed them. (I used to worry that this made them forbidden to read on Shabbos.) He read his books in the bath, kept them on the floor of his car, set hot coffee cups on them, jotted cryptic notes on their pages. Sometimes a title page or back cover was just the handiest piece of paper (in *Aesthetics: An Introduction* by Ruth L. Saw he wrote “Loan Officer” and a number in the 818 area code).

Among the deeply familiar books (the furniture of my childhood) I found while sorting and packing were two identical paperback copies of Santayana's little book *Three Philosophical Poets*. One copy was



his mother's—my Nana's—copy, probably from when she went back to school in the '50s. On the inside cover of the copy he'd later bought himself he wrote “p. 19: ‘It is always the fleeting moment in which we live.’” Of course most of his annotations don't deliver that kind of retrospective punch. A yellow Post-it in David Roochnik's *Of Art and Wisdom: Plato's Understanding of Techne* reads:

Sacajawea was born in 1787 AD.

Socrates was executed in 399 BC.

∴ Sacajawea and Socrates never had lunch.

My guess is that this was a note about the logical function of time in certain arguments—what kind of necessity was involved in that “therefore.” Also, he was a wise guy.

His dog-eared copy of Timothy Chappell's annotated translation of Plato's *Theaetetus* is heavily marked up. On page 9, he's jotted down a list of those “Plato guys”: Cornford, Bostic, Burnyeat, McDowell, Sosa, Sedley, . . . [indecipherable]. It's hard not to make each

surviving trace of one's dead parent a relic, to imagine that my father is himself scattered among these hundreds of books, piled on the floor of an empty house.

When I was about 15, he briefly tried to become an insurance salesman. I don't know how long this lasted and I'm fairly sure that he never sold a policy, but there was some drama around a visit from two of his new colleagues at Prudential. Not only did the house need to be (relatively) neat, but my father was worried that the number of books, magazines, and journals in the living room might not hit the right note. We packed a few boxes and put them in the garage. When the insurance salesmen arrived, my dad got some beers out and the three of them stood around making awkward chit-chat. “Wow,” they kept saying as they stared at all the remaining books, the casual untidiness of our living room, my mother's tomato plants in the front yard, “this sure is California living.”

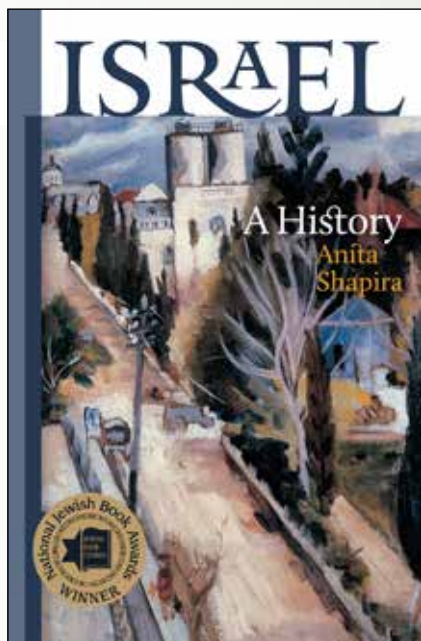
When we got home from the hospital, my father was too weak to read, but the next day, or maybe the day after that, I brought the *Theaetetus* over. Plato frames the dialogue as a record of conversations that took place decades earlier and are being read now because Theaetetus is dying after the battle of Corinth. I don't know whether this was in the back of my father's mind (or at the front of it) in that moment in the oncologist's office. Before he was diagnosed, he had been writing his own parallel dialogue in which a dying Theaetetus reassesses Socrates' arguments about the nature of knowledge (“Socrates has loaded the dice, if I may say so, Imendides”). So he might have been wondering if he had time to finish his dialogue, when he asked about “The Digression.”

That digression begins at line 172c1. Socrates says that philosophers tend to look awkward and ridiculous in courts of law, civic assemblies, committee meetings, and parties. They are like Thales, who gazed at the heavens and fell in a well to the amusement of a Thracian girl. However, Socrates soon shows that when unphilosophical men who excel in such settings are “dragged upwards” into discussions of what really matters, they find themselves looking ridiculous. Then Socrates pushes a little harder. Suppose, he says, that we tell such men that the “region which is untainted by evils will not receive them even when they die,” for they have been unconcerned with the eternal patterns of goodness while they lived. So maybe my father had been trying to remember this line when he asked his question. It was certainly a hard sentence to read to him in the fleeting moment.

Then again, my father was at the very end of a good, modest, thoughtful life and was, in any case, untempted by Plato's heaven. On the title page of McDowell's translation of the *Theaetetus*, which I have just reopened, I wrote “p. 54: Dad-Digression-Flapjacks-Heaven.”

Abraham Socher is the editor of the Jewish Review of Books.

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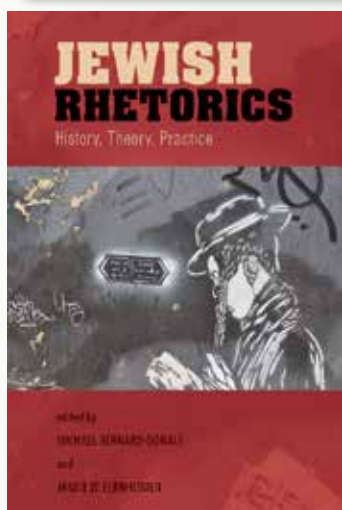
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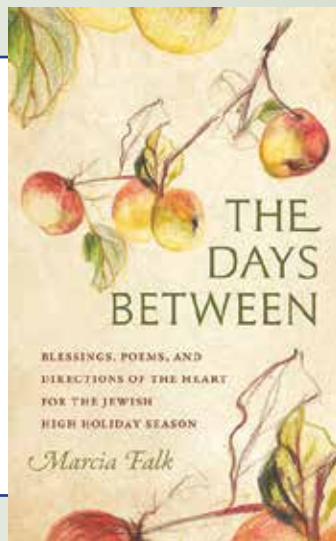
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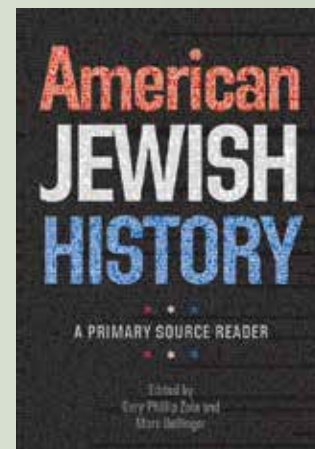
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