

Israel,

Anti-Semitism,

and  
Free Speech

Bernard Harrison

AMERICAN JEWISH COMMITTEE

# Israel, Anti-Semitism, and Free Speech

Bernard Harrison

**The American Jewish Committee** protects the rights and freedoms of Jews the world over; combats bigotry and anti-Semitism and promotes human rights for all; works for the security of Israel and deepened understanding between Americans and Israelis; advocates public policy positions rooted in American democratic values and the perspectives of the Jewish heritage; and enhances the creative vitality of the Jewish people. Founded in 1906, it is the pioneer human-relations agency in the United States.

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## Foreword

In the ideological battle being waged for the security of Israel and of Jews around the world, words and their meanings are among the chief weapons of choice. A proficient warrior who wishes to counter the assault on the legitimacy of the State of Israel must choose his words carefully and precisely.

One of the points of contention in this fight is the meaning of the term “anti-Semitism.” Because many who deny the legitimacy of the State of Israel do so using the themes and motifs of classical anti-Semitism, anti-Zionism and anti-Semitism have in our day come to be seen as overlapping circles. Unfair, say the critics of Israel, to smear those who decry Israeli actions as anti-Semitic! Once you call anti-Zionism anti-Semitism, they argue, you leave no room for legitimate criticism of Israeli actions.

Wrong, says Professor Bernard Harrison, who taught philosophy for some three decades at the University of Sussex in England. In this essay, he uses the tools of his academic trade to show precisely how distinctions can be made between fair and honest criticism of Israel and anti-Semitism/anti-Zionism.

He begins by distinguishing between “anti-Semitism in intent and anti-Semitism in content.” While a person may hold anti-Semitic views “in his heart,” it is that which is spoken or written that influences climates of opinion. He then goes on to define what is “anti-Semitic in content.” It must meet both an “Unfairness Criterion”—by spreading lies, or saying discreditable things, or treating one group by a different standard than others—and a “Continuity Criterion,” by resurrecting the slanders and distortions previously employed in the long history of anti-Semitism. Political anti-Semitism, he points out, continues two negative, derogatory

views of Jews held earlier by religious anti-Semites; he dubs these “the Postulate of Absolute Wickedness” and “the Postulate of Conspiratorial Power.”

With his carefully honed definitions in place, Harrison then tests negative statements about Israel against these criteria. He finds that indeed there are some criticisms that meet these criteria and should be called anti-Semitic, and there are others that don't. Not all critics of Israel are alike—and these definitions leave plenty of room for legitimate, honest criticism of Israel. In fact, many true friends of Israel, including organizations like our own, often engage in this genuine truth-telling, but we do so quietly, as a partner in a trusting relationship.

Prof. Harrison was stimulated to explore these distinctions analytically by the brouhaha sparked by AJC's publication last winter of an essay by Prof. Alvin H. Rosenfeld, director of the Institute for Jewish Culture and the Arts at Indiana University, entitled “*Progressive Jewish Thought and the New Anti-Semitism*.” For pointing out that hyperbolic criticisms of Israel on the far left were fueling anti-Semitism elsewhere, Rosenfeld was accused of trying to squelch debate on Israel. “How,” asked one defender of Rosenfeld, “does joining a debate become an effort to suppress it?”

Harrison shows that those who cried censorship failed to demonstrate how the silencing would actually work. He points out the “forensic sophism, the dialectical scam” whereby anti-Zionist spin-doctors, rather than engaging the argument, simply shifted the blame to the other side.

In applying the tools of the analytical philosopher's trade to the Rosenfeld controversy, Prof. Harrison has given us an essay that is both immensely clever and eye-opening. We are indebted to him also for sharing his perspective as a non-Jew—as he puts it, “[s]peaking as a Gentile, with perhaps some sense of how the minds of my fellow Gentiles work.” He observes that certain “Gentile delusions” have infected some “Jewish minds”—and so have great potential to do harm, not only to Jews.

Our aim in publishing Prof. Harrison's essay is to shed light on the accurate, unpolemical meaning of the term “anti-Semitism,” so that those who practice it in speech or actions can be combated vigorously. We know that words have specific meanings as well as consequences in the realm of action—and that opposing the slander of anti-Semitism makes the world safer for both Jews and non-Jews.

David A. Harris  
Executive Director  
American Jewish Committee

## ISRAEL, ANTI-SEMITISM, AND FREE SPEECH

### Introduction

This essay has three connected aims. The first and central one is to provide a philosophical framework for a distinction that has lately come to play a leading role in discussions of the Middle East conflict: the distinction between fair criticism of Israel and anti-Semitic defamation. Beginning around page 11, it develops a simple but reasonably rigorous set of criteria for telling one of these from the other.

The issue came to a head recently in the extraordinary public debate set off by the American Jewish Committee's publication of a paper by the distinguished Holocaust scholar Professor Alvin H. Rosenfeld of Indiana University. Rosenfeld suggested that extreme and hyperbolic attacks on Israel, many of them coming from leading Jewish intellectuals, were helping to fuel the rise in anti-Semitic acts and propaganda seen around the world. For his pains, he found himself widely accused of attempting to silence criticism of Israel by smearing its authors as anti-Semites. The remaining two aims of this essay are, first, to defend Rosenfeld against these charges, and second, to show that, and why, objecting to and exposing mendacious and defamatory attacks on Israel does not constitute either a threat to free speech or a strategy for closing down debate on the Middle East conflict.

### A Scandalous Essay

In December 2006, the American Jewish Committee published an essay by Professor Rosenfeld entitled "*Progressive*" *Jewish Thought and*

Besides, there is nothing so plain boring as the constant repetition of assertions that are not true, and sometimes not even faintly sensible: if we can reduce this a bit, it will be all to the good.

—J. L. Austin, *Sense and Sensibilia*

*the New Anti-Semitism*.<sup>1</sup> Its opening three sections offer a brief, factual account of the recent sharp rise in anti-Semitic incidents and publications seen both in Europe and in the Muslim world, and suggest that what is new about much of this activity is that it operates by drumming up hatred of Israel: “earlier attempts to rid the world of the Jews [find] a parallel in present-day desires to get rid of the Jewish state.” What interests Rosenfeld, in this essay at least, is not the Muslim version of this new kind of anti-Semitism, but that promoted by sections of the American and British left. Rosenfeld argues, as others have done, that much current left-wing writing about Israel is hyperbolic, studiously one-sided, and frequently erroneous, the errors in question ranging from slipshod scholarship to outright mendacity—in short, intellectually disreputable. He proceeds to demonstrate his case by examining in some detail the writings of a number of Jewish “public intellectuals” prominent in the “progressive” left: notably Jacqueline Rose, Michael Neumann, Tony Judt, and Tony Kushner, among others.

The essay rested without much public notice for a couple of months, except for a favorable review by Shulamit Reinharz in Boston’s *Jewish Advocate* and some discussion on various Jewish blogs, including jewschool.com. Then, on January 21, 2007, the *New York Times*, evidently picking up on the increasingly vituperative conversation on the blogs, printed an article crediting Rosenfeld’s essay with having “stirred up a bitter and emotional debate with a new target: liberal Jews.” Strictly speaking, this is not quite fair to Rosenfeld, whose target is not “liberal Jews”—a very large class of people holding, one would have thought, a wide diversity of views about Israel—but, on the contrary, a very small number of named Jews on the extreme fringes of the “progressive” left. It might be argued that the *Times* article immediately amplifies this initial characterization in the right direction. It isn’t “liberal Jews” whom Rosenfeld is after; it appears at the end of the second paragraph, but “a number of Jews [who], through their speaking and writing, are feeding a rise in violent anti-Semitism by questioning whether Israel should even exist.” That would seem to grant Rosenfeld’s tar-

get a fair degree of specificity—not Jews who criticize Israel, but only those who deny the right of Israel to exist.

But this brief outbreak of accurate citation is short-lived. Never mind that a fairly clear, if rough, line between “legitimate” criticism of Israel and criticism verging on anti-Semitism has been laid down in paragraph two of the news article; by the end of paragraph four it has already slipped out of sight: “admirers and detractors of the essay agree that it aggravates an already heated dispute over where legitimate criticism of Israel and its defenders ends and anti-Semitic statements begin.”

This solemnly head-shaking sentence, with its implausible suggestion that it is, in the end, impossible to distinguish anti-Semitic discourse from ordinary, unprejudiced political controversy, serves as an introduction to a telephone interview with one of Rosenfeld’s accused, the prominent British-born New York University historian Tony Judt. Rosenfeld is cited here as criticizing Judt for “a series of increasingly bitter articles” in which he has “called Israel everything from arrogant, aggressive, anachronistic and infantile to dysfunctional, immoral, and a primary cause of present-day anti-Semitism.” This is fierce stuff, and one might have expected Judt to reply with some brief but pithy demonstration of why Israel is indeed all of those things, and worse. But he doesn’t. He makes no attempt either to defend the views attributed to him or to disclaim them. Instead, he suggests that Rosenfeld’s criticisms should be disregarded, because Rosenfeld’s motives in advancing them are political.

... Mr. Judt said in a telephone interview that he believed the real purpose of outspoken denunciations of him and others was to stifle harsh criticism of Israel. “The link between anti-Zionism and anti-Semitism is newly created,” he said, adding that he fears “the two will become so conflated in the mind of the world” that references to anti-Semitism and the Holocaust will come to be seen as “just a political defense of Israeli policy.”

The first sentence is plainly a non sequitur. A demonstration that some criticism of Israel is hyperbolic and mendacious might indeed have the result of “stifling” such criticism and be advanced

with that result in mind, but it might be nevertheless substantially correct. It is unclear from this sentence, or from the remainder of Judt's off-the-cuff remarks, whether he wants to accuse Rosenfeld of attempting to "stifle" some, or all, criticism of Israel. The insertion of the qualifier "harsh" suggests the former. However, the implication of Judt's suggestion that "the link between anti-Zionism and anti-Semitism is newly created" (and therefore, we are to suppose, factitious) is that "anti-Zionism," under which heading Judt presumably includes any and all criticism of Israel, is just not and could never have anything to do with, anti-Semitism, whatever that may be. So Judt's claim seems to be that, after all, in alleging that some "anti-Zionist" discourse tends to promote anti-Semitism (and thus, in Judt's view, muddying some perfectly clear distinction between being anti-Zionist and being anti-Semitic), Rosenfeld is attempting to "stifle" *all* criticism of Israel.

At this point, having proceeded in a circle, we are back where we started with the original non sequitur. Rosenfeld has advanced some detailed arguments alleging the anti-Semitic tendency of some current "anti-Zionist" discourse. These arguments have been neither considered nor rebutted, other than by the blank assertion, unsupported by any attempt to define either term, that anti-Zionism and anti-Semitism are mutually exclusive categories. Instead, they have been airily dismissed, by way of the allegation, this time not only unsupported but clearly irrelevant, so far as the issue of their truth or falsity is concerned, that their author's intent in advancing them is to stifle criticism of Israel, along with the suggestion, again unsupported by any reference to Rosenfeld's text, that what they are intended to stifle is *all and any* criticism of Israel. Finally, and in a way amusingly, Judt's remarks commit, flagrantly, the very forensic sophistry that, without offering evidence, he accuses Rosenfeld of committing. It makes very little difference, after all, whether one attempts to discredit a man's arguments by accusing him of anti-Semitism or by accusing him of attempting to stifle debate: Either tactic, by adroitly changing the subject, is designed to relieve the controversialist of the requirement that he directly address his opponent's arguments and rebut them, if at all possible, on their own ground.

### The Response in the World Press

Not much of a case against Rosenfeld, you might think. The world's press thought otherwise. Within a very short time, in the wide selection of newspapers that picked up the story, in America and around the world, it was not Judt and his political friends who were being excoriated for promoting anti-Semitism, but Rosenfeld who was being excoriated for allegedly attempting to "stifle debate." In none of the resulting pieces have I been able to trace much concern with what Rosenfeld actually said in his essay, let alone any attempt to engage rationally with its arguments. Rather, each writer elaborates in his own way, grinding his own set of axes, on Judt's initial, entirely unsupported "diagnosis" of Rosenfeld's supposed ulterior motive in publishing the piece.

Thus Stanley I. Kutler, writing in the *Boston Globe*,<sup>2</sup> identifies Rosenfeld's target as "Jewish critics of Israel's policies" and credits Rosenfeld, without citation, with the scarcely rational view that "such criticism"—*any* criticism, of *any* policy whatsoever, presumably—"questions the very right of Israel statehood." Having gratuitously reduced Rosenfeld's views to absurdity, Kutler follows Judt's lead in looking around for some discreditable ulterior motive that might explain why a distinguished professor would publish such nonsense. His conspiracy-hunting adds a new twist in taking Rosenfeld to be a mere mouthpiece for sinister forces in the American Jewish Committee, which published the essay. It is *their* ulterior motives that stand in need of scrutiny. "The committee's real targets are 'progressives'—which is their shorthand for Democrats and opponents of George W. Bush's dubious adventure into Iraq," Kutler concludes.

Crossing the Atlantic, Gaby Wood, in the London *Observer*<sup>3</sup> ("The New Jewish Question," February 11, 2007) offers an admiring profile of Judt ("one of our most dazzling public intellectuals"). She takes it as given, following Judt, (and also, like him, without mentioning Rosenfeld's arguments) that no left-wing opposition to Israel, whatever its source, could possibly be tainted with anti-Semitism and that to suggest any such thing is self-evidently factitious

and dishonest, and that the object of such suggestions, by “very pro-Israel Jewish organisations” can only be, therefore, to silence (all) left-wing critics of Israel. Elaborating on this theme, Wood puts together something approaching a Jewish conspiracy theory, to the effect that Jewish organizations and individuals are actively conspiring to close down public debate about Israel and the Middle East in America. To this end, she places Rosenfeld’s essay in the context of two recent events: first, the cancellation, on October 3, 2006, of a talk by Judt on “The Israel Lobby and U.S. Foreign Policy” at the Polish Consulate in New York; the second, the appearance of an essay by John Mearsheimer and Stephen Walt, “The Israel Lobby,” published in the *London Review of Books* in March 2006. Mearsheimer and Walt’s widely criticized (but also widely publicized) essay accuses a range of powerful pro-Israel lobby groups, in particular, the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC), of exercising a startlingly wide and effective influence over U.S. policy in the Middle East, contributing “in large part” to the U.S. decision to go to war in Iraq.

Wood, like numbers of other journalists reporting on the story, offers no substantial paraphrase or analysis of Rosenfeld’s arguments. But by establishing the above pattern of association in her readers’ minds, she avoids the need for any. It is, after all, “clear” that Rosenfeld’s essay forms part of a concerted Jewish attempt to “silence” left-wing opponents of Israel; “clear,” also, that for that very “reason,” any concerns that Rosenfeld may claim to have about anti-Semitism may safely be dismissed as entirely disingenuous—a further instance, merely, of the perennially acknowledged readiness of Jews to complain vociferously about alleged woes in the hope of dishonestly obtaining some consequent advantage. This latter charge is, of course, very much a traditional motif of anti-Semitism, and Wood might reasonably complain that she says no such thing. In fact, she does not, but it is the impression inevitably conveyed by her article, as by others in the same vein, due to the fact that, in it, no substantial paraphrase or analysis of Rosenfeld’s arguments is offered. By ignoring Rosenfeld’s arguments, Wood implies that they

are not worth stating, which in turn insinuates the suggestion, at least to incautious readers, that they are not honestly advanced, but serve merely to mask some ulterior agenda.

In a *Jerusalem Post* article,<sup>4</sup> Samuel Freedman, a professor of journalism at Columbia University, accuses Rosenfeld of suffering from “what I call the Amalek Syndrome—an effort not to eradicate our external enemies but to invalidate, delegitimize and disenfranchise the supposed traitors within.” Freedman has some harsh things of his own to say, not only about the entire British Jewish community, which he accuses of “moral cowardice ... when it comes to Israel,” but also against Rosenfeld’s individual targets: Rose, Kushner, Judt, et al. But his main quarrel is with Rosenfeld for affording such writers “intellectual martyrdom” by suggesting that “their ideas are so dangerous, so powerful, that they dare not be uttered or heard.” He concludes, stirringly, “We should crave the debate rather than duck it,” for all the world as if Rosenfeld had been arguing for some kind of suppression of the ideas of Rose, Judt et al., rather than offering, as he does, a full and reasonable account of those views and arguing strenuously against them.

John B. Judis, writing in the *New Republic*,<sup>5</sup> treads a more cautious path, accusing Rosenfeld of inconsistency in an article not altogether coherent itself. Faced with the choice between engaging rationally with Rosenfeld’s arguments and attempting to discredit them by ascription of ulterior motives in the style of Judt, Kutler and Wood, he opts for both. Rosenfeld and his like are indeed would-be silencers of debate. “What these charges are meant to do is to raise the warning flag of anti-Semitism over certain opinions, placing them beyond argument—in a realm consigned to social pathologies..... Rosenfeld and other critics are attempting to suppress an important debate on American foreign policy towards Israel and the Middle East.”

The implication of this, presumably, is that, “Rosenfeld and other critics” dispose of no arguments bearing upon this debate or, at any rate, none worth considering. If one is attempting to suppress a debate, one is not contributing to it; and equally, if one is con-

tributing to it, one is not attempting to suppress it: You cannot have it both ways. Judis, however, wants to have it both ways. So he does, after a fashion, summarize two of the central contentions of Rosenfeld's essay. The first is that in "attributing inordinate influence to the Israel Lobby," as Walt and Mearsheimer and their supporters do, "and in describing that influence as being contrary to ... American national interest," much recent criticism of the Lobby is reminiscent of older anti-Semitic conspiracy theories. The second is that, as Judis cautiously puts it, "by voicing overly negative views of Israel or by calling for Israel's replacement by a secular democratic state—Judt and others are contributing to anti-Semitism."

It is worth noting here that, like many other commentators, Judis conflates Rosenfeld's essay with other controversies, including the one over Mearsheimer and Walt, which do not concern Rosenfeld because they erupted after his essay was published. Leaving that aside, Judis's objection to Rosenfeld's position thus conflated is that there is "a paradox" that "haunts these charges of anti-Semitism." The paradox is that, in fact, it is impossible to demand loyalty to Israel of Jewish American intellectuals without saddling oneself, and them, with divided loyalties. And, in fact, many Jews do "now suffer from divided loyalty—the same way that Cuban-Americans or Mexican-Americans do." Mearsheimer and Walt are simply right about this, in other words, and to anyone whose loyalties are not divided in this way, the other sins of which Rosenfeld accuses "progressive" critics of Israel—comparing Israel with the Third Reich in Germany or the apartheid regime in South Africa—amount merely to harmless tropes adopted for the sake of dramatic emphasis, as is common in political discourse, and, indeed, according to Judis, adopted by "Rosenfeld et al. ... when they identify Walt and Mearsheimer with David Duke, or when, like the American Jewish Committee's David Harris, they equate Walt and Mearsheimer's views with those of people who imagine 'Jews as inoculators of AIDS in the Arab world or contaminators of Palestinian water sources.'" Nobody on Rosenfeld's side of the argument has ever, to my knowledge, "identified" Walt and Mearsheimer with David

Duke, as distinct from pointing out that Duke has expressed warm admiration for their stance—but let that pass.<sup>6</sup>

The final word (at least, the latest to reach me) in this chorus of condemnation of Professor Rosenfeld for his alleged contempt for free speech and espousal of "censorship" comes from no less a figure than George Soros, writing in the *New York Review of Books*.<sup>7</sup> Soros's main target is the Bush administration and its reluctance to negotiate with Hamas and other movements that refuse to recognize the right of Israel to exist. Like Mearsheimer and Walt, he sees the influence of AIPAC on both the Republican and Democratic Parties as a main obstacle to these goals. He is, rightly, wary of suggesting that AIPAC constitutes a Jewish conspiracy against the national interest. "One of the myths propagated by the enemies of Israel is that there is an all-powerful Zionist conspiracy. That is a false accusation," he writes. Nevertheless he speaks of AIPAC in terms that suggest that its influence is both extraordinarily extensive and, if not exercised precisely by illegal methods, then at least by methods that sail very close to the wind and place it effectively beyond control by the ordinary processes of democratic government. "Any politician who dares to expose AIPAC's influence would incur its wrath; so very few can be expected to do so." The suggestion conveyed by these words is that AIPAC and similar mainly Jewish organizations continue to exercise the influence they do only because there is a conspiracy of silence among politicians and journalists to conceal both the existence and the influence of such organizations. "I cannot remain silent now when the pro-Israel lobby is one of the last unexposed redoubts of this dogmatic way of thinking"—i.e., President Bush's claim that "those who don't support his policies are supporting the terrorists."

Soros, again like Mearsheimer and Walt, considers that one of the main tactics adopted by the "Israel Lobby" in its effort to avoid "exposure" is the accusation of anti-Semitism, leveled at anyone who criticizes Israel in any way. "Recently," Soros writes, "the pro-Israel lobby has gone on the offensive, accusing so-called progressive critics of Israel's policies of fomenting anti-Semitism and endangering the very existence of the Jewish state." Rosenfeld now appears

on cue, figuring in this new incarnation as the spearhead of this “offensive”—as it were, the Israel Lobby’s secret weapon—and even more extraordinarily, as an enthusiast for the principle of Israel “right or wrong.” His essay “equates anti-Semitism with anti-Zionism and asserts that Jewish critics of Israeli policies reinforce both.”

Rosenfeld, according to Soros, commits three errors. The first is to take progressive Jewish critics of Israel to be anti-Semites when they are guilty only of sounding like anti-Semites. “[T]he fact that constructive critics of Israel say things that when taken out of context or paraphrased in provocative ways, can be made to sound similar to anti-Semites does not make them anti-Semitic or supporters of anti-Semitism in any way.” The second is a “lack of factual evidence.” This charge comes down to the suggestion, akin to Judis’s similar one, that the seemingly anti-Semitic charges made by “progressive critics of Israel” are—often, anyway—not “defamatory” at all, because they are simply true. Rosenfeld’s final error, it seems, is to demand fair reporting, fair in the sense of not taking actions out of context.

Third, the professed respect for criticism [presumably Rosenfeld’s] is a sham when it is not permitted “to condemn Israeli actions and, at the same time, to forego any realistic historical and political frameworks that might account for such actions.” As presented by Rosenfeld, this formula implies that Israel’s actions have to be justified, right or wrong... Criticism ought to be considered on its merits and not by any other yardstick. Suppressing criticism when it has been deemed to be unpatriotic has been immensely harmful both in the case of Israel and the United States. It has allowed the Bush administration and the Sharon/Olmert government to pursue disastrous policies.

### A Call for Debate Turns into a Call for Censorship

The above are a fair sampling of the ways in which a protest against the witting or unwitting propagation of anti-Semitic arguments in the heat of political animus has been mysteriously transformed into a call for censorship. And the trick has worked. A recent e-mail from an American Jewish friend contains the following passage:

Is it not marvelous how these people shout “censorship” the moment they are criticized? When I asked the *Jerusalem Post* for space to reply to the attack they carried (by a Columbia journalism professor named Freedman) the opinion editor said to me: “How can you argue in favor of censorship?” I replied that I wasn’t aware that Alvin had called for censorship, although I’d read his study rather carefully.

I wasn’t aware of it, either, though I also read the essay, more thoroughly, it appears, than many of his critics, since most of them abstain from citing its contents, and all abstain from citing them in any detail. As Professor Rosenfeld observes in a reply to his critics,<sup>8</sup> “Since I never once referred to ‘liberalism,’ called no-one a ‘Jewish anti-Semite’ or ‘self-hating Jew,’ said nothing about the Democrats or the Iraq war, and made no attempt to ‘silence’ anyone, this Kafkaesque bill of indictment makes me wonder what is at play here, illiteracy, dishonesty, or worse?”

As Bret Stephens recently put it, “How does joining a debate become an effort to suppress it?”

### How to Distinguish Fair Criticism from Defamation

Let’s now look a little more closely and perhaps more calmly, at all this. And any closer look must certainly begin with the question the *New York Times* considers so resistant to speedy rational resolution as to be matter for “heated dispute”: namely, the question of “where legitimate criticism of Israel and its defenders ends and anti-Semitism begins.”

Any currently useful definition of anti-Semitism must begin, as I have argued in a recent book,<sup>9</sup> by first discriminating between anti-Semitism in intent and anti-Semitism in content, the latter more particularly in the context of utterances, written or spoken. There are two reasons for this distinction. The first is the obvious one that someone may say, in certain contexts, or in the heat of a political argument, things anti-Semitic in content, without being—consistently, inwardly, “in his heart”—an anti-Semite. The second is that only what is publicly uttered, in speech or in writing, not what is brooded over in the silence of the heart, can contribute to the for-

mation of climates of opinion. As I suggest in my book, it is when anti-Semitism begins to make itself felt as a climate of opinion that people can be moved by, influenced by, feel pressured by, and finally, buy into it, even though they themselves would never, uninfluenced, in isolation, have set themselves up as conscious anti-Semites, and even though they may not recognize that anti-Semitism is what they are, in fact, buying into, that Jews, and not only Jews but the rest of us, need to start getting worried.

So the issue is not, as Judis puts it, whether “critics of Israel and of the Israel lobby in the United States” are to be “charged with anti-Semitism.” The issue is, rather, whether some of the more unbridled “progressive” critics of Israel, Jewish and non-Jewish alike, are sufficiently aware of the dangers of contributing, through the overuse of certain appealing but deeply compromised arguments and rhetorical tropes, to the growth of a climate of opinion, largely among non-Jews (and I write as a non-Jew), whose consequences, in the long run, may be very different from those they imagine themselves to be pursuing. It is certainly relevant here, as Rosenfeld has observed,<sup>10</sup> that certain groups on the progressive left (Rosenfeld mentions the writers involved in *Dissent* and *Democratiya*, and the British-based authors of the Euston Manifesto), who are no doubt as opposed to the Bush administration as anybody else in that wing of politics, have begun to take fright on just these grounds at the nature of the atmosphere being actively fomented in certain quarters. Consequently, they have taken active steps to dissociate themselves from “organizations of the left that are willing to entertain openly anti-Semitic speakers and to form alliances with anti-Semitic groups,”<sup>11</sup> as the Euston Manifesto group puts it.

That said, the next step must be to try to establish what exactly it is that renders an utterance anti-Semitic in content. There are two evident criteria, which must both, equally, be met by a given utterance before it can reasonably be characterized, *prima facie* at any rate, as anti-Semitic. The first concerns fairness, in a rather broad sense of that term. Anti-Semitism is, after all, a form of prejudice, and what is generally taken to distinguish prejudice from fair com-

ment is, precisely, its unfairness. Human ingenuity, and for that matter human nastiness, being what they are, a final, complete list of “Ways of Being Unfair to People” is probably unattainable, but a short, uncontroversial selection is doubtless within our power. Some obvious “Ways of Being Unfair to People” include: (1) telling lies about them; (2) saying discreditable things about them that are not only not true, but are not even candidates for truth or falsity, since they are self-contradictory or in some other way incoherent; (3) treating them differently from others in the absence of any relevant ground of difference.

Thus an utterance, to be anti-Semitic, must embody some form of unfairness. Call this the Unfairness Criterion. The second criterion—call it the Continuity Criterion—is that, to be construed as anti-Semitic in content, an utterance must be in some way continuous with the long historic tradition of anti-Semitic discourse and action. The continuity involved need not take the form of simple repetition—there are, after all, many ways in which old grudges may be refurbished to match new discontents—but it must be there.

For there to be a case for a given utterance being anti-Semitic in content, both the Continuity Criterion and the Unfairness Criterion must be satisfied. Little argument is needed to show this to be so. If, for example, a teacher meticulously, even grindingly, points out errors of reasoning on the part of a given student who happens to be Jewish while allowing non-Jewish students to get away with murder, the Jewish student, though he may wonder, rebelliously, if the man’s behavior toward him does not spring from anti-Semitism on his part, will have difficulty proving it, even to himself, because, although his teacher’s behavior is in a sense unfair, the kind of unfairness it exhibits—singling out the Jew for attentions which, though they may humiliate him, also serve to strengthen the powers of his mind and secure him high grades—is not of a kind traditionally manifested by anti-Semites. Again, if some Jews are fairly and rightfully convicted of a criminal conspiracy, the conviction is not rendered anti-Semitic in character by the fact that one of the main

accusations traditionally brought by anti-Semites against “the Jews” is conspiracy. One could say that what the case has uncovered is a Jewish conspiracy, but not the Jewish Conspiracy.

The Continuity Criterion needs a little more work. What kinds of continuity, precisely, are we to regard as satisfying it? Anti-Semitism comes in various forms. There is, for example, social or cultural anti-Semitism. Examples would be the feeling some persons have that Jews are not quite the sort of people one would like to see joining their country club, or the sense, prevalent in English departments in American universities before 1950, that the handing on of the cultural treasures of English literature was too culturally sensitive a matter to be confided to the hands of Jews.<sup>12</sup> Prejudices of this kind, however irritating to Jews, are by no means peculiar to them. Other immigrant groups meet with analogous obstacles, which, in any case, have a way of weakening over time. Such prejudice, moreover, is not lethal in its effects. The Nazis did not destroy the Jews of Europe because they considered them to be lowering the social tone of the Third Reich, introducing an unwelcome element of moneyed vulgarity into the tea dances at the Hotel Bristol, or any other snobbish, and hence feeble, nonsense of that sort. They undertook the extermination of the Jews—to spell it out, the arbitrary arrest and summary murder of vast numbers of noncombatant men, women and children, including babes in arms—because their thinking was dominated by political anti-Semitism.<sup>13</sup>

Political anti-Semitism manifests itself in two very general sorts of conviction, extraordinarily durable in their hold on the European imagination over many centuries. They are always the same in their general form, though they display an astonishing and protean capacity to reinvent themselves in terms of the specific content that may happen to embody that form at particular historical junctures. They are “political” convictions in the sense that, unlike social anti-Semitism, which involves holding derogatory views about Jews considered as individuals, they concern “the Jews” considered as a political entity: a people or a race. The first dominating conviction of the political anti-Semite is that “the Jews” are, as a people,

wicked, and not merely relatively, wicked, but absolutely wicked—in other words, *evil*. In the moral vocabulary of Western, which is to say Christian, culture, evil has traditionally been understood, following Aquinas, as what is sometimes called a “privative” notion. Evil is not a positive thing, in other words, but simply the absence of goodness. It follows, conceptually, that what is evil is absolutely so; that it is devoid of any redeeming feature; that there neither is nor could be anything to be said in favor of it. What political anti-Semites have held, and do hold, concerning “the Jews” is that they are evil in this absolute, privative sense. It follows, for the political anti-Semite, that the presence of Jews is dangerous to any people among whom they settle. And since this fear of “the Jews” is conceptually required by the basic proposition that “the Jews” are evil, in the privative sense of “evil,” it is a fear very difficult to eradicate by means of rational reassurance. We are dealing here, as Jean Paul Sartre pointed out in connection with the anti-Semitism of Louis-Ferdinand Céline, with a form of Manichaeism: a version of the ancient heretical belief that the world, together with all human life in it, is the theater of a titanic conflict between absolute good and absolute evil, with “the Jews” cast in the latter role.

The second conviction of the political anti-Semite is that Jews are conspiratorially organized in the pursuit of their evil ends; that there exists a vast “Jewish conspiracy,” of unquantifiable but alarming power and influence, whose agents are everywhere, endlessly deploying the power of International Finance to bewilder and subvert the Forces of Light. To someone who actually believes this sort of thing, it is irrelevant both that a large majority of people whose great wealth renders them politically influential are non-Jewish and that fortune has failed mysteriously to bless the vast majority of Jews with wealth on any scale that would count in this particular ballpark. Non-Jewish wealth and influence are OK, and as for those allegedly modestly prosperous Jews, hey, we know, whatever they say, that “they’re all in it together.”

One of the more useful tricks of academic philosophy, the field in which I spent my working years, is the introduction of little cant-

phrases, sometimes amusingly pompous, that help one to remember an argument. So let's call the first of these convictions on the part of political anti-Semites the Postulate of Absolute Wickedness and the second, the Postulate of Conspiratorial Power.

To sum up the results of this bit of the argument: A statement is, *prima facie*, dangerously (that is, politically) anti-Semitic in content, if, and only if, it satisfies both the Unfairness Criterion and the Continuity Criterion. On the one hand, it must be unfair, in one of the three modes of unfairness defined earlier: roughly speaking, mendacity, incoherence, or special pleading. On the other hand, it must also deploy a version of either the Postulate of Absolute Wickedness or the Postulate of Conspiratorial Power, or both. A claim that fails to satisfy one or other of these conditions is not, as far as its content goes, an expression of political anti-Semitism, even though it may be advanced by someone whose acts and utterances identify him or her as an anti-Semite.

### The Criteria Put to Work

Let us now consider how the above criteria work in practice. Do they, for a start, leave any area of "criticism of Israel and its defenders" untainted by anti-Semitism? I think it evident not only that they do, but that the scope they leave to "legitimate" criticism of Israel is fairly wide. Take three common criticisms of Israel: that Israel should have withdrawn from the West Bank and Gaza in 1967, that no Israeli settlements should have been built in either area pending the conclusion of a peace treaty and a formal settlement of boundaries, and that Arab citizens of Israel, both Muslim and Christian, are treated as second-class citizens. All three of these criticisms count Jews among those who hold them to be justified.

In the case of the first, there was the late Shimon Tzabar, whose protest against the occupation of Gaza and the West Bank began in September 1967 with the insertion of a paid advertisement in *Ha'aretz*, signed by himself and others, which contained the following statement:

Foreign rule leads to resistance. Resistance leads to oppression. Oppression leads to terror and counterterror ... keeping the territories will turn us into a nation of murderers and murder victims.<sup>14</sup>

The second criticism, that Jewish settlements should not have been built in the occupied territories, counts among those who advance it no less vehement a supporter of Israel than Alan Dershowitz, and for that matter, Alvin Rosenfeld.<sup>15</sup>

The third can be found both advanced and documented at length in Phyllis Chesler's *The New Anti-Semitism: The Current Crisis and What We Must Do about It*.<sup>16</sup>

As we have seen, it has been constantly and uniformly asserted by Professor Rosenfeld's opponents that the sole purpose of raising concerns about a "new anti-Semitism," promoted not only by Gentiles but by a small minority of Jews, is to smear, in order to silence, all critics of Israel. It will thus serve as a useful test of our criteria for distinguishing "legitimate" criticism of Israel from anti-Semitism masquerading as anti-Zionism, to see whether Tzabar, Dershowitz, Rosenfeld, and Chesler come out, on those criteria, as anti-Semites.

They do not. There is, for starters, nothing unfair about criticizing Israel on any of these grounds. It isn't a lie that the territories are occupied, that Jewish settlements have been erected on parts of the occupied land, or that non-Jewish Israelis are, in certain respects, treated as second-class citizens. And it is in no way incoherent or self-contradictory to point out that these things are so. Nor does any element of special pleading enter, at least in principle, into such criticisms. That no member of a society should be treated as a second-class citizen is something that one might reasonably require of any society. Tzabar's sober warning concerning the likely consequences of continuing to occupy the lands overrun in 1967 was couched in terms sufficiently general to apply, with reason, to any occupying power whatsoever. Again, the suggestion that it is both wrong, and in the long run folly, to set up enclaves of foreign settlement in lands not only claimed, but overwhelmingly still occupied, by a hostile and resentful alien population, is sufficiently general to apply

not merely to Israel, but to a host of other historical situations—for example, to almost the entire history of Ireland.

So the Unfairness Criterion is not satisfied by these criticisms. For that matter, the Continuity Criterion also fails. To criticize successive Israeli administrations since 1967 for their policies in the territories or for treating the non-Jewish part of the population to some extent as second-class citizens does not reanimate either the Postulate of Absolute Wickedness or the Postulate of Conspiratorial Power. One isn't saying that it is Absolutely Wicked to occupy and to settle on the territories—merely that it is wrong, and in the long run, foolish. Again, one is not saying that either the treatment of non-Jewish Israelis or the settlement policies pursued by various Israeli administrations are directed by the World Jewish Conspiracy. One is not saying anything about “the Jews” at all, but only about certain aspects of Israeli society, and some decisions of Israeli ministers.

So much criticism of Israel fails to trigger our two criteria that one might wonder whether anything at all is going to get stopped by them. But some things most certainly do run afoul of them. Let us begin with the Unfairness Criterion. Here it will be helpful if we start small, with cases that raise mild worries about the limits of fair comment, and work up by stages to cases in which any concern for fairness, truth, or even internal coherence has gone right out of the window. Then we can turn to the Continuity Criterion, and ask: Do these latter cases carry any of the traditional distinguishing marks of anti-Semitic propaganda?

### Israel in the Media

Starting, then, on the mild side, it is generally admitted that the daily news coverage of Israel put out by much of the liberal press and broadcast media is, to say the least, startlingly one-sided and lacking in either contemporary or historical context. Dennis Sewell, a British left-liberal commentator, put it this way, in 2002, in the British left-wing weekly the *New Statesman*:

Read the liberal press almost any day of the week and you will find that Israel comes off worst. Many younger correspondents

appear to have forgotten that the UN was instrumental in bringing Israel into existence, that the Israelis have had to fight off three invasions from neighbouring Arab states; and that UN Resolution 242 is a more nuanced document than the reflexive attachment of the epithet “illegal” to the occupation of the West Bank suggests. Palestinian acceptance of Israel's right to exist behind secure borders is often reported uncritically, sometimes implying that this position is shared by Hamas. And a creeping cultural and moral relativism holds Israel to account for every action and reaction while excusing Palestinian excesses on the grounds of poverty and general victim status. I could go on, but only at the risk of being thought to have been nobbled myself.<sup>17</sup>

There is, to be sure, something slightly eerie about the implications of this last sentence: that only someone who had been “nobbled”—a British expression for “swindled” or brought over to one's side by unscrupulous means—presumably by the “Israel Lobby” could object to the persistent, and unwitting, suppression of material facts by the “liberal press” where Israel is concerned. But maybe this is just the simple pleasure of a certain sort of journalist in the techniques of his craft. After all, political journalism is a dog-eat-dog business, in which dirty tricks and the suppression of inconvenient facts play a large part. Why should Israel expect to fare any better in this respect than, say, the Serbs or John Kerry or anybody else, in media quarters opposed to them?

Where Israel is concerned, however, the one-sidedness and the suppression of relevant facts often betray an agenda that goes beyond the everyday journalistic tendency to put spin and the requirements of a good story ahead of the unrestrained play of caveat and counter-argument. There are many governments and regimes in the world—North Korea is a good example, as was the tyranny of Saddam Hussein in Iraq, and as are many similarly brutal and kleptocratic regimes in Africa and elsewhere—whose actions, every day of the week, are infinitely worse than anything of which Israel can, with any shadow of veracity, be accused. The mere smuggling out of sight of this patent fact whenever Israel is the subject of a hue and cry by the media is no doubt unsurprising. What journalist worth his salt

would wish to upstage the revelation that Mr. X beats his wife by mentioning, even if were true, that Mr. Y next door murdered his? And there is even a morally respectable reason for reticence of this sort: That murder is a great deal worse than wife-beating does not, after all, make wife-beating right or even mitigate its wrongness.

A good deal of left-liberal comment on Israel, however, goes beyond the mere suppression of relevant contrast. It does not merely avoid mention of regimes, beside the horrors of which Israel's sins might appear relatively venial. It goes to considerable lengths to plant in the minds of its readers the conviction that Israel is actually worse—and not only worse, but very much worse—than any regime or society with which it might relevantly be compared; that, in short, Israel is more deeply sunk in political-moral enormity than any other society existing in the world today. Examples include the frequent characterization of Israel as a “Nazi” state, with the suggestion that “the Jews,” having suffered genocide at the hands of the Third Reich, have now themselves become Nazis in their turn; the still more commonplace characterization of Israel as an “apartheid” state; and the claim often heard, and not just on overtly anti-Semitic Web sites, that Israel is plotting genocide against the Palestinians or sometimes that it has actually begun to set in motion a Palestinian Holocaust.

### The Comparison with Apartheid

The facts belie the proposition that the conduct of Israel is comparable to that of the Nazis or even to that of South Africa under apartheid. Take the latter charge. Israel has a population of more than a million and a half Muslim and Christian Arabs, mostly descendants of the 160,000 who chose to remain within the boundaries of Israel after the Israeli defeat of the Arab armies sent, in defiance of the United Nations, to crush the nascent state in 1948. Mosques and churches are as prevalent, relative to the population served, as synagogues in Israel, and are neither desecrated nor burned, as all three have been, at times, in recent years in Europe, and not only in the Balkans. Muslim and Christian citizens of Israel

use the schools, hospitals, and universities on the same basis as Jews. Members of certain non-Jewish groups, notably the Druze and the Bedouin, are to be found serving in the Israel Defense Forces.

Recently the first Israeli Arab Muslim to join an Israeli cabinet, Ghaleb Majadlah, did so as minister of science, culture and sport. His appointment brought some cries of outrage and criticism from certain Israeli political figures—but the member of Knesset who complained the loudest was censured by her own far-right party. Again, while there were once laws preventing Arabs from buying homes in certain areas specified as Jewish, these were struck down in 2002 by a decision of Chief Justice Aharon Barak. His judgment on that occasion included the following words:

The principle of equality prohibits the state from distinguishing between its citizens on the basis of religion or nationality.... The principle also applies to the allocation of state land.... The Jewish character of the state does not allow Israel to discriminate between its citizens.

It is impossible to imagine the South African Supreme Court under Hendrik Verwoerd delivering an analogous judgment because to have done so would have struck at the root of the entire system of apartheid. “Apartheid” in the South African sense—the only one attaching to the term—means the attempt to keep two races from mingling, sexually or socially, through the erection of legally enforceable prohibitions: whites-only beaches, separate housing, separate seats on buses, a pass system to limit penetration by one race of areas reserved to the other, and so on. Such a system neither exists in Israel nor would be feasible there.

Because it is rather easy to show that the term “apartheid,” in its strict literal sense, has no application to Israel, opponents of Israel who wish for political purposes to keep it in play are reduced to using it in senses so extended as to deprive it of determinate meaning. Something like this is happening in the following sentence, cited earlier, from George Soros's article on Rosenfeld:

What is the more appropriate term, “Israel's still incomplete security fence” or “an Apartheid Wall?” That can be determined

only by considering the impact the wall is having on the lives of the Palestinians, a subject ignored by Rosenfeld and AIPAC.

The problem with this is that the so-called security fence has not been erected to enforce what we ordinarily call apartheid. It is not there to keep one “race” separate from another, in this case Jews separate from Arabs, in the service of a doctrine of racial purity. Israel is full of Arabs, and Jewish racial, as distinct from religious, purity has been a lost cause for many centuries. The fence has been erected to stop suicide bombers from infiltrating Israel proper with the intention of killing Israeli civilians. It does indeed impose much suffering and inconvenience on the Arab population of the West Bank. But it was suicide bombing by members of that population that built it; and the cessation of suicide bombing, should that ever come about, will inevitably lead, among other things, to its demolition. Hence the “impact of the wall on the lives of the Palestinians,” bad though it may be, is simply irrelevant—unless we follow Humpty-Dumpty’s principle that words can mean anything we choose—to the issue of whether the expression “Apartheid Wall” is “appropriate.” The question of whether it is “appropriate” fails to arise, because the notion of apartheid, in the sense that it is commonly taken to mean, finds no foothold in the situation. And if the term is not being used in that sense, the onus is on those who wish to use it to explain what they imagine themselves to mean by it.

### The “Nazi” Analogy

Much the same can be said of the more extreme charge that Israel is a “Nazi state,” and that “the Jews” are planning, or have already begun to carry out, a “Holocaust” against the Palestinians. Given the extraordinary and bizarre nature of the Third Reich, the facts needed to give any serious support to this accusation would have to be themselves fairly extraordinary and bizarre. For a start, we would need an Israeli party, with a program and outlook analogous to Hitler’s, to seize power, suppressing other parties and political dissent in general. Then we would need to see protesting members of the Israeli left arrested, beaten up, and dispatched to concentration

camps. Then we would need to see a program for the elimination of the Arab population within Israel, no doubt beginning with the exclusion of Arabs, such as the present minister of science, from Israeli public and commercial life. An Israeli version of Kristallnacht, with Arab shops and businesses being smashed by mobs coordinated by the new ruling party, and guarded the next morning by storm troopers, with notices warning the public not to patronize such businesses, would certainly help the story along. But we would at some point need the trains—though buses would no doubt do—to begin running to unknown destinations, and plumes of smoke to begin to trail from chimneys in, say, the remoter parts of the Negev.

All this, of course, is a fantasy. But only if something of this sort were true, would it make sense to call Israel a “Nazi state,” because these things, terrible as they are, are for historical reasons an essential part of what the term “Nazi” means. To deploy it in the absence of such circumstances is not to use it to make a serious political point, but rather to fling it around without caring what it means, as a mere abusive epithet, a smear, a threat.

With these two surprisingly common lines of “criticism” of Israel—the apartheid and the Nazi analogies—then, we reach a point at which the Unfairness Criterion is clearly satisfied, as it is equally clearly not satisfied in the case of the first three criticisms we considered. We have “criticisms” that are not supported by the facts, which can therefore be sustained only by means of smears and innuendos that distort or ignore the plain meaning of words, and by the kind of special pleading that ignores or minimizes both mitigating circumstances and the crimes of others in order more effectively to blacken the reputation of a chosen object of obloquy.

### Meeting the Continuity Criterion

Unfairness, though, does not necessarily equate with anti-Semitism. To take that further step, we need to invoke the Continuity Criterion—but that is not difficult. One traditional component of anti-Semitism—we called it the Postulate of Absolute Wickedness—has been the belief that “the Jews” are, as a people, evil, in something

akin to the Thomistic, privative sense of “evil”: the sense in which for what is evil there is nothing whatsoever positive to be said, no conceivable redeeming feature, not the least tincture of good, no possible ground of sympathy. In a letter to a newspaper recently, the writer recalled going into Blackwell’s bookshop to buy a copy of Alan Dershowitz’s *The Case for Israel*. He asked a young woman sales assistant, probably a student, for the title. She eyed him with contempt, and observed, “There is no case for Israel!” The absurdity, the preposterous moral magniloquence, of this remark would be comic were it not so chilling. But it is the attitude encouraged, indeed inculcated, by the incessant coupling of Israel with Nazism or with the apartheid regime in South Africa, by certain sections of the left.

The Third Reich, after all, is the one regime in modern history that most people would regard as evil in the privative sense. It is so regarded because it was guilty of kinds of inhumanity deserving the term “demonic”: an inhumanity most rampantly manifest not only in the Holocaust, the *Shoah*, but also in the smaller but still significant genocides directed against Gypsies and Orthodox Slavs (the Serbs alone lost over 100,000), and in a host of lesser known campaigns of mass destruction of innocent noncombatants, from the mentally or physically handicapped to Polish and Russian prisoners of war, in the conduct of sadistic medical “experiments” on unwilling human subjects, and so on. The term “Nazi” thus has a rich, and factually very well-grounded, aura of the demonic, the absolutely evil, hanging about it. The effect of constantly, and casually, equating Israel with Nazism can only be to transfer to Israel this aura of absolute evil. It creates the impression in the minds of the ignorant or the innocent, such as the passionate young sales assistant, that Israel deserves to be regarded as absolutely evil, as a state for which there is “no case,” without having to tackle the hard—and not just hard, but impossible—task of providing the necessary factual grounding for such a grotesque accusation. The same can be said for the equally commonplace coupling in the same breath of the terms “Israel” and “apartheid.”

Those who revel in this sort of trifling with words regularly tell us that their object in doing so is to “isolate” or “delegitimize” Israel in the eyes of the world. The question to be asked here is why this goal is felt to be appropriate to the case of Israel, and only to the case of Israel? To take just one other case, the Arab-dominated government in Khartoum conducted for twenty years a war against the black Christian and Animist tribes of the southern Sudan, fought with a degree of savagery approximating at times to genocide, and has for the past few years been conducting a similarly genocidal campaign against the black, but this time fellow Muslim tribespeople of the province of Darfur. We have seen there, in short, two long, drawn-out wars, both racist, quasi-colonial, and quasi-genocidal in character, both involving the displacement and casual murder of vast numbers of innocent civilians. These wars have been abundantly reported in the Western press. Yet nobody on the left, to my knowledge, has ever asserted any analogy between the government of Sudan and either the Nazi Party or the apartheid regime in South Africa.

There have, indeed, been calls for divestment from Sudan over Darfur, in particular “Divest for Darfur,” which is part of the Save Darfur Coalition ([www.saveDarfur.org](http://www.saveDarfur.org)). This is an American group made up of a wide span of faith-based and human rights groups, including the American Society for Muslim Advancement, the American Islamic Forum for Democracy, the American Jewish Committee, Hadassah, Network, A National Catholic Social Justice Lobby, and many others. But no voice among those calling for the “isolation” or “delegitimation” of Israel has been heard calling for the “isolation” or “delegitimation” of the government of Sudan. Nor have there been any motions calling for boycotts of Sudanese academic or other institutions, analogous to those frequently moved by small left-wing groups operating within British trade unions such as UNISON, the University and College Union, or the National Union of Journalists.

Why not? The only possible answer to this question would have to be that no such actions have been taken because things are by no

means as bad in Sudan as they are in Israel; because the government of Israel is more guilty, more bloody, more analogous in its proceedings to the Nazi Party than the government of Sudan; because the leaders of Sudan are more reasonable, more attentive to world opinion, readier to make peace, than the leaders of Israel. Few informed observers would find these claims remotely plausible.

These are the claims implied, insinuated, and to a degree successfully insinuated, by the constant coupling of the terms "Israel" and "Jewish state" with the terms "Nazi" and "apartheid." The object of such couplings is to insinuate, without argument, the impression that Israel is an evil polity, in the sense of a polity so much worse in its proceedings than any other, that there can be nothing whatsoever to be said in its favor: a polity to whose existence, as to that of the Third Reich, the only morally acceptable policy must be exclusion from the human community, isolation, delegitimation.

These accusations are anti-Semitic. They are anti-Semitic, in the first place, because they display the characteristic irrationality and unfairness of the genre, founded as they are on grossly factually untenable claims advanced, not by fair argument, but by dirty little games of insinuation, smear, and trifling with the meanings of words. In the second place, they are anti-Semitic because, in their singling out of the one Jewish polity in the world for what amounts to an accusation of absolute, metaphysical evil, they display perfect continuity with one of the major obsessions of anti-Semitism down the centuries.

That continuity extends to the arguments advanced in an attempt to justify the use of the terms "Nazi" and "apartheid" for Israel. Such language is justified, we are told by some on the self-proclaimed "progressive" left, because it serves to "isolate," to "delegitimize" Israel, to establish it in the public mind as a "pariah state." To those, like myself, just old enough to recall the events and atmosphere of the 1940s, there seems very little that could be called "progressive" either about these arguments or about the goals they serve. To isolate the Jews, to turn them into pariahs, to delegitimize their

presence in Europe was precisely, after all, the object of Nazi policy toward the Jews. To hear such language used again, with all the innocent moral fervor of some particularly boneheaded branch of the Hitler-Jugend, by people who seriously imagine themselves to be on the "progressive left" in politics, and used not only about a Jewish state, but about the only Jewish state, carries once again, to my ears, a grating and ominous echo of those days: the sound, as it were, of gallows being erected, of cattle-trucks being marshaled by night in obscure sidings.

In the 1930s the goal served by the boycotting of Jewish businesses and institutions, the exclusion of Jews from public and professional life, in general, the delegitimation of the Jewish presence in Europe, was the creation of a "*Judenrein*" society, in which, to put it delicately, there would be no further Jewish individuals to be met with. It is rather hard not to see, in the sort of criticism of Israel that crystallizes around the "Nazi analogy," a simple transfer of that goal from national to international politics: No more Jewish political presence on the world stage. No more "shitty little country," to quote the recent words of a certain French ambassador. No more Jewish state. Professor Rosenfeld is being perfectly reasonable when he suggests that "earlier attempts to rid the world of the Jews [find] a parallel in present-day desires to get rid of the Jewish state."

### The "One-State Solution"

Of course, those who pursue the latter goal are anxious not to have it appear that this is, in fact, the goal they are pursuing. But in assessing the nature of a person's goals we are apt, not unreasonably, to depend more upon the foreseeable consequences of his actions than upon the public gloss he or she endeavors to put upon them. One gloss currently put upon attempts to delegitimize Israel in the public eye, by defamation or calls for boycott as the case may be, is that they are intended to bring about the putatively desirable outcome of a "one-state solution" to the Israeli-Arab conflict. According to this proposal, the Jewish national autonomy guaranteed by the existence of Israel in its present form would end. There would

still exist a state within the 1967 boundaries, but it would not be a Jewish state. Rather, it would be a state in which Jews, Arab Muslims, and Arab Christians would exist in harmony under a democratic constitution. There would still be a state that Jews could regard as theirs from a historical and sentimental point of view, but without a guaranteed Jewish majority.

This proposal paints an attractive picture, but does it picture the state of affairs that would, or could, come into being after the collapse of the Jewish state? Of the deistical doctrine that "virtue is the certain path to happiness and vice to misery, in this world," Henry Fielding said, "[It is] a very wholesome and comfortable doctrine, and to which we have but one objection, namely, that it is not true." The same might be said of the belief in the viability of the "one-state solution." The reason why the idea of partitioning Transjordanian Palestine into an Arab and a Jewish state recommended itself to the various British royal commissions that considered the question, and ultimately to the United Nations in 1947-48, was that no other solution seemed to offer a way of preventing genocidal attacks on the Jewish population, attacks of which the worst example was no doubt the Hebron massacre of 1929, but which were regular occurrences under the British Mandate. The wars of 1948, 1967, and 1973 were initiated by Israel's Arab neighbors with the express purpose of ending Jewish settlement in the Middle East, of "driving the Jews into the sea."<sup>18</sup>

Anti-Semitic feelings in the Arab world have in no way declined with the new century, but have, if anything, increased. Anti-Semitic propaganda, including the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, circulates widely in the Arab world, both as written material and on television. The hostility of Iran and Syria to Israel is manifest in their support for Islamist movements, Hezbollah and Hamas, in whose ideology anti-Semitism, of a murderous vehemence recalling the Hitler era, is a central plank. It is quite unclear that any nation in the world would be willing to accept over five million Jewish refugees. It is deeply plausible, therefore, that the collapse of Jewish autonomy in Israel would result in a second Holocaust.

That, in turn, raises various subordinate questions: First, what would be the fate of non-Jewish Israeli citizens, especially those whose sons have served in the IDF, if, say, the civil war between Hamas and Fatah (and other groups) taking place in Gaza were to spill over into Israel? The fate of Algerians who had cooperated with the French suggests the closest parallel, and it is not a happy one. Second, what would be the fate of the Palestinians in general? It is quite unclear that the Arab states would welcome the foundation of a Palestinian state on the present territory of Israel, still less if its population retained any Jewish element. Palestinians have not fared particularly well under Syrian or Jordanian rule, nor was there any call from the Arab states for a "two-state solution" until it became politically expedient for them to demand one. One would be foolish, therefore, not to expect attempts at annexation of any remnant state emerging from the chaos that would follow a collapse of Jewish political autonomy. And, given the express exclusion of Jewish settlement under the present constitution of Jordan, not to mention the 750,000 to 800,000 Jews who were forced to flee Arab countries since 1948, it seems very difficult to envisage a place in any such state for the present Jewish population of Israel.

### Melanie Phillips on "Independent Jewish Voices"

The British journalist Melanie Phillips, in her weblog [melaniephillips.com](http://melaniephillips.com),<sup>19</sup> recently described the above scenario in more detail in the course of a critique of a British anti-Israel group recently formed under the title "Independent Jewish Voices." She titles the piece "Jews for Genocide." When I drew her critique to the attention of a Jewish lawyer friend in London recently, he turned a little green and murmured, "Well, that's Melanie, you know." The trouble is, though, that the most elementary understanding of the politics of the Middle East makes it very difficult to dissent from Phillips's diagnosis of the likely consequences of a collapse of Jewish political autonomy in Israel. And if that is the consequence likely to result from the success of current campaigns by parts of the left, both Jewish and Gentile, to boycott, to isolate, to

delegitimate, to reduce Israel in the public mind to the status of a pariah state, then does one not have to say that it is the goal that those who conduct such campaigns are, wittingly or unwittingly, pursuing? And if that is the goal of such campaigns, are they not as clearly anti-Semitic in character as the corresponding campaigns of boycott, isolation, delegitimation, conducted by the National Socialist Party in Germany after 1933?

This is the nub, it seems to me, of the specific dispute between Alvin Rosenfeld and the historian Tony Judt. The debate dates from a 2003 piece of Judt's in the *New York Review of Books*,<sup>20</sup> in which he argues that Israel is, historically speaking, "an anachronism," that it is "bad for Jews," and that it should be converted into a binational state: the one-nation solution, in other words. The prima facie objection to this proposal is, as we have seen, that it is political dream-work: a way, merely, of putting a saving gloss on the likely result of any such "conversion"—namely, genocide. Judt needs arguments, which are very difficult to imagine how to construct, if he is to avoid that objection. Rosenfeld's move is precisely to ask Judt to produce those arguments: to show why the one-state solution would not be a one-way ticket to genocide. Judt's off-the-cuff reply, recorded by Gaby Wood in her *Observer* piece on the dispute, is simply to refuse the challenge, with no more than an anodyne restatement of the very position under question.

"The issue is not whether Israel has a right to exist," Judt says plainly. "Israel does exist. It exists just like Belgium or Kuwait or any other country which was invented at some point in the past and is now a fact. The question is what kind of a state Israel should be. That's all."

But unfortunately, that is by no means "all." The objection has been dodged. It remains to be answered.

### The Charge of Denying Free Speech

So far I have been defending Alvin Rosenfeld against the charge that there is nothing anti-Semitic about "anti-Zionism," however extreme and defamatory the methods chosen to advance it, and that

"the new anti-Semitism" is a recent fabrication, invented by "right-wing Jews" with a bewildering variety of putative objects in mind, from bashing the Democrats and promoting the Iraq war [Kutler], to silencing "all criticism of Israel" [Judt et al.]. What I believe I have shown is that there is, in fact, a radical difference between the vast bulk of criticism of Israel that raises no issues of anti-Semitism whatsoever, and "criticism" or, better, defamation of Israel, which in its methods and its goals is entirely continuous with the long historical tradition of anti-Semitic obsession. That it is this second strain of "criticism," and not the first, which is Professor Rosenfeld's target, I think is evident from the most cursory reading of *Progressive Jewish Thought and the New Anti-Semitism*. Rosenfeld's object in writing is an entirely proper and necessary one. He is blowing the whistle on varieties of "anti-Zionism," which, whether they issue from Jews or, as they mostly do, from Gentiles,<sup>21</sup> really do have an anti-Semitic edge to them.

Now let us turn to the second main charge brought against Rosenfeld: that he is an enemy of free speech, and that to defend him is, as the *Jerusalem Post* opinion editor said to my American friend, "to argue in favor of censorship."

Commentators elaborating on this charge, as seen earlier, frequently bracketed Rosenfeld's essay with John Mearsheimer's and Stephen Walt's now-celebrated paper, "The Israel Lobby." The Israel Lobby, headed by the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC), is, according to Mearsheimer and Walt, committed to directing American policy in the Middle East in ways that undermine American national interest. It has also, according to them, played a crucial and perhaps determining role in the promotion of the second Iraq war and has generally been active in hampering Democratic efforts to rid the country of the Bush administration.

The row in Jewish circles over Rosenfeld's essay clearly struck many commentators as further evidence for the Mearsheimer-Walt thesis. Here, they suggested, was a "right-wing Jew" running true to form, just as "The Israel Lobby" had warned us, trying to silence those of his fellow-Jews who are prepared to do their duty as citizens

and human beings and denounce Israel, by the dishonest trick of smearing these honorable men with the ancient tag of anti-Semitism. Some commentators took the line, common in these cases—putting it a little more delicately, of course—that anti-Semitism since the Second World War is a marginal phenomenon, blown out of proportion by Jewish hysteria and self-pity. Others took a lead from Tony Judt in suggesting that, though anti-Semitism remains real enough, the battle against it can only be waged by maintaining unflinching Jewish hostility to Israel, because, if accusations of anti-Semitism come to be widely seen as a mere device to deflect criticism from the soi-disant criminal activities of the Government of Israel, the very notion of anti-Semitism will be devalued. As a result, such accusations will come to be seen as a mere device of Jewish deceit.

This whole hodgepodge of bad argument strikes me as mainly designed to give new content to some very familiar anti-Semitic themes. We have strayed into a region of political thought dominated by the second grand delusion of traditional anti-Semitism: the Postulate of Conspiratorial Power. Jewish-conspiracy theory has two main components. The first is the belief that Jews are never entirely trustworthy servants of the national interests of whatever state claims their nominal citizenship, because their real loyalties are to world Jewry. The second is that the international tentacles of world Jewry give Jewish groups in any country colossal power to exercise a secret and malign influence over events. The trouble with the first of these beliefs is, on the one hand, that the content of the national interest is never clear to all on inspection, and for that reason, is always a matter of political dispute; and on the other, that every country is awash with non-Jewish groups who can equally be said to “owe allegiance,” in some equally vague sense, to foreign interests. The trouble with the second belief is that it is not merely intrinsically unbelievable, but is refuted daily by commonplace and evident facts. “Jewish interests,” far from being carried on from success to success by the redoubtable underground machine supposedly directed by world Jewry, are often daily and routinely trampled into

the ground—as happened, unsurprisingly, to Professor Rosenfeld.

The tone of this aspect of the campaign against Rosenfeld is typified by John B. Judis in the *New Republic*. As noted earlier, the “paradox” that haunts Rosenfeld’s essay, according to Judis, is that, if (presumably, uncritical) “loyalty to Israel” is “demanded” of American Jewish intellectuals, this must saddle them with divided loyalties. In fact, bemoans Judis in the passage quoted above, many American Jews do “suffer from divided loyalties—the same way Cuban-Americans or Mexican-Americans do.” Any dispassionate reader of these words must be struck by the artificiality of this parallel. Nobody would ever think of regarding Cuban-Americans or Mexican-Americans as bad, or worse still, ersatz Americans for having unbroken links with Cuba or Mexico. It is only “the Jews” whose interests and connections overseas are made matters for a sort of loyalty-test.

Equally, of course, once one begins to think of other groups “saddled with divided loyalties,” the list extends itself effortlessly and more or less indefinitely. What about all those Irish-Americans whose loyalties are divided between America and Ireland, and whose contributions helped to finance IRA terrorism for several decades? Are they ersatz Americans? The St. Patrick’s Day parades in New York City say otherwise. In Britain, elements of the right were sympathetic to European fascism during the ‘30s, while a rather large body of opinion on the left remained strongly sympathetic to the Soviet Union through thick and thin (including the Gulag), virtually until the final collapse of the Communist Party of the USSR in 1989. The left, both in Britain and America, has been extremely sensitive to accusations of divided loyalties and has not hesitated to condemn such accusations as McCarthyite fascism. Some people, on the same wing of politics, however (as documented in my book), show no compunction whatsoever in bringing precisely that charge against Jews who dare to defend Israel against defamation. Such talk is anti-Semitic, whether it comes from Gentiles or Jews. By its manifest special pleading, its singling out of Jews for criticism while ignoring innumerable non-Jewish cases of the same phenomenon, it

qualifies under the Unfairness Criterion, while its satisfaction of the Continuity Criterion is patent.

As said earlier, the controversy over Rosenfeld's essay, although written earlier, struck many commentators as a sort of addendum to the 2006 controversy over Mearsheimer and Walt. As noted above, the latter argue, on the one hand, that the divided loyalties of American Jews have led them, through organizations such as AIPAC, to betray the national interest, and on the other, that the power exercised by AIPAC and the rest of the Israel Lobby not only enables it virtually to dictate American policy in the Middle East, but allowed it to play a determining role in taking the Bush administration to war with Iraq. There is nothing particularly anti-Semitic about accusing Jewish political organizations of betraying the national interest. Such accusations are brought, from time to time, by all sides in politics against one another, though since what constitutes the national interest depends itself on political judgments and political views, such accusations rarely have the force that those who bring them would like them to have. Accusations of exercising illegitimate control behind the scenes, of, in effect, subverting democracy, are a different matter, and this is what Mearsheimer and Walt suggest the "Israel Lobby" does: partly by manipulating funding, and partly, once again, by threatening to smear politicians hostile to, or merely insufficiently supportive of, Israel with the tag of anti-Semitism. The problem with these accusations, however, is that they single out Jewish lobby organizations for pursuing their goals by methods standard for all lobby organizations in a political system dominated, as in all advanced countries, by lobbying on behalf of interest groups. On the other hand, in the style of traditional Jewish-conspiracy theories, they attribute to Jewish organizations a power and influence out of all plausible relation to their actual size and financial resources.

AIPAC may well be influential in Washington, but so are many non-Jewish groups operating with as great, or vastly greater, resources, many of which were in favor of declaring war on Saddam Hussein—as were approximately 70 percent of the American elec-

torate at the time.<sup>22</sup> And no doubt many of these groups, for a host of reasons, would also be opposed to any weakening of U.S. support for Israel. Again, given the tiny size of the Jewish population of the United States (5.275 million according to Sergio DellaPergola, or 6.45 million according to Ira Sheskin and Arnold Dashefsky, making Jews about 2.2 percent of the American population<sup>23</sup>), its division between the two main parties, with a considerable tilt toward the Democrats, and the resulting electoral insignificance of the "Jewish vote" in most areas of the country, it follows that if American politicians are reluctant to come out as opponents of Israel, the reason must be that Israel commands, for whatever reasons, the sympathy of large numbers of non-Jewish Americans. Which is why, perhaps, some of those opposed to Israel feel it necessary to wheel out the pasteboard phantoms of world Jewry and the Jewish conspiracy.

#### **The Heart of the Matter: How Would the "Silencing" Work?**

Certainly if opposition to Israel commanded wide support among the American electorate, Jews would not have very much chance of silencing its expression by branding its spokesmen as anti-Semites. And that point brings us, finally, to the heart of the matter, at least where the media response to Professor Rosenfeld's essay is concerned. Overwhelmingly, as we have seen, that response took the form of accusing Rosenfeld and the American Jewish Committee of attempting to silence "all opposition to Israel" by smearing its proponents as anti-Semites. Nobody, though, thought to ask the obvious question: Supposing Rosenfeld or his putatively sinister backers at AJC had conceived such a strategy, how, exactly, would it be supposed to work?

Would publishing houses and major periodicals such as the *New York Review of Books* or the *London Review of Books* cease to offer space in their columns or book contracts to people like Judt or Mearsheimer and Walt, once the label "anti-Semite" had been publicly affixed to them, like the eponymous Scarlet Letter in

Hawthorne's novel? Might those people themselves, like certain Soviet writers warned of Joseph Stalin's displeasure, be expected to humbly recant their former opinions in groveling letters of apology? Is one to take this seriously? Walt and Mearsheimer received a contract from Farrar, Straus and Giroux for a book-length version of "The Israel Lobby."<sup>24</sup> At the very moment when Jimmy Carter was complaining on CNN about the "tremendous intimidation in our country that has silenced" media criticism of Israel, his book, *Palestine: Peace Not Apartheid*, was at the top of the Amazon best-seller list. If "the Jews control the media," how have the views of left-wing opponents of Israel come to be so widely publicized and known? How is it that Professor Rosenfeld's paper received such a uniform savaging, in the Jewish as well as the non-Jewish press, as recorded above? And how, in any case, could "the Jews" or anybody else "control" the American or, for that matter, the British media? The media in countries like ours, as our diplomatic representatives frequently observe when endeavoring to smooth the ruffled feathers of leaders of totalitarian states, are beyond control: They are a law unto themselves.

The charge of attempting to silence "all critics of Israel" by smearing them as anti-Semites is absurd, in short, if for no other reason than the manifest impracticality and ineffectiveness of any such strategy in the world in which we live. Its absurdity, however, is not just any old absurdity. It is the sort of absurdity—the dreamlike, hugger-mugger absurdity that springs from the secret, cloying, ineradicable will to believe any nonsense you please, even manifestly internally incoherent nonsense, when communicated in a confidential whisper over a glass of beer—that characterizes low-level, bar-room anti-Semitism. It is just another version of the endlessly protean theory of the Jewish Conspiracy.

As a Gentile with some interest in Jewish religion, history, and culture, and some consequent understanding of the importance of the Jewish contribution to Western civilization, I have been encountering this sort of thing on and off for sixty years, though not usually, I have to say, from Jews, and I find it wearisome and contemptible in the extreme. That versions of it should now be

heard in some Jewish quarters, in fact, astonishes me as much as it astonishes Professor Rosenfeld.

### A Dialectical Scam

The extraordinary thing is that the trick, the forensic sophism, the dialectical scam—call it what you please—being played out in these exchanges is such a simple and impudent one that one would not credit it at first sight with the power to persuade anyone but a fool—or an anti-Semite. It works like this: One advances some "anti-Zionist" thesis out of the "Nazi analogy" box—some defamatory thesis, call it  $T_d$ , which would be hard to make stick by normal processes of argument—while at the same time suggesting in an undertone that more people would be prepared to say "these things" if they were not so afraid of the Israel Lobby. Up pops some Jew, preferably a distinguished one, right on schedule, to point out, perfectly reasonably, that  $T_d$  is defamatory and stinks of anti-Semitism. This gives the author of the proposition exactly what he was after in the first place: namely, empirical evidence that there is indeed a Jewish Conspiracy to suppress "the truth" about Israel. The press raises a hue and cry and, like a pack of hounds diverted from the scent by a trailed sack of aniseed, hares off on this new tack. The debate is turned from one about Israel into one about free speech, and  $T_d$ , the original bit of defamation that started it all, doesn't have to be defended after all. Game, set, and match to the "anti-Zionist."

While one expects this sort of thing from some of my fellow Gentiles, it is a bit surprising to find it coming from Jews. Is the explanation that the people who play this game are "self-hating" Jews? Professor Rosenfeld has been endlessly attacked for saying this, although, as he has correctly points out, he nowhere says any such thing.

The notion of Jewish self-hatred has been given a clear—and depressing—analysis by Sander Gilman's monumental work on the subject.<sup>25</sup> If one follows Gilman, Jewish self-hatred is not, in a sense a Jewish problem. It is not some strange quirk of the Jewish psyche. On the contrary, it is a response to anti-Semitic hostility toward

Jews. One response to such hostility, according to Gilman, is to internalize it. One admits that whatever reasons the anti-Semite advances for his hostility are good reasons, and one tries to respond to them by eradicating “bad” Jewish characteristics from one’s own character. In short, one tries to become a “good Jew” *by the standards of the anti-Semite*, not grasping that this is a hopeless project, not least because the anti-Semite, whose hatred is not based on reason, can change at will the “reasons” he advances to give it some appearance of rational justification. Faced with this continuing hostility, the “good Jew” who feels that he himself has left no stone unturned in his efforts to defuse it, can only blame its continuation on the “bad Jew” who has made no effort to clear himself of “blame” in the eyes of the anti-Semite. Gilman’s book traces this phenomenon through a long history of instances, from Johannes Pfefferkorn to Heinrich Heine to Karl Marx and beyond. At the very end of the book, he notes, without developing the point, that “one of the most recent forms of Jewish self-hatred is the virulent Jewish opposition to the existence of the State of Israel.”<sup>26</sup>

No doubt something could be made of this. But it was not Rosenfeld’s intention to make anything of it, and it is not mine. Political debate that proceeds by attempting to discredit rather than to refute adversaries, by gratuitously equipping them with corrupt, or merely foolish, reasons for holding the opinions they do, does nothing to advance rational debate, and is not something that interests me. In any case, there are plenty of perfectly respectable reasons, having to do with, among other things, the nature of Judaism, that incline Jews to the left, and make it difficult for them to break the bonds that form between them and that political perspective. Edward Alexander’s first-rate biography of Irving Howe,<sup>27</sup> *Irving Howe: Socialist, Critic, Jew*, records just such a lifelong attachment.

So let’s leave Gilman and “Jewish self-hatred” to one side, and speak instead of Jews critical of things Jewish. After all, one surely cannot expect a man or a woman to be ecstatic about everything that happens to be, *de facto*, Jewish, merely because he or she hap-

pens to have been born a Jew. In the same way one would not be particularly surprised if someone who worked to expose child abuse by Catholic priests should turn out to be herself or himself a Catholic. Certainly it would be odd to call such persons “self-hating Catholics.” It is child abuse they hate, after all, not themselves, or even Catholicism. On the contrary, such people might turn out to be very devout Catholics, pillars of the Church, in fact. Many staunch critics of various aspects of Israeli policy are observant Jews. And, indeed, the best members of any community are usually those most anxious to weed out abuses that disfigure it.

The touchstone, however, is truth. Take the Catholic opponent of priestly child abuse. If his charges turn out on judicial enquiry to be true, he is, is he not, a man of conscience? But suppose, on the other hand, they turn out to be false, or worse, fabricated? Then, whether or not his Catholic faith is intact, such a person will likely find himself regarded, not as a man of conscience, but as a mischief-maker with some sort of a chip on his shoulder.

If left-wing Jewish critics of Israel wish to represent themselves as men (or women) of conscience, then they must face the same test. Professor Rosenfeld has claimed—I have argued, here and elsewhere, with reason—that certain strands of left-wing criticism of Israel are so strained, hyperbolic, and defamatory as to be effectively indistinguishable from (non-Jewish) anti-Semitic propaganda. The proper response to this, for the would-be man of conscience, should be to accept the test of truth, to take up the charge and rebut it; to provide the reasoned evidence needed to drive home his case, and show that, and why, Israel is, quite properly and soberly, to be described as, say, a “Nazi state” or whatever. To shirk the challenge, to respond with hurt dignity, personal abuse, and absurdly self-refuting motivational slurs—“Are you calling me a self-hating Jew?” “Whose political program are you fronting up?” “Are you trying to silence me?”—is to abandon the role of man of conscience for that of gutter politician or playground bully. But that, effectively, is the response Professor Rosenfeld has received.

### The Stuff of Politics

Such responses, such evasions, such forensic scams, such attempts to shift blame at any cost onto “the other side” are not the stuff of Judaism or “Jewishness”; they are the stuff of politics, and especially of present-day politics. Hence I believe that it is in the nature of politics that an explanation of the current susceptibility of some Jews to certain ancient Gentile siren-songs is to be sought. The present tendency for the outcry over Israel on the left, including the Jewish left, to spill over at times into something indistinguishable from anti-Semitism has, in other words, far more to do with the historic strains currently pulling the left apart than with any supposed psychological strains pulling the Jewish psyche apart. Since the 1750s a majority of intellectuals, and especially writers and academics schooled in the humanities, have seen themselves, in effect, as shock troops of the Enlightenment, people whose mission in life and *raison d'être* have been to transform society, to make it fairer, more rational, and more productive of human good.

Since the 1850s that sense of collective purpose has articulated itself mainly around the idea that the future lies with “socialism,” usually conceived in terms either entirely derived from, or at least heavily influenced by, Marxism. The enemy has been perceived to be capitalism, construed in Marxist terms as any form of society based on private ownership of the means of production and distribution. The twentieth century, culminating in the collapse of Communism in Europe and its conversion both in Russia and in China into a form of authoritarian capitalism redolent of the robber baron era of American history, has not dealt kindly with these ideals. But many intellectuals, especially intellectuals in academia and the media, have by no means given up the idea that capitalism is the root of all evil and must be attacked. Since the old economic and social grounds of attack appear, for the moment at least, to be no longer serviceable, other grounds must be found: in anticolonialism (though there are no more colonies); in antiglobalism; in the alleged indifference of capitalism to global warming; in whatever comes to hand.

Israel is one of the issues that come to hand. The facts have to be reshaped a little, of course, to fit each issue to traditional models still capable of commanding political engagement. The Israeli-Arab conflict has to be seen as fitting into the box marked “colonialism” rather than, as in the case of Kosovo, into the box marked “national self-determination.” Further, because the radical left, originating as it does in the Protestant tradition, tends to see things in black and white, the conflict has also to be represented as a battle between good and evil, heroes and villains, in which one side is simply guilty and the other simply innocent. So the “apartheid wall,” for instance, becomes a crime, while suicide bombing is at most a misdemeanor.

That propensity to think in terms of moral extremes, that preference for seeing all things in terms of Armageddon, which makes much of the present-day left appear at times comically similar to the born-again Christians whom they affect to despise, makes it particularly easy for the left, if it isn't careful, to fall into the kind of Manichaeism which, as Sartre noted, is characteristic of anti-Semitism. In the course of these strenuous intellectual endeavors, the plain meanings of words, as we have noted here, begin to creak and strain as complex and essentially new situations are racked to fit old ideological procrustean beds. Some reputations have to be blackened, others extenuated. When an historic political movement with three centuries of struggle behind it is in crisis, one must expect a great deal of misplaced ingenuity to be devoted to the whitening of sepulchres and the darkening of counsel. And one would be foolish, or historically illiterate, if one did not also expect people to be under great temptation to blame “the Jews” (who else?) for the whole mess.

### Source of the Reemergence of Anti-Semitism

That brings us back, in conclusion, to the question of the source of the present resurgence of anti-Semitism. For Tony Judt, Jacqueline Rose, and others who think like them, the primary cause of present-day anti-Semitism is, simply, the conduct of Israel. Israel is “bad for the Jews,” at least for Diaspora Jews; and the only way for Jews in

the Diaspora to fight anti-Semitism is to make clear at every turn their hostility to, and rejection of, Israel. For that very reason, hostility to Israel, however extreme and defamatory the language in which it expresses itself, cannot be anti-Semitic. On the contrary, it is those who protest, like Rosenfeld, against such language, on the grounds that it is anti-Semitic, who risk making it impossible to protest effectively against “real” anti-Semitism, because to employ the charge of anti-Semitism in the defense of Israel is to risk robbing it, in the eyes of the world, of any moral weight that might otherwise attach to it on occasions when “real” anti-Semitism is actually at stake.

I would be inclined to dismiss this as a piece of smart political repartee. But many people will inevitably take it seriously, and in any case, important issues are at stake. So let us also engage it in earnest, as a serious argument deserving a serious reply.

There are two things wrong with it. The first is that those who advance it fail to see that erasing the line between reasonable criticism of Israel, on the one hand, and the venting of anti-Semitic prejudice against Israel, on the other, leaves one with no means of setting up the distinction, which the argument also requires, between men of conscience, who should be listened to, and “real” anti-Semites, whose blandishments should be detected and rejected.

Let’s see why that is so. Judt’s case (of course, it isn’t only Judt’s, by any means) reposes on the idea that current anti-Semitism is generated by the moral outrage felt on the left and elsewhere at the alleged wickedness of Israel. But if Israel were as wicked as it is alleged to be by some on the left, any moral outrage its wickedness might occasion would not, in the nature of things be anti-Semitic; it would just be moral outrage, perfectly fair and above board. Quite a lot of moral outrage, after all, was occasioned by the behavior of the German forces in the Second World War, but because the things occasioning that outrage were really happening, the outrage did not display anti-German prejudice. It was not Teutonophobic outrage; it was just outrage. Prejudice, by definition, feeds on lies and special pleading; it cannot, by definition, feed on truth. Hence, to the

extent that the left’s moral outrage against Israel is occasioned by a sober assessment of the facts, it cannot be anti-Semitic. The problem that Rosenfeld, myself, and a lot of other people find with the left’s moral outrage over Israel is that very often what it feeds on cannot by any stretch of the imagination be classed as fact, as distinct from defamation, innuendo, hyperbole, and special pleading. That, as well as its thematic continuity with traditional anti-Semitism, is what fuels the case for calling it anti-Semitic.

Now, suppose we reject all this—reject, that is, both Rosenfeld’s and my attempts to separate out reasonable criticism of Israel from anti-Semitic prejudice. Let’s call all that the merest hairsplitting. There isn’t any criticism of Israel, however savage, however redolent in its language and ideological structure of past versions of anti-Semitism, that isn’t abundantly morally justified by the awfulness of Israel. The moment one takes this position, one has left oneself with no means of distinguishing anything or anybody as a “real” anti-Semite as distinct from a principled friend of humanity and enemy of the evil Israelis. That is, to spell it out, one has left oneself with no means of distinguishing oneself, as a principled, deeply anti-racist member of the left, from, let us say, David Duke—a state of affairs that Mr. Duke is more than intelligent enough to recognize, as he did in complimenting Mearsheimer and Walt on the conversion of the East Coast political intelligentsia to his way of thinking.<sup>28</sup> It is not, in short, as John B. Judis suggests, “Rosenfeld et al.” who want to “identify” Walt and Mearsheimer, or for that matter Judt et al., with David Duke. It is rather that the former, in their haste to abolish all limits to the rancor and hyperbole of political discourse where Israel is concerned, have left themselves with no means of separating themselves from him.

Now for the second thing wrong with the argument we are discussing: Does calling certain kinds of criticism of Israel anti-Semitic morally devalue the term “anti-Semitism?” A term is morally devalued, surely enough, if it is used to divert attention from what would, if known, provoke unqualified moral outrage. So if the only just response to the existence of Israel as a Jewish state were indeed

unqualified moral outrage, Judt would be correct in accusing Rosenfeld of devaluing the term “anti-Semitism.” And, of course, Judt does think that unqualified moral outrage is the only just response to the existence of Israel as a Jewish state. The trouble is that his arguments for that thesis are, to put it kindly, as thin as paper. This part of his argument against Rosenfeld is thus a shameless *petitio principii* (begging the question). It requires, as a premise, that we accept the entire adequacy of Judt’s moral and political opinions. But there are rather powerful reasons for not doing any such thing.

### Conclusion

Speaking as a Gentile, with perhaps some sense of how the minds of my fellow Gentiles work, I conclude that in this debate it is not Professor Rosenfeld who is doing most to bring joy to the hearts of the conscious and committed anti-Semites among us. But I wouldn’t blame Judt and his political friends either—except perhaps for a certain simplicity, for not grasping quite what they are up against. The relationship of certain Jewish intellectuals to the “anti-Zionist” left among whom they locate themselves does somewhat remind me of that between Louis Philippe Joseph II, Duc d’Orléans, known as “Philippe Egalité,” and the revolutionary cliques with whom he aligned himself before they ultimately executed him. But the relationship of “committed” intellectuals to radical causes is a long, mostly sad, story, and in no way a specifically Jewish one.

In any event, my own interest in this has nothing to do with allegedly “anti-Semitic Jews,” “self-hating Jews,” or any of the other obsessions of that sort that Rosenfeld’s paper called from the woodwork. I am not in the business of fingering anybody with that sort of abuse. I am not even interested in undermining left-wing ideas; large sections of the current left are already doing that job too well to need any help. I am interested solely in combating the spread, this time around, among large numbers of “progressive,” well-meaning, but not always well-informed, people, mainly in the universities, the media, the arts, and the professions, of a complex of

delusions—virtually entirely Gentile delusions, but with a remarkable power, on occasion, to infect Jewish minds—which have over the past century partly destroyed a people to whom we all owe much, and which certainly retain the power to do so again, if not stopped. We all need, in short, to stop this inane squabbling, this political hysteria, and try to get a grip on ourselves. If we do not, it will be very bad indeed for all of us, and not only for the Jews.

## Endnotes

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10. Rosenfeld, "Rhetorical Violence and the Jews," n.vii.
11. Citation from the Euston Manifesto Group Web site, <http://eustonmanifesto.org>.
12. See, for instance, Edward Alexander, *Irving Howe: Socialist, Critic, Jew* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1998), p. 73.
13. Harrison, *The Resurgence of Anti-Semitism*, pp. 12-23.
14. Daphna Baram, obituary of Shimon Tzabar, *Independent* (London), March 24, 2007, p. 58.
15. Alvin H. Rosenfeld, "Modern Jewish Intellectual Failure," in Edward Alexander and Paul Bogdanor, eds., *The Jewish Divide over Israel: Accusers and Defenders* (New Brunswick and London: Transaction, 2006), p. 26.
16. Phyllis Chesler, *The New Anti-Semitism: The Current Crisis and What We Must Do about It* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2003).
17. Dennis Sewell, *New Statesman*, January 14, 2002, p. 16.
18. As is frequently noted, the 1967 war differed from the 1948 and 1956 wars in that it opened with a preemptive attack by Israel. But the provocations in terms of closure of the Strait of Tiran to Israeli shipping,

troop movements, and belligerent rhetoric which preceded it were arguably sufficient to justify preemption by any state in Israel's position. Jordan then chose to enter the war on Egypt's side, and as a result lost its West Bank territories.

19. Entry for February 8, 2007.

20. Tony Judt, "Israel: The Alternative," *New York Review of Books*, October 23, 2003.

21. Alexander and Bogdanor, eds., *The Jewish Divide over Israel*, op. cit., document a sobering number of counterinstances to this claim, which remains, nevertheless, one I am prepared to stand by.

22. It is interesting to note that a Gallup poll in February 2007 found Jewish Americans opposed the war in Iraq in greater numbers than any other religious group in the United States. See [http://www.christianpost.com/article/20070225/26006\\_Jewish\\_Americans\\_Most\\_Strongly\\_Oppose\\_Iraq\\_War.htm](http://www.christianpost.com/article/20070225/26006_Jewish_Americans_Most_Strongly_Oppose_Iraq_War.htm).

23. Both figures are from the *American Jewish Year Book 2006* (New York: American Jewish Committee, 2006). The former is from Sergio DellaPergola, "World Jewish Population, 2006," p. 578, and the latter, based on local population studies, is by Ira Sheskin and Arnold Dashefsky, "Jewish Population in the United States, 2006," pp. 133-58.

24. Published under the title *The Israel Lobby and U.S. Foreign Policy* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, August 2007), the book reached bookstores after the writing of this essay.

25. Sander L. Gilman, *Jewish Self-Hatred: Anti-Semitism and the Hidden Language of the Jews* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986).

26. *Ibid.*, p. 391.

27. Alexander, *Irving Howe*, op. cit.

28. See footnote 6.



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