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EDITOR'S LETTER

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Dear friends,

Taking stock

Today, Tamara Berens, the author of our June feature, “From Coy to Goy,” offers her last word on the essay and the heated discussion surrounding it. As you’ll see, she refers to a conversation that we had yesterday together with the political scientist Samuel Goldman and the author Douglas Murray. Thank you to the hundreds of subscribers who joined us live yesterday for that important conversation, and for the many intelligent questions you posed. For those of you who missed it, we’ll have the video up on the site early next week—as well as next month’s feature. Stay tuned.

Thinking about loyalty

Loyalty—as a human sentiment, as a moral virtue, as a matrix of decision-making—is the subject of this week’s podcast conversation.

Avital Levi, a postdoctoral fellow at Tel Aviv University and a teacher of Bible and philosophy in Israel, is curious about what keeps nations that are deeply divided together. Conservative Americans dislike liberal ones, and vice versa; and the same goes for Israelis and for the populations of many other nations. So, what keeps those nations from descending into civil war? Levi looks at modern philosophical approaches to ethical decision making and thinks they’re not fully equipped to answer that question. Instead, she argues, another approach is needed.

This approach begins not by asking what people are support as partisans but whom they stand with as citizens. Loyalty is the quality she thinks is most important here—the moral virtue responsible for belonging and membership, that contours the devotion that people muster to stand with their fellow citizens even when they dislike them. Together, Levi and I discuss what motivated her research into loyalty—and why it matters.

The genealogy of a phrase

Part of being a sensitive reader has to do with picking up on the quiet allusions that authors make to one another. I suppose that’s true for all the art forms, not just literature—appreciating the subtle references that painters make to one another’s work, to choose another example, allows us as viewers to step a little closer to the artist’s intentions and aims. The same practice is second nature to serious students of rabbinic writing too. Indeed, of all genres, that one is perhaps most heavily laden with subtle and secret references to previous rabbinic statements, to various codifications, to liturgical intricacies, and to the Hebrew Bible itself.

This week, our language columnist Philologos got ahold of Paul's famous phrase, in his Epistle to the Corinthians, that "we see through a glass darkly," and, in response to a reader query, set about to discover whether Paul's usage and a similar Talmudic formulation both come from a shared phrase that may have already been in frequent use at the time. That possibility set old Philologos off on a hunt which, in part one, has led him back to Plato's *Phaedo*. Part two will be coming next week

With every good wish,

Jonathan Silver

Editor, *Mosaic*

Warren R. Stern Senior Fellow of Jewish Civilization



Then-Republican presidential candidate Pat Buchanan in Washington DC in 1992. Mark Reinstein/Corbis via Getty Images..

TAMARA BERENS

JUNE 30 2023

About the author

Tamara Berens, a former Krauthammer Fellow at *Mosaic*, is the director of young professional programming at the Tikvah Fund..

What American Conservatives Can Do about Right-Wing Anti-Semitism

What else but turn to the past in search of some historical precedents for the current situation, and of what was done successfully then.

I would like to thank Tara Isabella Burton and Tim Carney for their insightful responses to my essay, and Samuel Goldman, Douglas Murray, and Jonathan Silver for taking the time to discuss it with me live on June 29. Taking their thoughts into consideration, I'd first like to dilate on an important distinction with regards to the prominence of Christian nationalism on the far right, then move on to broader questions, and finally say something about the historical antecedents to the situation I've outlined.

I argue in "From Coy to Goy" that, whereas the alt-right of 2016 exhibited an eclectic mix of pagan disdain for Christian morals and white supremacy, the far-right of 2023 is (at least overtly) more Christian-nationalist in its flavor. That particular articulation of political Christianity seems, as Tim Carney argues, not an expression of, but instead a departure from, much of organized congregational Christianity in America. The unchurched appear to have more in common with post-Christian ideas than with more traditional forms of religious devotion.

In yesterday's conversation, we talked about the political messaging used by some self-described members of the Christian right. In Goldman's esti-

mation—which accords with Carney’s empirical findings—the anti-Jewish approach of the Catholic, anti-Semitic Internet personality Nick Fuentes is out of step with the considerably more philo-Semitic attitudes of those American Christians who identify as both religious and conservative. Goldman noted that in the history of Christian nationalism, particularly in Europe, “Christian” means “not Jewish.” And it remains to be seen how the altogether different historical and political traditions of American democracy will recast that European tradition in a more ecumenical form. But most concerning would be the growth of a version of Christian nationalism that indeed is a euphemism for a political order that excludes the Jews.

My essay seeks to explain that anti-Semitism on the right in America is a problem that conservatives shouldn’t ignore. The conversation and responses to my essay all point to the further question of what caused anti-Semitism’s appearance in this form. My interlocutors have all provided partial answers: Burton points to broad social and cultural trends, and the anxieties they produce; Carney to the rise of the unchurched Christian; Goldman to an ideological turn against liberal modernity; and Murray to the failures of older conservatives to impose guardrails on the younger members of their movement. These explanations complement rather than contradict one another, and I can only urge those who haven’t yet done so to read or listen to these remarks.

And that leads us to the most consequential unanswered question: how should the right respond? In seeking an answer, I recommend looking to some of the historical precedents for our current situation, and to what distinguishes the current situation from its precursors.

In the 1960s and again in the 1990s, William F. Buckley, Jr. drew clear red lines over anti-Semitism, first with the John Birch Society, and later with the former Reagan staffer and then-popular media personality Patrick Buchanan and with *National Review*’s own columnist, Joe Sobran. The dispute over whether Patrick Buchanan’s comments about American Jews and Israel constituted anti-Semitism sparked a lively debate in 1992, the same year he challenged George H.W. Bush for the Republican presidential nomination.

Commentary issued the harshest rebuke from the right, marking perhaps the highest profile break by Jewish conservatives with a mainstream Republican politician since the magazine’s emergence as a Jewish voice on the right in the 1970s. The story begins with a column by A.M. Rosenthal in the *New York Times*, arguing that Buchanan’s criticism of U.S. involvement in the Gulf War relied heavily on anti-Semitism. Rosenthal pointed to one statement in particular: “There are only two groups that are beating the drums . . . for war in the Middle East—the Israeli Defense Ministry and its amen corner in the United States.”

The piece ignited a storm of responses. The definitive one, in my mind, is Joshua Muravchik's essay in *Commentary*. With characteristic thoroughness, Muravchik examines Buchanan's character, his record on Israel from 1976 onward, his views on the First and Second World Wars and the Holocaust, and much else, and concludes that Buchanan is indeed an anti-Semite by his own definition of term.

Buckley deals with the incident in his 1992 book, *In Search of Anti-Semitism*, a volume containing his own lengthy essay on the subject, responses to it, and various related correspondence. At the heart of the book is not Buchanan, but Buckley's erstwhile friend and ally Joe Sobran, who long held the post of senior editor at *National Review*. Sobran developed an anti-Israel obsession around the time of the Gulf War, but also more plainly attacked Judaism itself.

It's striking how similar Sobran's efforts to defend himself are to those now frequently heard from left-wing anti-Semites: he insists that he isn't a bigot, but simply a critic of Israel, and that his enemies are trying to stymie debate about the U.S.-Israel relationship by branding such criticism anti-Semitism.

In his rebuttal, Buckley carefully constructs a useful distinction between personal and political anti-Semitism. Sobran and Buchanan *might* be motivated by personal animus towards Jews. But that question is far less important than the political implications of their actions, which are clear. As public figures, Buckley argues, they have high standards to uphold, perhaps especially in their treatment of the Jews, who *do* require special care, given the recent evils of the Holocaust. Buchanan and Sobran's statements, at times careless, and at others, seemingly calculated, indicate a dangerous abdication of these standards.

Like Muravchik, Buckley observed that the support for the Gulf War by such prominent Jews as Charles Krauthammer and Henry Kissinger was entirely in character with their general attitudes towards foreign policy, and therefore can't be attributed to nefarious Jewish special pleading. In contrast, Buchanan's apparent support for the intifada and his derision of Israel goes against his general policy attitudes. (What other left-wing, Soviet-backed revolutionary movements did Buchanan support?) Buckley in the end broke with both Buchanan and Sobran over their anti-Semitism.

What lessons, if any, can be learned from this history? First, that these irruptions from the anti-Semitic fringe happen periodically. Second, that much depends on the ability and willingness of intellectual, media, and political authorities—the adults in the room—to maintain guardrails and red lines. The advent of the Internet and social media makes this much harder to do. And, the adults have had a fairly spotty record in recent years. That's not reason to despair. Anti-Semitism on the American right has been restrained in the past, and summoning the spirit to do so again begins by recognizing its recurring presence.



1 Corinthians 1:1-2a in a Greek minuscule manuscript from the 14th century. Wikipedia.

PHILOLOGOS

JUNE 28 2023

About Philologos

Philologos, the renowned Jewish-language columnist, appears twice a month in *Mosaic*.

Were the Rabbis Riffing on Corinthians?

Why is a phrase from a tractate in the Talmud so similar to one in Paul's First Epistle to the Corinthians?

Cole Aronson writes:

Do you know what the story is with the phrase “through a glass darkly” from Paul’s Epistle to the Corinthians in the New Testament? I ask because in the Talmud, in the tractate of *Y’vamot* 49b, the phrase *aspaklaria she’einah me’irah*, “a mirror that is not bright” is used in a similar way. Could this just have been a common expression? Presumably, the rabbis were not riffing on Corinthians.

The resemblance between the two passages is indeed striking, both for how they do and how they do not resemble one another. Here, in the King James Bible’s translation from the Greek, are Paul’s words in the first of his two letters to the Christians of Corinth:

For we know in part, and we prophesy in part. But when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away. When I was a child, I spoke as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child; but when I became a man, I put away childish things. For now we see through a glass darkly, but then [we shall see] face to face. Now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known.

The parallel passage in *Y’vamot* consists of only one sentence, which concludes a fanciful account of how the prophet Isaiah was put to death by the

7th-century Judean king Menashe for blasphemously contradicting the words of Moses—one of the charges against him being that whereas Moses says in God’s name in the book of Exodus, “No man shall see me and live,” the famous epiphany in Chapter 6 of Isaiah begins, “In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne.” The account in *Y’vamos* ends by exonerating Isaiah by explaining that he and Moses were describing two different kinds of experiences, since “the prophets saw in a mirror that was not bright [*b’aspaklariya she’einah me’irah*] while Moses saw in a mirror that was bright [*b’aspaklariya ha-me’irah*].”

Mr. Aronson asks whether these two passages might be related. They clearly are, since both use a similar figure of speech, that of a clear or cloudy mirror (the King James’s “glass” is short for “looking glass,” an archaic term for a mirror), to refer to a similar phenomenon, that of human perception of the divinity or divine truth. Yet how they are related is something else. Although Paul’s epistle dates to the mid-1st century CE and the Babylonian Talmud was redacted over 400 years later, this does not mean that “through a glass darkly” influenced, or is even appreciably older than, “a mirror that was not bright.” Much of the material in the Talmud represents oral traditions going back centuries, and both expressions, as Mr. Aronson suggests, could conceivably derive from a shared source in popular speech or imagery.

Here’s an example of this. The reader of a version of the near-sacrifice of Isaac in the midrashic collection of *Genesis Rabbah*, compiled in Roman-governed Palestine in the early centuries of the Common Era, is at first startled to find in it the statement, “Abraham took the wood for the sacrifice like a man shouldering his cross.” How could a Jewish story about Abraham have resorted to such a blatantly Christian image? But crucifixion, when one considers it, was hardly a fate reserved by the Roman authorities for Jesus or persecuted Christians. It was a common punishment for a wide range of crimes, and being made to carry the heavy wooden cross one would be crucified on to one’s own agonizingly painful execution was an added sadistic touch. Already in the 2nd or 3rd century BCE we find a character in a play by the Roman comedian Plautus saying of someone he would like to see dead, “*Patibulum ferat per urbem, deinde affigatur cruci*”—“Let him carry a cross through the city and then be nailed to it.” The author of our midrash wasn’t necessarily comparing Abraham to Jesus.

Can we point to a similarly shared origin for our two expressions about mirrors? As a matter of fact, we can, though it doesn’t derive from ordinary experience. It comes from the realm of philosophy and takes us back even further than Plautus, all the way to Plato.

First, though, we must begin by avoiding a false trail. If there are Plato lovers among you, one of your favorite dialogues is probably the *Phaedo*, which tells of Socrates’ last day in prison, spent with his disciples and admirers before he is made to drink the hemlock, and of the long conver-

sation he has with them regarding the immortality of the soul. Moreover, if you have read the *Phaedo*, it may well have been in Benjamin Jowett's marvelous Victorian-age English translation—and if this is so, you may remember the passage in which Socrates says, relating his struggles to philosophize when young:

I thought that as I had failed in the contemplation of true existence, I ought to be careful that I did not lose the eye of my soul, as people may injure their bodily eyes by observing and gazing on the sun during an eclipse, unless they take the precaution of only looking at the image reflected in water, or in some similar medium. . . . And so I thought that I had better have recourse to the world of mind and seek there the truth of existence. I dare say that the simile is not perfect—for I am very far from admitting that he who contemplates existences through the medium of thought see them only “through a glass darkly,” any more than he who considers them in action and operation.

Before saying, “Eureka! So this is where 1Corinthians 13:12 comes from,” we had better pay attention to the quotation marks that Jowett put around “through a glass darkly.” He did this to let us know that, far from Paul's having quoted Plato, it is he, Plato's translator, who is quoting Paul in his translation. What Plato actually wrote was more like the Loeb Classical Library's translation of the paragraph, the end of which goes:

Now perhaps my metaphor is not quite so accurate; for I do not grant in the least that he who studies realities by means of conceptions is looking at them in images [*en ekosi*] any more than he who studies them in daily life [*en tois ergois*].

Why did Jowett, a superb translator, choose to depart so far from the literal meaning in rendering a 4th-century BCE. Greek text with the aid of a 17th-century English phrase (the King James was published in 1611) used to translate a 1st-century CE Christian epistle? Our next column will start with this question.

TIKVAH PODCAST AT
MOSAIC AND AVITAL
LEVI

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About the authors

A weekly podcast, produced in partnership with the Tikvah Fund, offering up the best thinking on Jewish thought and culture.



An anti-judicial reform protest in Modi'in, Israel in June 2023. Matan Golan/SOPA Images/LightRocket via Getty Images.

Podcast: Avital Levi on Loyalty

An Israeli philosopher joins the podcast to talk about what keeps nations together, even when their populations are so deeply divided.

Podcast: Avital Levi

Loyalty—as a human sentiment, as a moral virtue, as a matrix of decision-making—is the subject of today’s podcast conversation.

Avital Levi, a postdoctoral fellow at Tel Aviv University and a teacher of Bible and philosophy in Israel, is curious about what keeps nations that are deeply divided together. Conservative Americans dislike liberal ones, and vice versa; and the same goes for Israelis and for the populations of many other nations. So what keeps those nations from descending into civil war? Levi looks at modern philosophical approaches to ethical decision making and thinks they’re not fully equipped to answer that question. Instead, she argues, another approach is needed.

This approach begins not by asking what people are support as partisans but whom they stand with as citizens. Loyalty is the quality she thinks is most important here—the moral virtue responsible for belonging and membership, that contours the devotion that people muster to stand with their fellow citizens even when they dislike them. Together, Levi and *Mosaic*’s editor Jonathan Silver discuss what motivated her research into loyalty—and why it matters.

A Rightwing Pundit's Anti-Semitism Problem

JAN 6 2022

From Douglas Murray
at *Common Sense*

In the past several decades, anti-Semitism has been rare in the mainstream of American conservatism, confined mostly to the extremes. But **Douglas Murray** points to a recent instance where it has appeared, more than once, in the twitter feed of one Pedro L. Gonzalez, a journalist currently holding a one-year fellowship at the Claremont Institute, a prestigious conservative think tank.

On the penultimate day of 2021, a left-wing economist named David Rothschild was doing what leftist activists do on social media. On this occasion, he was tweeting that “Republic intellectuals *despise* the Constitution.” Gonzalez responded to this low-grade click-bait by saying “Libs openly flout laws they don’t like—see sanctuary cities and DACA—but will still preach to you about the constitution. These people are as dumb as they are repulsive.” He added a photo of Rothschild.

There is already a certain problem here. For to accuse other people of being physically unattractive one must be either in a playground or in a position of extraordinary Adonis-ism oneself. You can Google Mr. Gonzalez and judge for yourself.

Then he wrote this: “That Rothschild physiognomy is pure nightmare fuel.” “Rothschild physiognomy.” Even reading those words in the 2020s causes a degree of whiplash. But it turns out that Mr. Gonzalez has a bit of a thing for the phrase. In responding to another tweet—this one from a lawyer *coincidentally* named Ari Cohn—he returned to the physiognomy question. Tweeting out the most unflattering photo he could find of Cohn, Mr. Gonzalez wrote: “Oh look another cursed goblin physiognomy.”

I think we can safely say that in these recent communiques, Mr. Gonzalez is sincerely enjoying playing with anti-Semitism. He is treating himself to some of it. Indulging in it. Enjoying it. Specifically thrilled at the opportunity to revive execrable motifs and notions that recall Nazi eugenicists and their obsession with *über-* and *untermenschen*.

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How the War in Ukraine Affects Israel's Struggle with Iran

JUNE 26 2023

From Jonathan Spyer
at *Jerusalem Post*

Over the weekend, an abortive rebellion by a segment of the Russian military apparatus seemed to expose Vladimir Putin's weakness. Ukrainian forces, meanwhile, have pushed forward with what appear to be the preliminary operations of the awaited counteroffensive. With all this happening, Kiev's embassy in Israel deemed yesterday an opportune time to lambaste the Jewish state for taking, in its view, insufficient steps to help Ukraine defend itself against the Russian onslaught. This undiplomatic complaint ignored not only the real limitations on Jerusalem's options, but also the fact that, as **Jonathan Spyer** explains, Russia and Israel are, like it or not, aligned against one another:

There is today a de-facto Moscow-Tehran alliance. As such, a decisive defeat for Moscow in its Ukraine invasion will be a defeat for Iran too. The seismic shocks such a defeat might well set off in Russia would weaken Moscow's capacity for offering support and assistance to its emergent Mideast partner.

[The outcome of the Ukraine war] matters to Israel because the maintenance of Western prestige and power is also an Israeli strategic interest. But, more concretely, it matters because Israel's main regional enemy is a key element of the Russian war effort. New information released by the Biden administration in early June shows the extent of Iranian assistance to the Russian war effort in Ukraine. The administration has referred to Tehran in recent weeks as Russia's "top military backer."

All this is not a one-way street, of course. In return, Russia is set to supply Iran with Su-35 fighter jets, attack helicopters, and possibly—and most significantly—with the S-400 air-defense system. All these systems, once integrated, would enormously assist the Iranian capacity for defending its airspace.

This emergent partnership has non-military aspects too. In an agreement signed last month, Russia and Iran pledged to build a north-south transportation corridor, buttressing the maritime links across the Caspian through the construction of railway lines adjacent to it. Such a system would serve to strengthen the capacity to bypass Western sanctions. . . . An anti-Israel alliance will in the near future receive a hammer blow from Ukrainian fighters using Western weapons systems. It is in Israel's interest that the hammer strikes home.

The Biden Administration's Self-Defeating Snub of Benjamin Netanyahu

JUNE 27 2023

From Elliott Abrams
at *Pressure Points*

On June 18, the State Department declared that it is “deeply troubled” by Jerusalem’s decision to allow the construction of 4,000 new housing units in the West Bank. It appears that some or all of these units will be built outside the major settlement blocs, a deviation from Prime Minister Netanyahu’s longstanding policy preference. **Elliott Abrams** comments:

Why would Netanyahu agree to this? Because the far-right parties representing the settlers have more power in his government today than they have ever had before. Or to put that equation backwards, because Netanyahu is weaker than he was previously.

That brings me to the Netanyahu invitation to visit the White House. Presumably the Biden administration believes it is achieving something important by refusing to invite Netanyahu. What it is actually achieving, however, is to weaken him against those in the governing coalition who seek the kinds of things the Biden administration opposes—judicial reform and settlement expansion. The White House is thereby truly biting its nose to spite its face—weakening Netanyahu to somehow punish him and thereby leading to exactly the results it least wants. On these issues of settlement expansion and judicial reform, Netanyahu has long been a moderating force. Weakening him aids more extreme voices.

Perhaps denying him an invitation gives the president and White House staff some personal satisfaction, but doing so undermines U.S. policy goals. It’s a foolish, even childish, position, and reversing it will advance administration policy. It is remarkable that administration “experts” on Israel don’t or won’t see that.

An Expert Look at Israel's Missile Defense

JUNE 27 2023

From **Thomas Karako**
and **Moshe Patel**
at *Center for Strategic
and International Studies*

In addition to the much-vaunted Iron Dome, the IDF also employs two other groundbreaking pieces of technology, known as the Arrow and David's Sling, to protect itself against enemy rockets, drones, and missiles. **Thomas Karako**, one of America's foremost experts on missile defense, discusses these life-saving innovations—and the decisions that must be made by the young people who operate them—with **Moshe Patel**, director of the Israel Missile Defense Organization. .

What the Federal Government Should Do to Fight Anti-Semitism—and What It Shouldn't

JUNE 26 2023

From Tevi Troy
at *National Affairs*

Analyzing the White House's newly released strategy for countering anti-Semitism, and maintaining “an appropriate skepticism of government programs and their tendencies to create unwanted and unintended consequences,” **Tevi Troy** looks for concrete policies that would in fact make American Jews safer and more secure. First and foremost, Washington should stop exacerbating the problem:

[T]he American government does not intentionally target Jews, and even tries to combat anti-Semitism. Yet several government-funded programs could be subsidizing anti-Semitism anyway.

Many if not most of these funds are given to anti-Semitic individuals and programs in educational institutions, including anti-Semitic professors, extremist anti-Israel speakers invited to campus, and public universities that form hostile environments for Jewish students. Title VI of the Higher Education Act provides funds to anti-Israel Middle East Studies programs, academic departments that have issued extremist anti-Israel statements, and public institutions that pay membership dues to the virulently anti-Israel Middle Eastern Studies Association. At the K-12 level, federal funds may go to public schools that assign textbooks containing anti-Semitic materials, encourage anti-Jewish attitudes through ethnic studies or anti-Israel programs, or pay for anti-Semitic critical-race-theory training.

In addition to these education-related expenditures that may have the unintended impact of increasing anti-Semitism, we should also consider cutting off certain types of foreign aid that have a similarly destructive effect. These include contributions to the UN Human Rights Council, UNESCO, UNRWA, and any funds that go to programs that subsidize anti-Semitic textbooks or Palestinian terrorism.

Eliminating these programs would not only save taxpayers money and reduce funding to those who purvey anti-Semitism but also send the strongest possible signal that the federal government does not tolerate this animus, whatever its source may be.