

WEEKLY PDF DIGEST 7 JULY 2023

EDITOR'S LETTER

This week in *Mosaic*

Jonathan Silver looks back at the week

ESSAY



The Looming War Over Israel's Law of Return

Over the coming years, Israel's most famous law will become an object of political gamesmanship and a potential tool for demographic engineering—no matter who will be in power.

RESPONSES



Watch Douglas Murray, Samuel Goldman, and Tamara Berens on Anti-Semitism and the Battle for the American Right

A recording of our special subscriber-only event on June 29 is now available.

OBSERVATIONS



How Much Plato Did Paul or the Rabbis Know?

A reader's question prompts Philologos to turn up a crucial link between the three.



Podcast: Tevi Troy on the Biden Administration's Plan to Fight Anti-Semitism

The D.C. veteran joins us to talk about what the government can do to fight anti-Semitism, and what, despite good intentions, it can't.

FROM THE ARCHIVE



The Once and Future Temple, Part I

Why do Christian depictions of the Jewish Temple look like the Dome of the Rock, the 7th-century Muslim structure built on that site?



The Once and Future Temple, Part II

Christian Renaissance paintings of the Temple are the visual record of a theology that had devastating consequences in the lives of Jews from antiquity to the Middle Ages and beyond.

+ The best of the editors' picks of the week

Dear friends,

Israel's other looming war

If you think war and Israel, you probably think of Israel's conflicts with its neighbors or its efforts to deal with terrorism. In *Mosaic's* July essay, however, we focus on a different sort of war—a looming culture war that when it arrives could redefine the nation's politics and one of its signature policies.

The Law of Return is probably Israel's most famous law. It stipulates that any Jew and indeed any grandchild of a Jew has the right to aliyah and to Israeli citizenship. But the question of just who counts as a Jew for those purposes remains vague. In "The Looming War Over Israel's Law of Return," the Israeli observer Rafi DeMogge argues that the fight over that question will constitute the main arena of Israeli politics over the coming years, and reflect the country's deepest cultural division.

Douglas Murray and Samuel Goldman join us

On June 29 we hosted the author of our June essay, Tamara Berens, the author and journalist Douglas Murray, and the political scientist Samuel Goldman to discuss anti-Semitism on the political right. Several hundred subscribers joined us live for that event, and the video is now available. You can watch or read the entire conversation [here](#).

Plato, Paul, and the rabbis

Last week, our language columnist Philologos began to trace the origins of Paul's famous phrase "through a glass darkly." Curious about a near-contemporary usage of a remarkably similar formulation that appears in rabbinic writing, Philologos investigated the origins of the phrase, wondering if perhaps Paul and the rabbis were both drawing from a common literary source. Pursuing his excavations further this week, he traces the line through the ancient Greek philosopher Plato, and the Alexandrian Greek-speaking Jewish writer Philo.

How to combat anti-Semitism

On our podcast this week, I spoke with the DC veteran and presidential historian Tevi Troy about the Biden administration's plan to combat anti-Semitism. Political analysts, critics, and historians have weighed in on the Biden administration's proposal—and in fact, we'll publish an illuminating historical perspective on the plan next week. But I don't know anyone who can analyze the document who possesses as much inside government experience as Troy. Listen and find out what he thinks [here](#).

From the archives

Yesterday on the Jewish calendar was the Seventeenth of Tammuz, a minor fast day that Jews observe to mourn the Roman army's breaching of the walls of Jerusalem in the year 70 CE. The fast inaugurates a three-week period of communal mourning, which concludes on Tisha b'Av, the anniversary of the destruction of the First and Second Temples.

Ever since, memory of and love for the Temple have remained at the heart of Jewish prayer and Jewish longing. The Temple has long served as an important symbol to Christians as well; this can be seen in the centrality of the Temple in so many works of Christian art. But the art historian Marc Michael Epstein points out a curious anomaly in the way that the Temple tends to be represented: many depictions of it look like the Dome of the Rock, the Muslim edifice that was constructed more than six hundred years after the Second Temple was destroyed. In our archive pick this week, Epstein provides a masterful two-part survey of the Jewish Temple in Christian art.

With every good wish,

Jonathan Silver

Editor, *Mosaic*

Warren R. Stern Senior Fellow of Jewish Civilization



An anti-judicial reform demonstration in Israel in April 2023. Eyal Warshavsky/SOPA Images/LightRocket via Getty Images.

RAFI DEMOGGE

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About the author

Rafi DeMogge is the pseudonym of an Israel-based author and researcher who writes on political demography.

The Looming War Over Israel’s Law of Return

Over the coming years, Israel’s most famous law will become an object of political gamesmanship and a potential tool for demographic engineering—no matter who will be in power.

Soon after the right-religious bloc, led by Benjamin Netanyahu’s Likud, won a governing mandate in Israel’s elections last November, attention turned to the increasingly ambitious demands of the religious and *haredi* parties that underpinned that victory. One of those demands was for the revocation of a key provision of Israel’s Law of Return, a provision known colloquially as the Grandchild Clause. The clause is perhaps the most familiar, to both Israelis and to foreigners, of any in Israeli law: it guarantees citizenship to anyone with a Jewish grandparent. Correspondingly, the demand to revoke it was controversial, drawing outcry from much of the Israeli public, including from part of the Likud party itself, and especially from American Jews and their representative organizations. For these reasons the proposal was dropped by the end of January of this year, and the government moved to focus instead on other issues, including judicial reform.

But the controversy over the Law of Return and the Grandchild Clause isn’t over. If anything, what happened last year may well be the opening skirmishes in a war that will last years if not decades. Indeed, there’s a good chance that the Grandchild Clause will one day be more controversial than the judicial reforms that nearly tore the country apart earlier this year, as

well as more meaningful in what it reveals about Israeli society. It could even rival in its importance a number of other historically contentious issues in Israel, such as the Israel-Palestinian conflict. This is no accident, since the Grandchild Clause is related to the core issue that has come to replace the Israel-Palestinian conflict as the most crucial fault line in Israeli politics, the issue that all other issues are organized around, issues of the deepest identity: who are we, and whose country is this? Both sides in the bitter controversy over Israel's identity nominally subscribe to the slogan that theirs is a Jewish, democratic state. But there is little agreement on how this slogan should be filled with content. Moreover, the ideological convictions that fuel opposing attitudes to the Grandchild Clause are inextricably linked to political and demographic self-interest, of which both sides are increasingly conscious. This is the final ingredient needed for a ferocious culture war.

I. The Grandchild Clause and Its Beneficiaries

Passed in 1950, two years after Israel declared independence, the Law of Return grants every Jew the automatic right to settle in Israel and receive Israeli citizenship. In David Ben-Gurion's view, expressed in a speech that year to the Knesset, the Law of Return does not actually *grant* anything; it merely *recognizes* every Jew's inherent right to settle in Israel:

This law does not provide for the state to bestow the right to settle upon the Jew living abroad; it affirms that this right is inherent in him from the very fact of being a Jew; the state does not grant the right of return to the Jews of the Diaspora; . . . its source is to be found in the historic and never-broken connection between the Jewish people and the homeland.

In the early years of the state, no explicit definition of who counts as a Jew for the purposes of the Law of Return was given, but legal practice largely followed the definition given in Jewish law (*halakhah*), the definition accepted by Orthodox and Conservative rabbis: a Jew is someone who was born to a Jewish mother or who underwent formal conversion under the supervision of a rabbi.

Twenty years later, in 1970, the Law of Return was amended to include a further detail, expressed in the following sentence: "The rights of a Jew under this Law . . . are also vested in a child and a grandchild of a Jew, the spouse of a Jew, the spouse of a child of a Jew and the spouse of a grandchild of a Jew, except for a person who has been a Jew and has voluntarily changed his/her religion." This sentence, of course, became known as the Grandchild Clause, and it guarantees the right to immigration and citizenship to anyone with a single Jewish grandparent.

The reason the Knesset decided to amend the Law of Return to include this clause is a matter of some historical debate. Often, Nazi Germany's so-called Nuremberg laws, passed to exclude Jews and those of Jewish descent from German society, are cited, on the grounds that if someone is Jewish enough to have been murdered by Hitler, then he is Jewish enough to come to Israel. The problem with this explanation is simple: there is no evidence that the Nuremberg laws played any role in the 1970 amendment. The real reason seems related to several other factors, including: the arrival of numerous mixed-religion families from Poland in 1968, who left their home country in the wake of an anti-Semitic government campaign; the much higher fertility rate of Arabs than Jews at the time, which produced an anxious desire for more Jews (broadly understood); and, perhaps, a desire to slow the assimilation of Diaspora Jews by making their immigration to Israel easier.

Those who arrive in Israel under the Grandchild Clause are categorized by the government as Others, the designation given to Israeli citizens who are neither Jews nor Arabs.

Today, new immigrants who arrive in Israel under the Grandchild Clause are categorized in the government's population registry as Others, the designation given to Israeli citizens who are neither Jews nor Arabs and who are typically registered as having no religion. Israel's system of family law is unprepared for these Others, who, since they have no religion and Israel has no civil marriage, are unable to legally marry. (The most popular loophole is for civil marriages to be performed abroad, and these marriages are then recognized in Israel.) In other respects, the status of Others resembles that of non-haredi Jews; most notably, they are obliged to serve in the military. It is sometimes said that the Grandchild Clause and Israel's family law give different answers to the age-old question "Who is a Jew?" But strictly speaking this is incorrect. The Grandchild Clause doesn't define those with partial Jewish ancestry as Jews. It extends to them the same right of immigration to Israel and right of citizenship that halakhic Jews have—but, once in Israel, such people are unambiguously not recognized as Jews.

At the time of its passing, the Grandchild Clause was of relatively minor practical significance. Immigration levels were low by the mid-1970s and reached record lows during the 1980s, often thought of as Israel's "lost decade" of economic stagnation. And although there was a substantial influx of Soviet Jews in the early 1970s, the 165,000 who came during this period were less likely to be intermarried than later arrivals and tended to have a stronger Jewish identity and a stronger commitment to Zionism. The remaining new immigrants during this time mostly came from traditional or religious Jewish communities in North Africa, Ethiopia, Europe, and North America—they were overwhelmingly halakhic Jews who were already covered by the Law of Return. Immigration really only picked back up in the early 1990s, with the post-Soviet aliyah wave that peaked in 1990 and 1991 and remained high until the early 2000s. Immigration from

Eastern Europe saw a resurgence again after the Russian incursion into Ukraine in 2014 and has reached mid-90s levels again in 2022 as a result of the full-fledged invasion that year.

These immigrants over the last generation were and have been very different from their 1970s precursors. They have been driven primarily by the social and economic uncertainty brought about by the collapse of the Soviet Union, rather than by Zionist fervor or anti-Semitic discrimination. And increasingly, they have also been not halakhically Jewish—and therefore many of them could come to Israel only because they had a Jewish grandparent. While in 1990 about 95 percent of ex-Soviet arrivals were defined as halakhically Jewish, between 1999 and 2009 the majority were defined as Others. In 2020 the share of halakhic Jews among these immigrants was a mere 28.3 percent, a share that has continued through the present day.

The result of this trend is that for the first time since its passing, the Grandchild Clause has been called into widespread use. Because of it, the share of Others has been consistently rising in Israel, even though the group has the highest emigration rate among all demographic groups, and the lowest fertility rate (1.35 as of 2020 according to the Central Statistical Bureau, well below even that of secular Jews). Others presently make up around five percent of Israel's total population, enough to make them a politically consequential group; they are more numerous than Israel's Druze and Christian Arab populations taken together. To put it in bluntly electoral terms: if they turned out to vote proportionally to their share in the population, Others of Soviet origin would be numerous enough for six Knesset seats. As we will see in later segments of this essay, this simple fact is crucial to a full understanding of the controversy that surrounds the Grandchild Clause. The controversy isn't merely about whether the Jewish state should welcome people with partial Jewish ancestry who aren't halakhically Jewish. It is, tacitly, also about how these people vote and which camp's vision of Israel they strengthen.

II. How Israelis See the Grandchild Clause

How do these Others define themselves? According to the ex-Soviet Israeli activist Alex Rif, as many as 94 percent of Others consider themselves Jews. Yet their Jewish identity tends to be weaker and to play a less central role in their lives than is true of Israel's halakhically Jewish population, secular and religious alike. According to a 2022 survey conducted by the Institute of National Security Studies, a relatively large minority of ex-Soviet immigrants assigns little if any importance to their Jewish identity. Still, according to all surveys only a minority of Others see themselves as definitely not Jewish.

But most Israeli Jews don't see them that way. According to a 2022 survey conducted by the Israel Democracy Institute (IDI), only 26 percent of

Israeli Jews recognize immigrants with only patrilineal Jewish ancestry as Jews. Even a slight majority of secular Jews, 50 percent vs. 44 percent, decline to recognize patrilineal Jewish ancestry.

This widespread commitment to the halakhic definition of Jewish identity, however, doesn't automatically translate into opposition to the Grandchild Clause. Surveys on the clause are many, and they paint a mixed mixture. In the IDI's 2009 Portrait of Israeli Jews, only a minority (42 percent) supported the clause. According to a later Direct Polls survey from May 2022, 34 percent of Israeli Jews supported completely cancelling and another 30 percent "modifying" the Grandchild Clause (presumably in a more restrictive direction). Yet an even more recent poll conducted by the IDI in January of this year showed that only a slight majority—54.4 percent—of Israeli Jews think that cancelling the Grandchild Clause would help preserve Israel's Jewish majority, while a slight plurality—47.7 vs. 43.7 percent—thought that cancelling the clause would undermine the Zionist ideals of aliyah and the ingathering of the exiles.

In all these polls, there is a clear and unsurprising correlation between level of religiosity and opposition to the Grandchild Clause. Haredim are the least supportive of the clause, while secular Jews are the most supportive, and ex-Soviet immigrants especially supportive. The most obvious objection to the clause is at base rooted in Jewish law: it contravenes the halakhic definition of a Jew, which, in this view, is the only definition relevant to understanding Israel's identity as a Jewish state. Put in more practical terms, the Grandchild Clause strikes the religious as a means for non-Jews to immigrate to Israel *en masse*, thereby threatening or diluting Israel's Jewish character. A related concern is fear of intermarriage and "hidden assimilation": according to the 2023 IDI poll cited above, all Jewish groups other than the secular are opposed to their children marrying non-Jews.

As this statistic suggests, the greatest dividing line according to these surveys is between secular Jews and everyone else. The typical secular attitude to Grandchild Clause immigrants is one of conditional acceptance: they or their children will serve in the army, speak Hebrew, and generally adopt a lifestyle that isn't substantially different from that of secular Jews. This attitude often comes hand in hand with support for easier conversion to Judaism, which finds 76.5 percent support among secular and 56 percent among traditional Jews who define themselves as "not religious," and only 35 percent support among more religious groups.

In 2023, the close correlation between level of religiosity and opposition to the Grandchild Clause also means something else: a close correlation between support for or opposition to the present right-religious government. In the IDI survey, coalition voters consistently gave answers indicative of opposition to the Grandchild Clause, while opposition voters consistently gave answers indicative of support for it. The tone in the Knesset was similar: virtually all support expressed for the plan to cancel the clause last year came from members of the coalition, with the opposition being fierce-

ly against such a move. Some individual opposition members are known to be in favor of cancelling the Grandchild Clause, but they have been notably mum during these debates.

This situation suggests a major shift: while the Grandchild Clause has been divisive for a long time, it wasn't always divisive along partisan lines.

This situation suggests a major shift: while the Grandchild Clause has been divisive for a long time, it wasn't always divisive along partisan lines. In April 2005, it was none other than center-left leader Tzipi Livni who submitted a bill to cancel the clause. (Livni was in Likud at the time, but she belonged to the left flank that supported the disengagement from Gaza, and half a year later she joined Sharon's new Kadima party.) Other left-of-center MKs who expressed some level of support for the move included Labor's Ophir Pines-Paz and Meimad's Michael Melchior. (Meimad was a small religious center-left party, which for most of its history functioned as a satellite party of Labor.) At the same time, Likud's Reuven Rivlin—ideologically well to the right of Livni—was fiercely opposed to touching the Law of Return; and haredi MKs such as Aryeh Deri and Moshe Gafni, while opposed to the Grandchild Clause in principle, were much more cautious about their opposition than they are today.

Thus, while the Grandchild Clause's overall favorability hasn't changed significantly—support for the clause appears to be somewhat but not much higher today—the controversy has a much more partisan nature to it than two decades ago. If in 2005 there were important voices on the left that supported cancelling the clause, and important voices on the right that supported keeping it, bloc affiliation today is a much stronger predictor of where one stands on the issue.

What explains this partisan shift? One strong possibility is that support for or opposition to the Grandchild Clause is now ultimately related to if not dictated by political self-interest. And this brings us back to the Others and how their voting patterns have shifted between 1990 and today.

III. The Russians Change the Picture

Ever since the great post-Soviet aliyah wave, the so-called “Russian vote”—a term used colloquially to refer to all immigrants from the former USSR, Others included—has been one of the cardinal questions of Israeli politics. Post-Soviet *olim* and their descendants make up over a million people and around 15 percent of Israel's “Jews and Others.” They're a significant constituency whose votes can easily decide elections. In my eyes, there are four periods in the history of the Russian vote: a brief Labor period (1992), an era of right-leaning sectoral parties (1996-2006), full entrenchment in Israel's right-wing bloc (2009-2019), and a new era since

then in which they have been rapidly shifting allegiance to the center-left bloc. (One note: there are few polls on the voting behavior of post-Soviet Others; they are typically treated together with other post-Soviet *olim*, and their voting patterns can be reasonably presumed to be similar.)

At the time of its onset, the predominantly secular and Ashkenazi center-left establishment welcomed the post-Soviet aliyah wave with great enthusiasm. In 1990, this establishment was in a dire state, unable to win a single election since the Menachem Begin-led Likud won its famous electoral upset in 1977, after almost three decades of uninterrupted Labor rule. When the Soviet aliyah wave arrived, the Labor establishment hoped that it would replenish its secular, European-oriented voter base. And for a brief period, this expectation was borne out. In the 1992 elections, recent immigrants from the USSR mostly backed Yitzhak Rabin's Labor, so that after a fifteen-year hiatus Labor once again received enough Knesset seats to put together the first center-left government since 1973.

The secular and Ashkenazi center-left establishment welcomed the Russian aliyah wave with great enthusiasm. But that hope was to be short-lived, as the Russians quickly turned to the right.

But Labor's hope was to be short-lived. After Rabin's murder, his successor Shimon Peres called early elections in 1996 hoping to claim a stronger mandate for continuing the peace process. But Peres narrowly lost to the young and relatively inexperienced Benjamin Netanyahu, who had on his side a new center-right party, Natan Sharansky's Yisrael b'Aliyah, which represented the interests of Russian speakers.

By 1999, Russian speakers' parties were ideologically right-leaning, though ex-Soviet immigrants weren't fully aligned with the right-wing bloc yet, and in the same year's direct elections, a majority of them still voted for Ehud Barak. Over the 2000s, such parties tended to be regular (if not always reliable) allies of Likud. Yisrael b'Aliyah was itself short-lived; it folded into Likud in 2003. But Avigdor Lieberman, a Russian-speaking Israeli politician originally from Moldova, split from Likud and founded Yisrael Beytenu in 1999, a brand that proved to be much more durable. For more than two decades, Yisrael Beytenu was the party of Israel's Russian speakers and reflected their demographic power. In 2009, it garnered fifteen seats and became the third largest party in the country, ahead even of a not-yet-defunct Labor.

During the height of the Netanyahu era, between 2009 and 2019, Yisrael Beytenu was a stable fixture of the right-wing bloc, so much so that it ran on a joint slate with Likud in 2013. Still, the party's platform was eclectic, and ideologically it never fit as seamlessly into the right as its bloc affiliation would suggest. Lieberman advocated for hawkish policies on matters of security and at a certain point even demanded a loyalty oath from Arab citizens of Israel. His peculiar proposal for ending the Israel-Palestinian

conflict had Israel not only annexing the major settlement blocs but also ceding sovereign areas from pre-1967 Israel—a trade which would result in a Palestinian state and an Israel with redrawn borders and greater ethnic homogeneity. The plan was often criticized as racist by the left, but it was also anathema in the eyes of the religious right for its break with territorial maximalism.

Another aspect that distinguished Yisrael Beytenu from the rest of the right-wing bloc was its liberal platform on matters of state and religion: support for civil marriage, lifting restrictions on transportation and commerce on the Shabbat, and easier conversion, a matter of significance for Lieberman's not-halakhically-Jewish voters. This unusual platform truly reflected the political positions of ex-Soviet immigrants: a mixture of antagonism to Arabs, hawkish views on security, and staunch secularism.

The Russian-speaking sector's secularism meant that Lieberman frequently clashed with the *haredi* parties, particularly over Israel's draft exemption for *haredi* men, a clash which nearly resulted in the fall of the ruling coalition in 2012. In 2019, things started to boil over. Lieberman deemphasized the hawkish aspects of his party's platform and rebranded himself as a secularist first and foremost. He still endorsed Netanyahu as prime minister, but refused to join his government, once again due to disagreement over the *haredi* draft exemption. Then, before the snap elections that September, he campaigned for a unity government between Likud and Blue and White that would exclude the *haredi* parties. By 2020, he spurned Netanyahu altogether, recommending Netanyahu's centrist rival Benny Gantz as prime minister and agreeing to a minority government that rested on external support from the Arab parties. When in the face of the pandemic, Gantz instead chose to join Netanyahu in a power-sharing coalition, Lieberman refused.

By 2021, Lieberman's shift was complete: he was fully aligned with the center-left bloc. When that bloc won in elections that year, by successfully luring Naftali Bennett's now-defunct Yamina to break from the right-wing bloc, he demanded (and received) the Ministry of Finance, signaling his new focus on domestic rather than security issues. Although he never explicitly announced a change of heart on matters of security, foreign policy, and Jewish-Arab relations, his tone on these issues noticeably softened; for example, in 2021 he called for amending the Nation-State Law with an equality clause.

Lieberman's voters, as well as the broader Russian-speaking sector, have followed the same political journey. According to a survey that was conducted shortly before the 2022 elections, Russian speakers supported the opposition against the right-wing coalition parties by a ratio of around two to one. When it comes to recent and especially not-halakhically-Jewish immigrants, this share is likely a conservative estimate, since the category of Russian speakers also includes pre-1990 veteran immigrants, religious Jews, and traditionalist Jews from the Caucasus and from Central Asian

countries who are sociologically often closer to Mizrahi Jews than to Russian and Ukrainian ones. In other words, the immigrants coming today from Russia, Ukraine, and Belarus are likely even more skewed toward opposition parties. There is some evidence that during the second half of the 2010s, part of the uptick in aliyah from Russia was due to Vladimir Putin's increasingly authoritarian rule. Many of the immigrants during this period were educated, liberal urban professionals who saw in Israel a liberal haven and a refuge from authoritarian repression. As a result, their movement was sometimes dubbed "the Putin aliyah."

As for Yisrael Beytenu, well, since 2015 it has not been able to repeat its earlier success, and has received between 5 and 8 seats, partly because the next generation of Russian speakers, who grew up in Israel, tend to vote for more mainstream parties, again mostly in the center-left bloc.

IV. The New Dividing Line in Israeli Politics

These shifts in the Russian vote were not incidental. To a certain degree, they reflect ideological changes in that demographic. But much more, they reflect huge changes in Israeli politics and what issues matter most to Israelis. Around 2019 and 2020, it was commonly argued that there was no significant ideological difference between Likud and the so-called "anti-Bibi right"—a category that was meant to include Yisrael Beytenu—and that the main divide in Israel revolved not around ideology but around the controversial persona of Netanyahu. This was already false then and is even more clearly false today. In fact, the logic of Israel's electoral blocs, of what constitutes right and left in the Jewish state, has changed significantly over the past decade.

Until the mid-2010s, the left-right dichotomy in Israeli politics referred primarily to different views about the Israel-Palestinian conflict, the peace process, and security. But debate over such issues has nearly vanished in the last decade. There is broad consensus today that a peace agreement with the Palestinians that would fully settle border and so-called final-status questions is not realistic. Sure, the center-left continues to warn (with varying levels of emphasis) against unfettered settlement growth and against Israel's increasing entanglement with the Palestinians, but even Meretz's Yair Golan tends to speak of "separating" from the Palestinians, rather than putting an end to the conflict with a final peace agreement. On the other side, no party left of Religious Zionism is fully and unambiguously committed to the old idea of "Greater Israel"; in 2020, large parts of the Likud-adjacent right welcomed the Trump peace plan and thus agreed to ceding land, at least in principle.

The political trench lines in Israel today have not disappeared as the Israeli-Palestinian conflict has receded. Instead, they increasingly follow not the logic of security but the logic of culture war and identity.

Politics abhors a peaceful vacuum, and Israelis need something to fight over, so the political trench lines in Israel today have not disappeared. Instead, they increasingly follow not the logic of security but the logic of culture war and identity. This is probably the most massive shift in Israeli politics in decades, yet it has been little apprehended, especially outside the state. The right-religious bloc—Likud and its religious and *haredi* allies—sees Israel not merely as a Jewish state but as a state that is *first and foremost* Jewish—Jewish not only in the sense that it has a Jewish majority and state symbols, but Jewish also in ways that are expressed in its policies, in the character of public spaces, and in its understanding of its own place in the world. Representatives of that bloc profess commitment to Israel as a democracy, but they understand democracy first and foremost in majoritarian terms: if Israel has a Western, liberal character, then the legitimacy of such a character is rooted in the existence of a majority that supports it, and which is free to change its mind and turn Israel into something other than a Western, liberal country.

The parties opposed to the right-religious bloc—with the exception of the Arab parties—also affirm Israel’s self-definition as a Jewish state. But this left-secular bloc generally sees Israel as first and foremost a modern Western state and a liberal democracy with a Jewish majority and Jewish cultural characteristics. In the eyes of its adherents, Israel’s identity as a Western-oriented, liberal democracy isn’t contingent on the wishes of a temporary majority; rather, these features are parts of Israel’s DNA no less than being a Jewish state is. In other words, in the Israel of 2023, the greatest dividing line isn’t between hawks and doves, but between Western-oriented liberals and Jewish exceptionalists—or, to put it more simply, between “Israelis” and “Jews.”

In a country split this way, Lieberman’s Yisrael Beytenu firmly belongs to the liberal camp, a stance unlikely to change even in the post-Netanyahu era, whenever that arrives. This distinction manifests itself in several ways that show the difference between Likud and the anti-Bibi right to be about much more than just the identity of the prime minister. For example, in a survey conducted by Israel’s Channel 13 last year, overwhelming majorities of New Hope and Yisrael Beytenu voters supported same-sex marriage, whereas Likud voters were about evenly divided and religious parties overwhelmingly opposed. According to another poll, conducted by HaMadad, Yisrael Beytenu voters were indistinguishable from left-wing voters with respect to their likelihood of having considered emigration in response to the political situation in Israel.

And this brings us to the crux of the controversy over the Grandchild Clause. Before Lieberman broke from the right-wing bloc, the political

right's ideology and its self-interest were in conflict with each other. On the one hand, the Grandchild Clause brought many new immigrants to Israel who weren't halakhically Jewish. On the other hand, these new immigrants tended to vote for Yisrael Beytenu (or Likud), and thereby strengthened the right-wing bloc. Now the picture is different. There is no other hand, not really. Today, the right-religious bloc's ideology and its demographic-electoral interests are in full alignment. Most of that bloc's voters oppose the immigration of Others on principle; and the Others now tend to vote for parties that are opposed to them.

V. A Great-Grandchild Clause?

Does the same go for the left-secular bloc? It does.

The election results in November 2022, the coalition negotiations that followed it, including the provocative demands for religious legislation made by the *haredi* parties, and above all Justice Minister Yariv Levin's reform proposal to weaken the judiciary and concentrate more power in the hands of the elected coalition—all these developments were a bitter wake-up call for center-left and liberal Israeli Jews. Pundits and political scientists have been noting for a while that Israel's rightward shift over the last 50 years has been in part driven by demography, and that the liberal bloc has a built-in demographic disadvantage thanks to the higher fertility rate of religious and *haredi* Jews, who overwhelmingly support the right. For a long time, however, these demographic processes largely took place under the surface, hidden from ordinary Israeli voters. I can recall many personal conversations, even with well-informed Israelis who follow politics, in which people assumed that sure, the *Haredim* have more kids, but also plenty of those children end up becoming secular, and it all balances out. In fact, this is very far from the truth: while nearly half of all children born into religious Zionist families indeed become secular or more loosely traditional, *haredi* Jews (especially Ashkenazi *Haredim*) remain in their community at very high rates.

Over the past half year or so, however, political demography has suddenly become a mainstream topic in the center-left, and that bloc's apathy has given way to a deep demographic anxiety—a fear that an insurmountable right-religious majority will form and permanently rule over them. Interestingly, many on the right also seem to believe the same thing. Demographic taunting—“we have more kids, you can give up and admit defeat already now!”—has become a standard, if disturbing, staple of political discourse. Again, such predictions are somewhat overblown, given the just-noted trends in religious Zionist demography, but still, the right-wing bloc's demographic advantage is real.

Over the past half year or so, political demography has suddenly become a mainstream topic in the center-left, and that bloc's apathy has given way to a deep demographic anxiety.

No party is as affected by this reality as Yisrael Beytenu. According to the N12 survey made shortly before the 2022 elections, 35 percent of the party's voters were over 65 years old, which makes it by far the most aged political party, significantly more even than Meretz, whose share of voters over 65 was 27 percent. In last year's poll of young voters by the same channel, Yisrael Beytenu garnered a meager two mandates, well below the electoral threshold. Lieberman's efforts in recent years to expand his core base of elderly Russian-speaking voters have largely failed. Add to this the fact that Yisrael Beytenu's base of ex-Soviet immigrants has a significantly lower fertility rate than native secular Israeli Jews, and it becomes clear that no political force is at such great demographic disadvantage as Yisrael Beytenu and any future Russian-speakers' party in general.

However, the Grandchild Clause is now vital not only for Lieberman but also for the entire center-left bloc, since it allows the immigration of tens of thousands of potential opposition voters to Israel each year. In an average year (preceding the war in Ukraine), around 25-30,000 immigrants move to Israel, and around 15-20,000 of them are not halakhically Jewish. (Not all of them come via the Grandchild Clause; some of them are non-Jewish spouses and the children of halakhic Jews.) Since there are around 185,000 live births per year in Israel, this means that around 10 percent of Israel's annual demographic growth comes from the immigration of (overwhelmingly ex-Soviet) Others. This is a very significant component of population growth.

Both sides in the battle for Israel's fundamental identity are now starting to sense the political-demographic importance of Others, which explains why attitudes to the Grandchild Clause break much more along partisan lines than two decades ago. It is hard to say to what extent this is a result of conscious attitudes and to what extent the instinctive recognition of collective self-interest. Anecdotally, I have often heard Haredim (but not many others in the right-wing bloc) quip that "Russian goyim" are brought to Israel with the express intent to serve as a counterweight to their rapid growth. On the center-left, I have rarely encountered explicitly demographic arguments; most secular liberals simply feel that there is no meaningful difference between halakhically Jewish and other Russian immigrants, and that both have place in the Jewish state. But I have little doubt that at some level they also understand that the Grandchild Clause serves their interests and undermines the rival camp's.

Lieberman now goes even a step beyond the Grandchild Clause. In October 2022, the war in Ukraine raging, he proposed to amend the Law of Return with a *Great-Grandchild* Clause, which would have extended the right of

immigration and a path to Israel citizenship to anyone with at least one Jewish great-grandparent. Lieberman was cautious in his proposal: he argued that such a change is necessary for humanitarian reasons, he didn't demand automatic citizenship for the great-grandchildren of Jews, and he suggested that the measure be temporary. Even so, the proposal would change Israel radically. Around 600,000 Russian and 200,000 Ukrainian citizens are still eligible to immigrate to Israel through the Law of Return. If this right were extended to anyone with a Jewish great-grandparent, then the number of potential immigrants could potentially be in the millions, considering the high rate of intermarriage in post-Soviet nations. It is difficult to believe that electoral considerations weren't on Lieberman's mind when proposing the amendment.

The chances of a Great-Grandchild Clause passing in the near future, even under a center-left government, are not high. Lieberman's proposal was mostly ignored, though then-Prime Minister Yair Lapid said that it should be discussed by the cabinet and Knesset and not rejected out of hand. The politicians on the right flank of Gantz's centrist National Unity, especially religious ones, would be strenuously opposed to it. But in the long run, the temptation of demographic engineering will likely be too great to resist, and the center-left will find a way to mitigate the cognitive dissonance between its desire to increase its pool of voters and its continuing commitment to Zionism and Israel as a Jewish state. It can be expected that such a drive will go hand in hand with a vigorous push to redefine who is considered a Jew. Perhaps the liberal camp's politicians will archaically refer to the potential new immigrants as *zera Yisrael* (the seed of Israel) in order to emphasize their connection to the Jewish people.

(As an aside, I should note that lenient stances on the status of *zera Yisrael*, and support for their easier conversion, exists outside Israel's secular-liberal tribe, but it remains marginal. For example, Haim Amsalem, a Sephardi rabbi and founding member of Shas, is a long-time advocate for very lenient conversion standards for people of patrilineal Jewish ancestry who serve in the IDF, going so far as to argue that their military service itself should be interpreted as "acceptance of the mitzvot." It is safe to say that Amsalem's approach won almost exclusively secular admirers, while antagonizing most of the *haredi* world.)

So, although it is unlikely that the Great-Grandchild Clause will become the official policy of the liberal camp in the near future, a drive of some sort for more permissive immigration policy in general probably will. The minister of the interior has a great amount of wiggle room in executing Israel's policies toward refugees and naturalization. During the Bennett-Lapid government's short tenure, Ayelet Shaked, minister of the interior at the time, took a hard line and capped the number of Ukrainian refugees arriving in Israel who weren't eligible to immigrate via the Law of Return. In a future government, though, one of the center-left parties could demand this ministry and quietly use it to speed up the arrival and naturalization of East European immigrants even without any official legislative change to the Law of Return.

VI. Complicating Factors

For now, though the two new sides in Israeli politics are waking up to their new reality, they are not fully aware of it yet or fully marshaled in their forces. Likewise, the political-demographic sorting of which the Russians are a leading indicator has not fully finished. The center-left bloc isn't entirely united in its support for the Grandchild Clause; it presently includes some "liberal religious" Jews with hawkish views on the Israel-Palestinian conflict but moderate to liberal views on social issues, who remain firmly committed to the halakhic understanding of Jewish identity. Likewise, the political right, which continues to enjoy the support of a minority of secular Jews, isn't monolithically opposed to it, either. After all, part of the reason that cancelling the clause was shelved was internal opposition within Likud. It has recently become common to describe the right-religious bloc as *ha-gush ha-emuni*, or the bloc of the believers. However, while this bloc primarily represents traditional, religious, and haredi Jews, it is still dependent on buy-in from a significant minority of secular voters.

According to the N12 survey mentioned earlier, as of 2022 31.5 percent of Likud and 13.5 percent of Religious Zionism voters defined themselves as secular. (The haredi parties had no measurable support among secular voters.) This means that about twelve of the coalition's 64 seats came from secular right-wingers who (as of 2022) decided to throw in their lot with the right-religious bloc. Without these voters, the right-wing bloc cannot win elections in Israel today. Incidentally, this is about the number of seats that the coalition would lose if elections were held today, according to recent polls. While some secular voters will always stick with the right-wing bloc no matter what, it is reasonable to assume that they are most of those who have switched sides over the past few months. It is also likely that secular right-wingers are less opposed to the Grandchild Clause than non-secular ones; according to one survey, voters who migrated from Likud to the center-left bloc tend to be more secular. Are there any groups moving left to right under this new dividing line? To my knowledge, none. There's a general expectation that if a new "liberal right-wing" party appeared, one like Naftali Bennett's Yamina, it could attract voters from both blocs. But no such party has yet appeared.

Since the two sides are not fully conscious of what is happening, it makes sense that they do not fully understand each other. The Israeli right is afraid that, whether in government or in opposition, the liberal camp is trying to undermine Israel's Jewish character. The right-wing media frequently describe all of Israel's center-left as "post-Zionist," and accuse them of trying to transform Israel into a "state of all of its citizens." (This phrase may sound unobjectionable in English, but to the ears of Hebrew speakers, it invariably means a *non*-Jewish state). This is not quite right. Post-Zionism undeniably exists on the political left in Israel, but today it is even more on the margins than it was in the past. Meretz could have been considered a post-Zionist party in 1999, when Zehava Gal-On expressed opposition to the Law of Return in its present form and considered ele-

ments of it “racist”; today, not so much. Voices can occasionally also be heard on the right that a center-left government might try to cancel the Law of Return. But of course, a center-left government today is far more likely to do the opposite and attempt to broaden the law and attempt to flood Israel with East European immigrants who now, in Israel’s culture wars, count as “Western.”

My view is that the center-left bloc doesn’t really misunderstand the right in the same way the right misunderstands the left. The center-left certainly says things about the right that aren’t true—“they are all religious fundamentalists”; “they all want dictatorship”—but I think this is some of the oversimplified discourse that is commonplace in today’s political climate, rather than genuine conviction. What the left does misunderstand, to some extent, is itself. The center-left has convinced itself that the anti-judicial reform protests are strictly in support of democracy. It seems clear to me, though, that they really are in support of the state’s liberal-Western character.

Another group liable to being misunderstood, and angry over the matter, is American Jewry, who have already exerted their outside power and surely will again. In Israel, the debate over the Grandchild Clause is seen as primarily revolving around post-Soviet aliyah. But whatever happens to it stands to affect other Diaspora Jews as well. Last year, when the idea of its cancellation was first proposed, Jewish organizations (especially Reform) in North America grew furious. It is important to note that Orthodox Jewry remained largely mum and tacitly supportive on the proposed immigration reform. For them, like for the Israeli religious right, Israel’s self-definition as a Jewish state is uncomplicated and essentially tied to the halakhic definition of Jewish identity. As is often the case, the main divide in American Jewry seems between Orthodox Jews and everyone else.

The strong opposition of Reform and liberal Jews to cancelling the clause sometimes seems curious to Israelis, given the low numbers at stake. The number of Americans who would be personally affected by abolishing the clause is miniscule. While over two thirds of immigrants arriving from post-Soviet countries are not halakhically Jewish, between 2010 and 2021 only around 5 percent of all U.S. immigrants to Israel were defined as Others, and only 0.3 percent—a mere 67 people—came through the Grandchild Clause. This isn’t surprising. While most American Jews are non-Orthodox, and non-Orthodox Jews are heavily intermarried, American emigrants to Israel aren’t representative of American Jewry. In 2007, for instance, while Orthodox Jews were only 10 percent of all American Jews, they were 60 percent of American Jews who made aliyah. Reform Jews, around 35 percent of American Jews, were only five percent of all U.S. immigrants in the same year. So, one could be forgiven for thinking that Reform Jews have little stake in the Law of Return one way or other.

The Law of Return is sometimes seen not so much as a particular immigration law passed in a given year by human politicians but as a sign of an unbreakable connection between Jews everywhere and the Jewish state.

But despite negligible practical effects, revising the law would threaten totemic symbols that are foundational to the mostly liberal North American Jewish understanding of what Israel is meant to represent, an understanding shared by many in Israel, like some of the Likudniks who were opposed to the clause's cancellation. According to this vision, Israel is not just a Jewish state but a safe haven for Jews—a place of refuge for anyone who could be subjected to anti-Semitic persecution due to his or her Jewish ancestry. Few non-Orthodox American Jews are interested in actually immigrating to Israel, but it's crucial to their vision of the Jewish state that they (and their children and grandchildren) will always have the option if the need arises. On top of this, the clause and the Law of Return more broadly are sometimes seen not so much as particular immigration laws passed in a given year by human politicians but as signs of an unbreakable connection between Jews everywhere and the Jewish state.

The second reason for American Jewish support for the clause is more prosaic: non-Orthodox Jews are far more intermarried than Orthodox ones. Reform Judaism also largely recognizes people of only patrilineal Jewish ancestry as Jews and allows its clergy to officiate mixed marriages. For Reform Jews, then, the push to cancel the Grandchild Clause is yet another reminder that Israel doesn't recognize their stream of Judaism, and sometimes doesn't even recognize themselves or their relatives as Jews. The diminished status of Reform and Conservative Judaism already complicates many liberal Jews' connection to Israel, and it extends to issues ranging from the non-recognition of non-Orthodox conversions and marriage ceremonies performed in Israel to the position of women at the Western Wall. Merely considering elimination of the Grandchild Clause exacerbates these tensions considerably.

The debate over who is a Jew in Israel is likely to repeat itself not only within the U.S., but on a smaller scale also within Israel about American Jewry. Edieal J. Pinker's recent population projection estimates that due to intermarriage and low fertility, the number of Reform and Conservative Jews in the U.S. will drop from a combined 3.5 to 2.5 million by 2063. It is reasonable to expect that with the passage of time, the gap between the size of the Reform and Conservative Jewish communities as perceived by members of these communities themselves, and their size as perceived by Israel's religious establishment, will keep growing. Because of the increasing share of Reform and Conservative converts—presently seven percent of 35-to-49-year-olds in those movements—and people of patrilineal Jewish ancestry, there will be a growing population of American Jews that Israel won't recognize as Jews.

All of this suggests that even with the best intentions, the distance between Israel and American non-Orthodox Jewry on this matter will only grow. Already today, there are 7 or 8 million Americans who aren't halakhically Jewish but qualify for aliyah via the Grandchild Clause. For now, few of them define themselves as Jews by religion. But within the next half century, as that group grows, there could be hundreds of thousands of people who unambiguously define themselves as Jews by religion but whose Jewish identity will be disputed by Israel's religious establishment. Scrapping the Grandchild Clause would likely turn the present rift into a complete schism, but keeping the clause isn't guaranteed to stop, let alone reverse, the process.

VII. Two Visions of Jewish Statehood

When will the fight over the Grandchild Clause begin again in earnest? In some ways, the battle over East European immigration is already taking place. Although the ḥaredi and religious parties gave up on cancelling the Grandchild Clause, at least for now, in April the government scrapped an emergency aliyah track that had been put in place by the Bennett-Lapid government. In June, the Knesset also voted to roll back new immigrants' entitlement to a passport immediately after arrival and to reinstate the pre-2017 situation, when Israeli citizenship was granted immediately but passports were given out after a one-year residency requirement. (The more recent law was passed thanks to pressure by no other than Lieberman, who argued that the residency requirement discriminated against new immigrants.)

And in a deeper way, this battle has been present in Zionism since its very beginning. It can be seen not just in the differences between thinkers like Herzl and Ahad Ha'am, but within the writings of almost every great Zionist thinker. This tension, inherent in the Jewish national movement in a way that the conflict with the Palestinians never could be, now once again finds its expression in the Israeli political and cultural divide.

The religious right believes in a state that is at its core first and foremost Jewish—a majoritarian democracy that can freely decide to adopt or shun liberal values according to its interests and the wishes of its ever-changing voters. This vision taps into millennia of Jewish history and sees a country that is thoroughly exceptional *because* it is Jewish. By contrast, the liberal camp's Israel is (mostly but not entirely) built on the Herzlian idea of Jewish normalcy; it is, in, the Zionist poet Ḥayyim Naḥman Bialik's words, a country with Jewish thieves and prostitutes and a Jewish police force. It is a thoroughly modern, normal country, which is just like any other country *except* that it is Jewish.

The religious right believes in a state that is at its core first and foremost Jewish. By contrast, the liberal camp's Israel is built on the Herzlian idea of Jewish normalcy.

These starkly contrasting visions have straightforward consequences for immigration policy. The religious right will want to stem the arrival in Israel of people who, according to Jewish law, are not Jewish and who therefore will complicate the essential Jewish qualities of the nation—and who will also vote for their opponents. They are frustrated that their camp cannot translate its growing demographic weight into policy; whether by the Supreme Court or by other unelected institutions, the right feels (with some justification, albeit often to an exaggerated extent) that the center-left continues to set Israel's agenda despite usually losing elections. Yariv Levin's drive to remake the justice system partly stems from this feeling of frustration and dispossession; so does the incipient desire to ensure that as few secularists as possible arrive in the country. The liberal camp, on the other hand, will want to facilitate the immigration of more people like themselves, in part because they see them as natural companions in their version of the Zionist dream, and in part because they would help compensate for their camp's demographic disadvantage. The North American Diaspora will mostly follow this battle from the sidelines, with Orthodox Jews cheering for the right, and most of everyone else for the center-left.

Throughout this essay, I have claimed that the main divide in Israeli society has to do with identity rather than security, and that the two camps give different answers to the question "Who are we?" Most supporters of the right-religious bloc have a straightforward answer to this question: we are Jews. We can peacefully live together with anyone else who accepts Israel as a Jewish state, although not in numbers that would threaten a robust Jewish majority. However, such people will always be considered "strangers and sojourners" rather than full members of our tribe.

Supporters of the center-left bloc tend to have a different and more ambiguous answer to the question of who we are. On the one hand, typically when center-left politicians (and the protest movement's leaders) speak in the first-person plural mode, they speak of *us, Israelis*, rather than *us, Jews*. On the other hand, the protest movement's re-appropriation of Zionist symbolism (the flag, the Declaration of Independence, and HaTikvah), its frequent references to Jewish history, and its celebration of army duty as a core component of Israeli-Jewish identity were not just PR measures but sincere expressions of their worldview.

This worldview was perhaps most aptly expressed by Nadav Argaman, director of the Shin Bet between 2016 and 2021, who quipped that Israel belongs "to everyone who bears the burden." In practice this means first and foremost the secular Jewish middle class, which bears most of the tax burden and participates in army service; they are the "best Israelis", the model citizens that others ought to emulate. According to this view, any citizen can be a good Israeli as long as he accepts Israel as a Western liberal

democracy with Jewish cultural characteristics, though for some groups—for example Israeli Arabs, Haredim, and “Hardalim,” i.e. Torah-oriented nationalists—such acceptance will typically be much harder than for others, such as the liberal religious, the Druze, and also the ex-Soviet Others. In short, then, the slowly crystallizing, implicit ideology that is now getting a foothold in Israel’s liberal camp is neither Zionism as the religious right understands it nor post-Zionism, but rather, a kind of post-ethnic Israeli civic nationalism. *We* are those who bear the burden and sustain the state—mostly Jews, but not all Jews and not only Jews.

The conflict between these competing identities and the accompanying visions is unlikely to be resolved anytime soon, if ever. In the meantime, the Law of Return and the Grandchild Clause will be at its center, serving as the policy locus for a fundamental debate over Israel’s soul. While the haredi and religious parties have given up for now on cancelling the Grandchild Clause, the war over the Law of Return is not only far from over, it is just about to begin.



Far-right leader Nick Fuentes speaks as protesters gather in New York City on November 13, 2021. Tayfun Coskun/Anadolu Agency via Getty Images.

THE EDITORS

JULY 5 2023

Watch Douglas Murray, Samuel Goldman, and Tamara Berens on Anti-Semitism and the Battle for the American Right

A recording of our special subscriber-only event on June 29 is now available.

For years, *Mosaic* has devoted its attention to addressing the urgent problem of anti-Semitism on the left in America and across the world. This month, it has turned its gaze toward the same problem on the political right. In “From Coy to Goy,” the writer Tamara Berens finds that over the last several years, a constellation of far-right activists has grown and united into movement bent on challenging the American conservative tradition and the Republican mainstream; and Holocaust denial, Jew-hatred, and opposition to the U.S.-Israel relationship are all central to its identity.

To delve more into Berens’s essay and explore the battle over anti-Semitism now being waged on the American right, *Mosaic* has invited the prolific author and journalist **Douglas Murray** to join Berens and the political science professor **Samuel Goldman** for a conversation.

Read the transcript below or watch on our website.

Jonathan Silver:

My name's Jonathan Silver, I'm the editor of *Mosaic*. Welcome to this afternoon's discussion with Tamara Berens, the author of our June essay, "From Coy to Goy," which explores strains of anti-Semitism on the right.

Tamara and I are joined by two distinguished guests, the George Washington University political scientist, Samuel Goldman, and the author and journalist, Douglas Murray. Let me say a word about what we're doing and why.

Mosaic was established in June 2013. This month, we celebrate ten years of publishing essays on Jewish letters, Jewish culture, Zionist history, Israeli politics and national security, and the biblical and religious foundations of Jewish civilization. In the course of these last ten years, we've published dozens of essays on the subject of anti-Semitism, its origins, and its penchant for modulating itself to harmonize with the dominant chords of the culture. In some eras, anti-Semitism deploys theological arguments. In some eras, it is presented as a consequence of biological science. At times, anti-Semitism manifests itself in utopian incantations about human rights. For the past decade, we've published work that focuses on the outgrowth of anti-Semitism from the political left, looking at its Soviet and Communist inflections, and also at the nodes in Western life where anti-Semitism has been incubated in the universities in prestige and legacy media and also in social media.

This month, we decided to turn our vision in another direction. In a moment, I'm going to ask Tamara to recapitulate the main themes of her essay and then we'll hear from Douglas Murray, author most recently of the *War on the West*, and then from Samuel Goldman, author of *After Nationalism*.

For those of you who are joining us live, I want to especially thank you for being part of our subscriber community. We simply could not publish work like this or convene conversations of this kind without your support.

Tamara, why did you write "From Coy to Goy"? What's this essay about?

Tamara Berens:

Thank you so much, Jon. First I'll just say what a privilege to be sitting here with Douglas Murray and Sam Goldman. Douglas was really the first writer who made me think, "I want to do this. I want to engage with ideas in the public square." Sam Goldman was the first teacher that really got me thinking about conservatism as a series of often conflicting ideas rather than just a set of policy positions. So thank you both for being here.

I'll start by summarizing the arguments I made in my piece, "From Coy to Goy," for everyone watching and listening who might not have read it in full. The piece at its core examines the nature of contemporary right-wing

anti-Semitism in America and the extent to which it influences mainstream culture and on a closer level, conservative and Republican institutions, which aren't always the same thing.

The story begins at the time of the 2016 presidential election cycle and the rise of what was then the alt-right, or the alternative right. There was a convergence of factors that led to this, beginning with the reliance on social media for news, and then candidate Trump's reliance and use of social media himself. Groups of extreme people and institutions that were formally on the fringes began looking to Trump as a popular vessel for their ideas. And there was a huge spike in online anti-Semitism targeting prominent Jews like Ben Shapiro.

Of course, the Charlottesville Unite the Rights riots followed, and then the catastrophic Pittsburgh synagogue shooting and events like this. At this time, the anti-Semitism voiced on the right was distinctly white-nationalist in flavor, and it was also quite peripheral. It was seen as incidental to Republicans success. It certainly was not the key force driving Trump's ascendance and anti-Semitic individuals themselves were not mainstream.

They were also mostly coy about their anti-Semitism. If anything, it was something that they were sort of caught out on, but they were trying to hide. Someone like Milo Yiannopoulos then of *Breitbart* would play into this publicly a little bit, but he would sort of issue this coy approval for these anti-Semitic online memes shared in the 2016 election, kind of laughing the thing off, not directly declaring his stance on that front. And in general, the whole thing was sort of treated as a bit of a joke.

How could something so online and so absurd like memes about a frog, which is one of the core memes of 2016, how could that have any political impact? The piece argues that today's far right is much more successful and entrenched, not yet ascendant, not yet front and center, but getting there much more so than the alt-right of seven years ago.

It's also no longer necessarily alternative because it's much more attuned to and in proximity to the mainstream than we would like it to be. There are lots of reasons for this, which I go into in the piece, but I'll just focus on three areas for now.

The first is that anti-Semitism on the far right has shifted away from white-nationalist symbols and towards a more publicly palatable Christian nationalism. To be clear, this is a complete perversion of Christianity and I think it's well worth reading the written responses to my piece from Tara Isabella Burton and Tim Carney, which deal with this. But these people aren't actually religious. Nonetheless, they pretend to be and they adopt Christian nationalist symbols, however distorted and hollow.

And this is significant because I think it resonates much more strongly with a larger audience who are kind of attuned to the culture wars and who see this sort of thing as more acceptable than, let's say, the kind of arguments that one would hear about immigration and white nationalism in 2016.

Those seemed like symptoms of a broader disease in American society, but they didn't offer an all-encompassing worldview. People weren't really taken by these kind of pagan and folksy symbols espoused by the likes of the white nationalist Richard Spencer. Whereas with this Christian nationalism, which we see espoused by people who are really far off to the fringe, like Nicholas Fuentes, who is a young live streamer mostly appearing from his basement who's nonetheless fomented a lot of nonsense. He has recently been working with Kanye West and of course, whether he was invited or not, he spent time with Trump at Mar-a-Lago.

He espouses this sort of argument. So do people who actually have a stake in political power like Marjorie Taylor Greene, who toys with anti-Semitism and is openly Christian nationalist and paints a vision of a Christian nationalism that's under siege by an internal enemy.

I think that's quite a powerful message. To that end, there's a second trend that I want to discuss as mentioned in the piece, which is that people like Nick Fuentes are much less coy about anti-Semitism than the alt-right of 2016. That goes to the title of the piece "From Coy to Goy," these people really identify as goyim. The core of their motivations is their belief that the Jewish people are kind of a fifth column within American society. They're undermining American values, but not only America, they're undermining the conservative movement specifically.

There's this idea that Jews have sort of subverted the movement from within, forcing people to support Israel when really there's no logical reason for the U.S.-Israel relationship, and so on and so forth. And so of course someone like Kanye West has come to symbolize the popularity and normalization of anti-Semitism and he has acolytes around him, Fuentes being one of them, the other one being Milo Yiannopoulos, who's always kind of falling in and out with Kanye West. And Yiannopoulos himself has taken on much more overtly this kind of anti-Semitism that in 2016 he was more coy about. And he himself actually identified as a Jew at the time, but now he identifies as a Catholic.

I'd say a third issue that I'll mention is this seductiveness of breaking the barriers of free speech and how much that has become associated with speaking out against the Jews. Free speech is an incredibly important value to me. It's built into the American republic, but there's this sense on this kind of extreme shadowy area of the far right, influencing the right increasingly, that there are certain things that you can't say about Jews and Israel and that this is kind of the next frontier in safeguarding free speech.

We've seen actually Candace Owens talk about this with regards to the ADL (the Anti-Defamation League), basically asserting that it has formed a lobby with Zionists to prevent people from speaking out about things that they believe in. And it's interesting to see Owens aligning herself with people who are adjacent to the Black Lives Matter movement and the Black Hebrew Israelites, when that was something that she was originally vehemently against.

We've seen this with Joe Rogan as well, who's popular on both right and left. He argued that the idea that Jews aren't into money is ridiculous—that it's like saying that Italians aren't into pizza, which I think is very worrying.

What does all of this mean? One of the arguments that I make about the broader political implications of this is that I could see this virulent anti-Semitism perhaps being weaponized on the right for political purposes, just as we see on the left, for example, in the UK with the rise of Jeremy Corbyn, which I wrote about at the time.

I don't think it's happened yet, but I do think that we're getting closer. Obviously, there are guardrails against this. The United States is philo-Semitic in nature, and I think that kind of undergirds so much of American life. But at the same time, there's this political utility to anti-Semitism that's coming out more and more. And so I'll just mention a recent example that I know we've all been following.

For those watching who might not have heard of Pedro Gonzalez, he's a very online person and editor at *Chronicles* magazine. He recently was written about in *Breitbart*, of all of places, and a series of messages that he had sent in private group chats was sort of gone through in great depth detailing a lot of really vile anti-Semitic statements that he had made, saying things like, "Yeah. Not every Jew is problematic. But the sad fact is that most are." Talking about how Fuentes, whom I mentioned earlier, is the future and saying that he does good things when he trolls the Jews.

But it's important to note that the piece is really designed to paint the DeSantis campaign as senseless anti-Semites and it seeks to exonerate Trump, whom *Breitbart* supports, from this charge. So it argues that Pedro Gonzalez, the person in question, as he's moved away from Trump, he's moved closer to anti-Semitism and closer to DeSantis. There's so much that could be read into this, but the article does actively seek also to exonerate Trump from the meeting with Nick Fuentes and sort of asserts that essentially DeSantis's response to the messages has been inadequate, even though I think it's evident that the two can't really be equated.

So I think this is one of the first examples that we've seen after my piece was published in *Mosaic* of this playing out very starkly in the public square: anti-Semitism being used as a political football. And ultimately the people that stand to lose the most from this are the Jews.

I think it's very worrisome. Just to sum up, because I'd love to hear from Douglas and Sam as to what they think of all of this, I think that there's a lot more to be done exposing some of these noxious figures and trying to figure out where exactly they fit within the right and the conservative mainstream. Obviously William F. Buckley Jr., one of the kind of heroic figures on the right, historically took a very strong stance against anti-Semitism within its midst.

He set the lines not only with the John Birch Society, but later with Pat Buchanan and with his own columnist Joe Sobran, really examining at length the way that their positions on Israel and statements that they'd said about Jews veered into anti-Semitism. But I think the standard that he's set no longer applies either because people aren't listening to it or it's outdated and it needs to be updated. And so there's a lot to be done in this area and I'm glad that we were able to publish this essay and I look forward to hearing what both of you think.

Jonathan Silver:

Tamara, thank you. Douglas, what do you make of all this?

Douglas Murray:

Thanks very much, Tamara. Just to start where we started from as it were, I think it's important to stress or to re-stress, although obviously anti-Semitism is played with and is more problematic to many of our minds on the political left these days. The cordon sanitaire is not as strongly held on the left as it has been on the political right in recent years.

But of course it can come from any direction, as I wrote recently. Anyone who knows Vasily Grossman's *Life and Fate* understands there's a good reason why Grossman almost exactly at the dead center of the novel devotes three pages to the subject of anti-Semitism. Because as he says there, it's this shape-shifter which you can meet in the marketplace or the academy.

For our purposes, it seems to me necessary to address it on the political right because it's important to try to keep your own stable clean. You can endlessly lament other people's inability to share your views. But if they're from the opposing political side, it's not surprising they might not share your views. Whereas of course if there are people in your own stable who are espousing ugly sentiments, I think it behooves anyone to address that.

I should say by the way, there's a difference between addressing that and cancel culture. There's been a thing in recent days in particular of saying, you're engaging in cancel culture if you call out ugly attitudes on your own side. I vehemently disagree with that claim. Everything is not cancel culture. Criticism of people is not cancel culture. But let me just say a couple of other things.

Firstly, Tamara is completely right to say that the William F. Buckley-vs.-John Birch sort of model is simply not doable today. The reason, I would say, is because there is just no similar central figure—whether one would wish for there to be one or not is another matter—strong enough in the conservative movement in America to make any such call or to draw any such line and for that line to be agreed upon. Much of what is in your essay is in part a reflection of that: people are eyeing up where the opportunities are because they recognize that the adults have sort of lost their authority.

There is no figure who would tell them they're effectively excommunicated from a movement even if such a movement existed. Let me just say very quickly that the left and the right also have obviously different undertones in anti-Semitism. When people on the left stumble into anti-Semitism—let me put it that way to give the most benevolent interpretation—it tends to be driven by their instincts on things like privilege.

They go into it wittingly or unwittingly, and then they start to try to eye up who is privileged in society. Before you know it, they're identifying the Jews as privileged and the hierarchy. You mentioned Jeremy Corbyn. One of the most famous things that Corbyn did was supported a mural in East London that was virulently anti-Semitic. If he didn't know, it's because his brain has been in this water for such a long time that he couldn't notice it anyway. But the version of that on the political right that I believe has similar traction is in which we've talked about before, the bit where you could see actually some progress of anti-Semitism on the American right would be to do with the state of Israel.

Again, actually to go back to Grossman's point, this is, as we all know, everyone here knows, I'm sure everyone watching knows, the great irony of anti-Semitism being that you can attack the Jews for being privileged or for being poor or for being stateless or for having a state. In the 21st century, Israel and the Jews having a state is going to be on the right of a galvanizing issue. And you see this on the online culture, as you know. It is why the Jews can have a state and have immigration controls and so many prominent Jews in America and in Europe don't argue for similar controls in other countries.

That is going to be, and you can already see, the place that on the right people are going to move into this area.

I'd just say one other thing, which is that it is an important thing. I mentioned earlier the thing of toying with anti-Semitism. I do think that's something we've probably all become a little bit more aware of in recent years, that there's a sort of character now in the culture that didn't, I think, used to exist in the era of newspapers and so on. And that is the so-called edgelord, the person who enjoys toying with dangerous things—you've mentioned Milo Yiannopoulos. That culture of knowing you are touching the third rail and enjoying the frisson of doing so is a very interesting phenomenon in our day.

It is important to identify where that is very clearly people toying with the ugliest possible ideas. You mentioned Pedro Gonzalez, but I wrote about him a couple of years ago, not because he's an important figure, by no means a significant figure, but because he was associated with the Claremont Institute at the time and I thought that somebody writing as he did then about people having Rothschild physiognomy was a dead giveaway that even uglier stuff lay beneath.

And so I wasn't at all surprised to discover in recent days that there was indeed uglier stuff beneath. But it was striking to me that even at such a relatively low level, there was a sort of incursion into a conservative movement and that the adults didn't seem to be willing to put it down and address it.

In part, I think that is because the adults are terrified that the excitement and the movement is as it were among the young and we don't quite know how to contain it. That was what Marjorie Taylor Greene said when she turned up to Fuentes event was I said, I think her line was just sort of enthusiastic young Americans. It's almost impossible to be that stupid and still speak, but nevertheless she saw it as a sort of exciting youth movement. Again, this is a failure of the adults, which is why it's so important to be addressing this today with adults.

Jonathan Silver:

Douglas, let me pursue two things that you've opened up. One, that there was the possibility in earlier iterations of the conservative movement for figures to play the function of a constable of the limits of the movement.

One possible explanation for why that's no longer possible is, as you've said, they're thrilled to have the energy of the young before them. The authority has devolved unto them, unto the young. I wonder if you think that technology plays another role or what other explanations you might offer.

National Review is still a conservative magazine, but it competes for clicks in the marketplace of ideas with a zillion other platforms. I wonder what you think explains the inability of adults to provide that same kind of limiting function.

Douglas Murray:

I'll have to be slightly careful because I'm a fellow of the *National Review*. Personally, I would like it if our institutions had more heft, as it were. It is a recent thing in America and I would put it down to—if I were being honest about this, which I should be—the failure of the adults in the 2000s. I think it's a devastating thing that the perception, correct or otherwise, is that Republicans failed in foreign policy.

It meant that nobody wanted to hear from the people a generation above. By the time you get to Trump and the—what was it?—100 foreign-policy

professionals who signed the letter against him, many of whom I had an argument with at the time. It didn't have any effect because effectively he could say, "I'm sorry, this is 100 people who led us astray." I'm afraid that argument has a lot of purchase, this happened after Vietnam as well to some extent: if the adults have seemed to have let you down, you've got to go to the kids.

Jonathan Silver:

There's an ambivalence in very online right-wing attitudes toward Israel that you have started to contour for us. The ambivalence I would describe like this: on the one hand, isn't it fabulous that those Jews are embodying a form of nationalism that is altogether admirable, where the relationship between religious authorities and civic authorities has much to recommend in it, where immigration, as you say, is controlled.

Because after all, it is a state for people and there's much to marvel at and learn from in that experiment. At the same time, Israel is also a source of criticism. Help us to mention both of those sides of the way Israel's seen on the right.

Douglas Murray:

Mind you, I can't resist telling a joke. "A Jew, a Black man, a Hispanic gentleman, and a bigot sit on a park bench and somebody touches a lamp and a Genie pops out and says, 'I've been in this lamp for so many years. I'll give you all whatever you want.' And he goes and says to the Jewish gentleman, 'What would you like?' He says, 'I would like the Jewish people to be able to return to our ancient homeland to thrive there.' And bang! It says to the Black gentleman, 'What would you like?' 'I'd like to return to Africa all my people, and for Africa to flourish.' Bam! He's gone. The Hispanic gentleman says, 'I'd like to return to Mexico and I'd like to live there in prosperity with my people.' Bang! He's gone. And it's just the bigot left. And Genie says, 'What do you want?' And the bigot says, 'So the Jews have all gone to Israel, the Blacks have all gone to Africa, and the Hispanics have all gone back home. I'll have a Diet Coke.'"

A lot of people who play in this, as you say, have this slightly conflicted view about Israel. On the one hand they sort of like it and say, "But why is it only allowed for them?" My view is that this is, again, just an old version of the same thing. The Jews can do nothing right. My other favorite example is Gregor von Rezzori's story rather luridly titled *Confessions of an Anti-Semite*, about anti-Semitism in the Hapsburg world.

There's that great scene in the novel where the young man takes an older Jewish woman he's dating out on a date and is seen by some friends and it ends up with him climactically slapping her in the restaurant. But it's because she ends up humiliating him by behaving too much like his friends, like the Gentiles.

He can't bear it. He can't bear the fact that everyone can see the Jewish woman is trying to be not Jewish. It is such a brilliant description of that endless conundrum. What is she meant to do? If she's too Jewish, he'll hate her. If she tries not to be, he'll hate her. I think this is the case with these, they're not thinkers but reactors on the right, when it comes to Israel.

Jonathan Silver:

Professor Goldman.

Samuel Goldman:

Jews have flourished under broadly liberal political institutions and capitalist economic practices like no other people. As a result, whenever politics turns to fundamental opposition to liberalism, again in a general and institutional sense rather than a narrow philosophical one, and capitalism, anti-Semitism almost inevitably results. Now in the 20th century and especially in the second half of the 20th century, that energy was concentrated on the left and that explains the anti-Semitic tendencies in Communism and a little bit later in Black Power and third-worldist movements.

I think a lot of the work that *Mosaic* has done is responding to the continuing reverberations of those tendencies on the left. But before the middle of the 20th century and certainly in the 19th century, opposition to liberalism and capitalism were found with equal and sometimes greater intensity on the right.

We haven't gone all the way back to that yet. But we seem to be departing from the 20th-century division of labor, particularly in the United States, where the right stood for the defense of liberal political institutions and a capitalist economy and the left stood for opposition to those things. As anti-liberalism and anti-capitalism have become more respectable of the right—and even, among younger and more online cohorts, the major source of intellectual and political energy—it's not surprising that anti-Semitism has followed.

Jonathan Silver:

Let me put to you a proposition and see what you make of it. That is a very high-minded way of describing the broad trends that one can observe. But if I were to put to you to try to situate the experience of a member of a very online cohort that is enthused by the transgressive thrill that is received by denying the authority of the elders who led us into Iraq, who are responsible for the financial crisis of 2008, who completely mismanaged the COVID epidemic and much else: it's simply that liberalism has failed in every respect.

It has produced people who are unhappy, who are not confident in our institutions, who are no longer able to summon the patriotism needed to

feel a part of this place and why it's worthy. That's all liberalism's fault. It's not that I object to it in any large abstract sense, it's the very people I see in front of me: these conservatives have never conserved anything and so it's empirical that I should want to turn away from them.

Samuel Goldman:

Well, I think that's probably psychologically accurate and to a certain degree understandable. But I evoke the history because I think the history has lessons for us and the lesson of the last 200 years is that the turn against liberalism and capitalism—and again, I want to emphasize, not just criticism of particular practices or institutions, which is often justified—turns out to be very bad, not only for Jews who end up being blamed for these things, but for everyone.

I think it's important to avoid what Leo Strauss called the *reductio ad Hitlerum*, where every bad thing you observe is ultimately Nazism. But I think it's important to understand that as National Socialism and other revolutionary movements of the right were gathering strength in Germany and elsewhere in Europe in the 1920s and 1930s, they were driven as much by what we now call the edgelord tendency as they were by a grand explanation of Jewish power or hatred of Jews as individuals.

This was a way of provoking people, which is exciting and fun. It was a way of tapping into inchoate popular energies and it was a way of making vivid the failures of liberalism and capitalism, which in many cases were real failures.

That did not work when it was pursued by movements of the right, which often began as more high-minded and intellectually aristocratic movements, but turned into the abomination of National Socialism. It didn't work on the left where Stalinism turned out to be something very different from what intellectual Communists and sympathizers had imagined.

It did not work in the 1960s and 1970s when the revived revolutionary Marxism of the Red Army Faction or the third-world nationalism of Africa and the Arab world, again, turned out to be something very, very different from what intellectuals and students and people who wrote for magazines had hoped and expected that it would be.

I don't know what the future holds. I am confident that these ideas remain relatively limited to the fringe, but it's a very, very dangerous game. I think that we would be better recognizing and responding to that danger earlier rather than waiting until it becomes a real problem.

Jonathan Silver:

There's one other thing I want to ask you, returning not to your most recent book, *After Nationalism*, but to the book before that, *God's Country*,

which is a study of American attitudes toward Hebraism, Zionism, philo-Semitism, and the like.

One of Tamara's claims is that we have seen a mutation of this attitude on the right from a kind of pagan-influenced white supremacist presentation to something that is more bound up with Christianity. Now, it seems that you presented a mid-century conservatism, which is an exception and achievement in which the Jews were a part of it and at home but that had parted ways from an earlier conservatism, an earlier movement on the right in which Jews were then too subject to anti-Semitic attitudes.

Something similar might be said for Christianity, which in the American tradition has had both great fondness for the Jews and has also harbored its own anti-Semitism extending quite far back into history.

Samuel Goldman:

Well, I think one of the significant developments, and Tamara talks about this in her essay, is the adoption of Christianity or Christian nationalism as a primarily political concept rather than a religious one. My intuition, and I think this is supported by survey and other data, is that among believing and practicing American Christians, including and maybe especially conservative Christians, the feelings toward Jews and Israel are very warm.

That's a good thing and that's one of the reasons that I am not yet willing to push the panic button. But over the last few years, *Christian* has come to function much more as a political and cultural symbol than as an expression of religious belief or activity. When Christianity functions in that way, it's primary and maybe ultimately it's only meaning is "not Jewish."

Forgive me for being pedantic; it's my privilege as a professor to do that. When you look at European history and the emergence of political movements in the late 19th century that called themselves Christian, they have that in their title, but the meaning of Christian is "not Jewish." It does not mean membership in a church or other religious community. It does not mean personal faith. It means "not Jewish." That, I think, is the danger that's associated with the concept and rhetoric of Christian nationalism.

Jonathan Silver:

Tamara, we've heard from Douglas and Sam, what do you make of them?

Tamara Berens:

Douglas, I was really taken by your point about the adults in the room being absent at such a crucial period of time and the impact that that's had. And as someone who is younger and who really grew up in that period throughout the Iraq war and the financial crisis, I think that's very much evident. I can imagine too, that for lot of the people watching and listen-

ing, some of these names, these very online personalities—even if you’ve heard of them, you must be wondering how they could they possibly have any influence; or these names are just nonsense to you.

But as someone who occupies this space as a young conservative, it really is all about this constellation of individuals and there’s no one holding the balance of power. In some ways it really mirrors what we’re seeing internationally on a grander level.

I think the experience that I’ve gleaned from working on this essay and just listening to you now is how important it is not only for adults to step in the room, but also for, I think, perhaps some of the courageous kind of younger and more online figures to take a stand on this and just grow up quite frankly.

I don’t think that will happen on its own necessarily. I think it requires institutional strength. It might be contingent on a broader kind of revival in American society of just some of the values around polite discourse that have really been lacking. I don’t know quite what we can do to fix this, but I’ll just say that it is gratifying on the one hand to hear that you don’t feel that it extends that far, that you’re not ready, Sam, as you said, to push the panic button.

But on the other hand, from where I’m sitting, I am sort of closer to pushing that panic button, just by being surrounded by a lot of these noxious personalities who are taking hold as you get younger and lower down the chain. It’s about trying to bridge that gap and trying to find some adults like yourselves who can really perhaps offer some more guidance and occupy a larger space than currently is the case among the young emerging conservatives in and around Washington.

Jonathan Silver:

Douglas.

Douglas Murray:

Can I add one thing to that? Much of this is going to do with a very precise analysis and diagnosis of where people are actually treading over a certain line. I have to say one of my fears is, and again this would be where an incursion into the mainstream would occur, that there is a breach at the moment because of the over-diagnosis of anti-Semitism and a claim of its existence in places where it is not.

Let me give an example, just from recent days. The comedian Roseanne Barr was recorded saying something that sounded very anti-Semitic and Holocaust-denying in a video clip. If you look at the whole thing, it’s clear

that she wasn't saying what the clip seemed to suggest. Now, the clip went round the world, and I'm not criticizing him, but Ron Lauder issued a statement on behalf of the WJC condemning this.

Now there's a problem there. A lot of people notice that and don't like it. It looks like policing of comedians. I don't think Ron Lauder needs to discuss comedians and what they should and shouldn't say. There's too much of that. And that does cause, and I notice it online, it causes a form of resentment. Let me give an example of another kind.

In 2016 or 17, after the election of Trump, there were two Democratic party operatives who took over an organization called the Anne Frank Institute for Mutual Understanding or something like that. They had absolutely no connection to the Frank family and they used this vehicle as a way to attack Donald Trump and accuse him of anti-Semitism. They caused quite a lot of ill-will understandably, because they were just operatives.

Now, I would just say that it is crucial that when people are accused of this, it be done accurately. I know myself, that when people are inaccurately or deliberately for political reasons accused of these things, it itself causes problems.

Samuel Goldman:

If I may make a suggestion about where to draw the line, it seems to me that it might be helpful to focus on anti-Semitism as a theory of Jewish power in contradistinction to stereotypes or sort of tasteless humor. Tamera quoted somebody saying, "Jews love money like Italians love pizza."

Douglas Murray:

Joe Rogan.

Samuel Goldman:

Yeah, Joe Rogan said that. That's annoying. I wish he hadn't said that. It's not a nice thing to say, but that doesn't really bother me. More generally, I think one function of Jewish conservatives can be to challenge the response that's characteristic on the left, which is that the problem is hate, is bigotry, it's sort of generalized sentiments of dislike which start with bad jokes and end with concentration camps.

I think we can say no to that. The problem is not personal dislike or stereotypes or bad jokes. The problem is a theory of Jewish power. The problem is the idea that Jews are running the world in a way that benefits them and screws you. That's the idea that is noxious and dangerous and I think does require the drawing of lines. Not bad jokes.

Jonathan Silver:

Yes.

Douglas Murray:

Absolutely.

Jonathan Silver:

The first political question that always has got to be asked is *cui bono*? “Who benefits?” is the question that I think has got to be applied to accusations of anti-Semitism. It is our great teacher, Ruth Wisse, who has defined it as the organization of politics against the Jews.

It is not the same as individual stereotyping. It has that collective quality. That’s very important. There’s another thing that made me initially hesitant to enter into this territory, which is the imprecision in the language of the left for whom there is no distinction between *National Review* and *Breitbart*, for whom it is all the same. Anybody who takes one step over to the conservative side is the same as an alt-right fanatic.

I did not want myself to believe that the sorts of attitudes that we were seeing on the right were there precisely because I’d heard so often that they had existed, that they were the animating impulse of the center right. And it’s precisely because of that imprecision that I myself was initially hesitant to enter into these grounds.

Tamara, you’ve mentioned this several times, your position as a person who yourself is in touch with very online members of the right who at least mute their criticism of anti-Semitism or indulge it in some sense. Maybe you could just tell us some of your own experiences that led you to want to write the essay to begin with.

Tamara Berens:

I’m glad that you asked that, Jon. I think it was something that I’d sort of suppressed because I was very much in the mode of criticizing the left and left-wing anti-Semitism, especially coming from the UK where I grew up and seeing the dominance of Corbyn’s Labor party and the manner in which it took power so aggressively. And that’s what I always had focused on.

It was in evaluating my experiences really after being asked to work on this essay that I began to realize just the extent of the emerging associations between Jews and Israel on the right that were so worrisome to me. I think Kanye West in particular was the person who so surprised me in terms of the reaction to him or the lack of reaction to him that I experienced from friends.

Someone like Kanye West is so obviously, to me, just a terrible human being in every respect and has very little or nothing to offer the right. And so having conversations with friends who perhaps sought to redeem him from his worst comments and sort of look upon him with optimism that he might change or that he just needed a bit of handling, he needed better PR, that to me just seemed absolutely absurd. I think that was sort of when I started examining whether I was really operating from the same kind of first principles as some of these people.

I just want to respond briefly to what Sam was bringing out with regards to Joe Rogan because I do think that there is a danger and Douglas, you've said this as well, in over-policing the right and picking out statements and comments that really are not anti-Semitic because of the boy-who-cried-wolf problem.

But I think what I've seen with both Kanye West and also I would argue that this applies to Rogan's statement, not to him as a whole, but to what he was doing in that moment, specifically with the Jews and money comments: there's this idea that you can't say anything about the Jews, and that's really what Rogan was saying.

He wasn't himself saying, "Jews like money, ha-ha, like Italians like pizza." But he was lamenting this thing that he's noticed in our discourse where he believes that you can no longer make jokes about Jews. What I find funny about that is that it's sort of similar to how people responded to Kanye West. And it seems so evidently false to me that you can't make jokes about Jews. Jews make jokes about themselves all the time, were so late to talk about our own downfalls.

We never talk about the Holocaust or the state of Israel, really. We don't. We allow people often to make jokes about these things and this idea that the Jews have so much power that no one can say anything about us. This is obviously what Kanye West picked up on in all these ridiculous claims about his management. It's just false to me. I think it's that kind of false analysis that is very disturbing to me because you're sort of entering into a plane of just total surrealism with regards to the position of the Jews in society. Again, it's this out-sized perception of Jewish power. I wish we had that much power, but we just don't.

Douglas Murray:

There is a difference, isn't there? Jews tell jokes about Jews is obviously. . . . Most of the famous comedians in the world are Jews. It that's a different thing from, as it were, a non-Jew being allowed to make jokes about Jews, which is I think is a cordon sanitaire that does effectively operate. It's recognized that most minorities are allowed to joke about themselves. You're not allowed to joke about them.

You're allowed to use language about your own group that you can't use about another group. And obviously American society in particular is fused with that. Again, that stuff doesn't worry me so much. Humor is a subject of itself. I like Clive James's definition, that humor and common sense are the same thing going at different speeds and the humor is common sense dancing. The thing just to return to it though, which is much, much more difficult, is the conversation I think the right should be able to have and should have out and goes back to these serious questions that exist, which do provoke the sort of, "We're not allowed to talk about the Jews," stuff.

Yoram Hazony and many others have observed this and are trying to do their own thing about it. But if it is the case that people will notice if the Jewish state exists and nationalism isn't okay for anyone else, there is going to be a bubbling recognition of that. There are other versions of that. I said after my book, *The Strange Death of Europe*, some years ago, I said that one example that made me just hold my head in my hands at this stupidity of everybody involved when a number of African migrants illegally entered into Israel.

Israel recognized that they were illegals, wanted to deport them. There was a significant international outcry about this. Israel was totally within its rights to enforce its own border policy. In the end, the EU volunteered to take the migrants and you just think, what better way to create anti-Semitism on the right. That's how you would do it. Actually, it goes back to your point of, and this is a crucial one in Europe and in America, what is the non-hyphenated American? What in a diverse society in Europe is the person who does not have a diverse bone in his body, as it were, and has no place on the intersectional hierarchy pyramid?

Those people who are a majority have to be able to answer those questions and discuss those questions. There's a sort of right-wing fear of that debate as if we're not able to have it. I think we can have it.

Jonathan Silver:

My friends, I'd like to invite your questions. While you're typing your questions, let me just ask a question about this business about Kanye. Nobody's really claiming seriously that Kanye is a conservative or a player in the conservative movement or anything like that. I think just to pick this apart a bit, it's that Kanye's comments were then defended by conservatives. The question I would pose is *why* were they defended by conservatives? Were they defended by conservatives because of the free-speech issue or because of the anti-Semitism that he gave permission to come out and they had wanted to surface in some sense? Do you think that anti-Semitism is the reason for the conservative defense of Kanye?

Tamara Berens:

That's a big question. I'll just say briefly, I don't think it's the reason for the conservative defensive Kanye by any means, but I think having a blind spot on anti-Semitism is very telling and it's just not what you would expect of a conservative movement that has so traditionally welcomed Jews with opened arms and included prominent Jews among not only its higher ranks, but in terms of actually shaping the movement. But I'd be curious what—

Douglas Murray:

I have a very straightforward explanation for this. I'm not an expert on the work or thought of Kanye West. I'm not sure he is either, but let me just say very obviously what happened there.

Conservatives were enormously flattered at a star of his star-wattage being anywhere near their orbit. Conservatives are used to not being the cool kid in the class. When one of the biggest celebrities on the planet seems to be available to your side, you're enormously flattered. It's the best date in town and it's only happened a couple of times in our lifetimes.

That was the biggest one. That was the biggest potential crossover of a megawatt celebrity onto the conservative side. The people who threw themselves in with him who were just so flattered that he was in our orbit then, when he amazingly enough turns out not to be politically reliable, are left stranded. Some of them tried to defend him because they just couldn't give up the shiny new toy they had. Trump had the same thing with him.

Jonathan Silver:

Here's a question: "How does a philo-Semitic American Christian community distinguish itself in the public square from an articulation of the right that has both co-opted and camouflaged itself with the symbols of Christianity?"

Samuel Goldman:

Well, it's not for me to tell Christians what they should do as Christians, but I think the good news is that it's not so very difficult to distinguish these symbolic and political invocations of Christianity or Christian identity from genuinely religious ones.

One of the things that has characterized a American Christianity, particularly in recent decades that I think is a healthy phenomenon is genuine interest in Israel and Judaism as a part of the Christian story.

That's not something that is so easy to fake or conceal. I don't think that Christians who are genuinely inspired by religious beliefs are in such great danger of being confused. The problem seems to emerge again primarily in an online or online-adjacent milieu of people who are using, sometimes literally, memes of crusaders and so on.

But that's the extent of their religious involvement. Again, there may be cases of overlap, but I don't think it's so very challenging to see the difference.

Jonathan Silver:

Sam, I have no evidence whatsoever from what I'm about to say, but I would postulate that when we are speaking about the very online articulation of this fascination with the Jews in such a negative way, I suspect that many of the people that we're talking about are first of all not part of a recognized Christian community. That was obviously Tim Carney's contribution to this discussion, that there's a distinction to be made between the churched and unchurched Christians of the country.

I'd further speculate again on the basis of no evidence, but my hunch would be that many of these people, primarily young men, are not married and don't have families. And that once they're bound up in forms of communal life, that make obligations and responsibilities on their shoulders, I suspect a lot of this goes away. I don't have any evidence for that, but that'd be my guess.

Samuel Goldman:

Well, I think, and I also have no evidence for this, but I'll make a suggestion anyway, part of what's going on is the de-bourgeoisification of the right and the erosion of those sort of personal and communal and institutional affiliations and replacement by a much more amorphous set of people who are angry and disconnected.

Once again, it is not a surprise, unfortunately, to find that people in that situation find anti-Semitism appealing—and this goes to Douglas's point that there's a certain envy mixed in—not least of all because by comparison, Jews now and in the past have seemed to have it together in a way that is admirable but can also seem shaming or dishonest. Why do they have these things when I don't and I can't?

Douglas Murray:

By the way, to do my bit for Grossman's royalties again, but just to quote exactly the quote I wanted to give you, he says, and it goes to what you were just saying, in *Life and Fate*, "Anti-Semitism is a measure of the con-

traditions yet to be resolved. It is a mirror for the failings of individuals, social structures, and state systems. Tell me what you accuse the Jews of and I'll tell you what you are guilty of." It goes exactly to this.

Jonathan Silver:

Here's an anonymous question. "How much of the attitude that we're now trying to analyze has to do with the fact that most of the Jews that these people meet, that they see, that they read about, are progressives and it's actually a complaint about progressivism?"

Tamara Berens:

I would just pause at that. I think it has to do with that, just seeing the extent to which we're starting to have these attacks on conservative Jews really emerge. The likes of Ben Shapiro, really no one would say that he's a progressive. He's done so much to combat progressivism, rightfully so.

But I think there's this real sense that people like Ben Shapiro appear to have it together. He has a beautiful family. He's created an excellent business empire. There's this sense that they are a perverse force within the conservative movement and that entails not only turning on them as Jews, but I think it also would entail turning on the state of Israel too.

You're starting to see this, I would say creeping in, and we've discussed this a little bit, but I would say I think it has little to do in this case with progressivism. That's my view.

Douglas Murray:

I disagree. I think it's got quite a lot to do with that. But both political sides can play it as you say. The right can identify Jews on the right, whom they disagree with and see it as being a Jewish thing. They can identify Jews on the left they disagree with and identify as Jewish thing.

However, I come back to this point I made several times. There are on certain issues, particularly on the immigration and integration issues, there are specifically very loud Jewish voices who keep coming up. The most obvious one is George Soros who just will keep coming up. And some of the people who bring him up will do so because they are anti-Semites and they love playing with that. But others are legitimately saying, "You seem to have too much power in paying for open-borders initiatives in countries you don't live in."

Samuel Goldman:

One thing that I think is relatively new, as Tamara mentions though, is the suggestion, even if it's not a specific accusation, that Jews have somehow sabotaged intentionally or unintentionally the conservative movement or

the American right. This has come out in some of the criticism of Buckley who has been denounced for his famous exclusions, for drawing lines. The suggestion is that if he hadn't done that, the American conservative movement would have been more successful.

Why did he not do that? Well, it's because he didn't want to be accused of anti-Semitism. That in a certain way, to me, seems more dangerous because there are very obvious and clear reasons why anyone right of center might look at Soros and say, "He's a bad influence. I wish he was unsuccessful." But to look even at Jews who are active more or less on the right and say that they are subversive, they are seeking personal profit, they may even be intentionally trying to sabotage the conservative movement—that is more threatening, I think.

Douglas Murray:

Who was said to do that on the American right out of interest, do you think?

Samuel Goldman:

This is why I say it's a suggestion rather than an accusation, and I think the response should be, well, who exactly did that and what did they do? And I think that's not an easy question to answer. But the broad suggestion is that in the formation of the American conservative movement after World War II, Jews, many of them ex-Communist, were disproportionately influential and they constructed conservatism around a form of right-liberalism or conservative liberalism based on universal principles that somehow downplayed or even excluded the religious and ethnic core.

The claim, which again is more indicated than argued, is that the American right would have been more successful if it had pursued that form of politics than, again, the more broadly liberal one that it did. I admit that I find this pretty unconvincing. I'm fairly certain that Buckley was closer to the median voter than Revelo Oliver, but that is the critique that seems to be forming in an inchoate way.

Douglas Murray:

By the way, again, going back to that thing of accusing others of your own failings, isn't it fascinating that what Buckley did and what Buckley and Goldwater managed to do was precisely what many of us on the political right have requested the political left do, which is to determine exactly where their side goes wrong and to draw that line. It's to say, how do you get from progressivism to the Gulag?

The answer is they don't know because they don't accept any blame for getting to the Gulag. And so when the right makes that demand of the left and yet says that it shouldn't do it itself, it's engaging in such an act of self-

harm precisely what one demands on the left and precisely what the right in this crucial intervention of Buckley's and the Jon Burch Society actually did, which is to say there is contamination on our side. We have to identify it, we have to cut ourselves off from it.

Samuel Goldman:

Although the argument then is that this was a form of self-sabotage. The left, ventriloquizing what someone might say, they were successful because they refused to draw lines, because they refused to turn down support where they found it, because they refused to avoid appeals that were fraught but successful. The right did those things and as a result, it lost.

Douglas Murray:

Yes. That's an argument online you come across all the time as it were, we've been gentlemanly. They weren't. Let's do what they do and give them some of their own medicine. That's a very popular thing on the young online right, which is we were too polite, we kept our gloves on, they never bothered. Right gloves off, guys.

Samuel Goldman:

So if Sharpton and Farrakhan can appear with presidents and attend fundraisers, why should we worry?

Douglas Murray:

Yeah.

Jonathan Silver:

Here's a question about Bronze Age Pervert whom Tamara you write about, and you referenced early on that whom we have not discussed.

Douglas Murray:

By the way, whenever you mention Bronze Age Pervert, it's always extraordinary that we discuss and many people watching will think, "What?"

Jonathan Silver:

So this question invites us to answer, what do we have to say? What do adults have to say to the 20-year-old who is seduced by the adulation of Nazi ideas that one can find in writing of that kind? It's not enough to simply say that we disagree with that and it's wrong and bad. But do we have something to offer in its place that's more compelling to the 20-year-old watching this conversation?

Tamara Berens:

As the person that's closer to the 20-year-old.

Samuel Goldman:

You have to tell us, Tamara.

Tamara Berens:

I could try. I'd like to hear what both of you have to say, but I could try. What I would like to hear, I think what we need is a confidence to say, "We are willing to lose if winning means aligning ourselves with the likes of Bronze Age pervert and the likes of Kanye West." That just goes to the discussion we just had, the conversation among the online right discussing, "Well, wouldn't the right be better off if Buckley hadn't drawn these lines?"

It just totally eliminates the moral impetus that most conservatives entered into policy with. If you buy that, which I do, I think there is a record of that, at least for the most part.

So if the goal is just winning, what is winning? Then you're not really part of a movement. You are perhaps attaching yourself to a cult of personality or to... Then you really veer into something which is so just anathema to what the American republic is about.

Samuel Goldman:

So I think I might disagree and invert that argument and say that this is a politics for losers. As I joked a moment ago, I'm pretty sure Buckley was closer to the median voter than Revilo Oliver.

This sort of thing may make you seem tough and transgressive and bold online, but this is not a rhetoric or politics that is going somewhere. On the contrary, as I mentioned, the actual opinion among American Christians and American conservatives towards Jews is quite favorable. If you want to win, which ultimately means winning, if not a literal numerical majority, then at least a working coalitional majority, this is not the way to do it. This is self-marginalizing in a way that is very satisfying to people online and in the past was very satisfying to people writing articles for newsletters and small magazines.

Some instead tried to do what Buckley tried to do, which was to establish and maintain a coalition that could actually win. DeSantis, whatever one's sort of political inclinations in this cycle are, seems to be interested in doing that. Whatever bottom-feeders on the Internet are saying, you yourself have written Tamara, that Florida under DeSantis has been become a sort

of haven for many Jews and as we know, he won election by a large margin. That seems a much more plausible way of winning than saying nasty things in private chats.

Douglas Murray:

Yes. What you're raising goes back to this point of hygiene on the right. It's a bad sign when people start playing again with things that have already been answered pretty demonstrably.

Jonathan Silver:

Every generation has to learn these lessons anew.

Douglas Murray:

Yes, but it's very interesting that there is an energy on the right. Take an example, the integralists in America. They absorb a disproportionate amount of attention on the American right. All of their proposals are preposterous. I still can't quite believe they're serious because as I always say, although I didn't live through the 1500s in Europe, I did hear about them.

The idea that one would revisit the separation of church and state, let alone suggest that the institution of a new monarchy, for instance—fond as I am of constitutional monarchy if you happen to inherit it. Nevertheless, I don't think it's a good idea to start one anew. The fact these people are even discussing this seems preposterous to me. I can't believe they're serious.

But why do they get the attention? Because there seems to be a lack of thought on the right. And so some people try to go back and they say, "What is it that we are missing?" Maybe it's that game that always occurs at conservative conferences. Where did it go wrong? Is it 1968? Is it 1789? Is it the enlightenment? Is it the romantics?

This is what a lot of the young conservative inclination people are doing is trying to go and find if there's something we missed and then they sort of try to read Heidegger and realize that that doesn't seem to help. And then they do a few other things like that.

This, again, has to be answered by the adults who have to explain, among other things, that this is what the late George Steiner would describe as nostalgia for the absolute. And it has to be explained that part of the nature of conservatism is recognition of the complexity in which you have to live.

Samuel Goldman:

I think in that vein, it's also important to think not only about political

strategy, but goals. What are you trying to achieve? If what you are trying to achieve is to overturn modernity, I just don't think it's going to happen.

That is not a strategy for winning, that is asking for failure and that doesn't mean that you have to cherish or accept absolutely everything that has happened until last Tuesday. But not only a successful politics, but I think a meaningfully conservative one has to reconcile at some point with the world that we really live in and that means that we're not going to return to a pre-Reformation or early modern understanding of the relation between religion and politics.

It also means that America is not going to become an Anglo-Protestant nation again, whatever may have been the case 200 years ago. If conservatism means anything, it means that there is an imperative to grapple with the world that you live in and think about what can actually be achieved in it.

Douglas Murray:

Yes. If you want to overturn modernity, you better be very fond of pre-modernity.

Jonathan Silver:

My friends, with that, maybe let's adjourn. Douglas Murray, Samuel Goldman, thank you very much for being our teachers and for joining us. "From Coy to Goy" was published in June 2023 in *Mosaic*. Tamara, thank you for the essay and thank you for being with us.



A stained glass image of Plato at the Stadtkirche St. Dionys in Esslingen am Neckar, Germany, ca 1300. Wikipedia.

PHILOLOGOS

JULY 6 2023

About Philologos

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

How Much Plato Did Paul or the Rabbis Know?

A reader's question prompts Philologos to turn up a crucial link between the three.

Last week's column ended with the question of why Plato's 19th-century translator Benjamin Jowett chose to render Socrates' observation in the *Phaedo* that we see the world around us "in images" as of our seeing it "through a glass darkly," a phrase taken from a New Testament epistle of Paul's.

Was Jowett, as some have thought, seeking to Christianize Plato? One suspects that, on the contrary, he was seeking to Platonize Paul.

Plato and the Socrates of the Platonic dialogues introduced into Western philosophy the notion that the world of our everyday sensory experience is an imperfect version of a more perfect reality that we can grasp only with our intellects. A cabbage, a cat, a melody, a beautiful face, a just act—all are blurred representations of an ideal vegetable, animal, musical structure, vision of beauty, or concept of justice that life as we know it falls short of. In the famous metaphor in Plato's lengthy dialogue *Republic*, human society is compared to a band of cave dwellers permanently seated with their backs to the cave's entrance. Beyond the entrance is a real world they cannot see; visible to them are only the shadows projected by the light behind them on the cave's rear wall that is in front of them. We live, says Plato, in a world of shadows that are mistaken for reality by all but the philosopher.

It is impossible to overstate the influence of Platonic idealism on the history of philosophy, just as it is impossible to exaggerate that of the empiricist challenge to it that started with Plato's pupil Aristotle. It has been said indeed, no doubt exaggeratedly, that all thinking persons are by nature either Platonists or Aristotelians—and Paul, Jowett was implying, was a Platonist. In this earthly life, Paul wrote in his first Epistle to the Corinthians, we see divine truth as though reflected in a cloudy mirror. In the next life (whether this will be in another world or in a transfigured this-world, Paul does not say), we shall see it “face to face.” Paul's metaphor of reflections in a mirror, it is true, differs from the *Republic's* metaphor of shadows on a cave wall—but in the *Phaedo*, as we saw last week, Plato also compares our perception of ultimate reality to things seen “reflected in water or in some similar medium.” The two images are equally Platonic.

However, Paul was not just a Christian influenced, as Jowett saw it, by Plato and by the Middle Platonism of his Graeco-Roman age. He was also an educated Jew and knew very well that his “but then [we shall see] face to face” was based on two verses in the Hebrew Bible. The first of these, Exodus 33:11, tells us that in Sinai “God spoke to Moses face to face, as a man speaks to a companion.” The second, Deuteronomy 34: 10, the antepenultimate verse of the Pentateuch, sums up the narrative of Moses' life and death by saying, “And never again was there a prophet in Israel like Moses, whom God knew face to face.” In the future, Paul promises the Christians of Corinth, he (and they with him) “shall know even as I am known”—that is, their knowledge of God will be direct like that of Moses.

Plato, of course, knew nothing of Moses, while Paul for his part did not need anyone's assistance to apply Platonic imagery to Moses. And yet there is a possible link among Plato, Paul, and Moses that might also be the link between Paul's “now we see at through a glass darkly but then we shall see face to face” and the tractate of *Y'vamot's* “the prophets saw in a mirror that was not bright while Moses saw in a mirror that was bright.” This link, I propose, is Philo of Alexandria.

Philo is a unique figure in Jewish history, a Greek-speaking Jew of the 1st century CE who wrote voluminous expositions and defenses of Judaism in a philosophic and semi-Platonic vein. A contemporary of Paul's, he is not mentioned in rabbinic sources and there is no evidence that any of the ancient rabbis was familiar with his work (which is no proof that none were); nor is it clear how well-versed he himself was in the early rabbinic tradition of his times, although he evidently had at least a superficial knowledge of some of it. His writings were valued and preserved by the Christian church fathers; had their survival depended on his fellow Jews, they would have been lost.

And now let us quote some lines from Philo's *An Allegorical Interpretation of Genesis*, Part III, Section 33. This passage occurs in the course of a comparison made by Philo between Moses and Betsalel, the master craftsman put in charge by Moses of constructing the Tabernacle. After observing

that Betsalel means “in the shadow of God” (Hebrew *b’tsel el*), Philo continues, as translated in the Loeb Classical Library edition of his works:

There is a mind more perfect and more thoroughly cleansed [than Betsalel’s], which has undergone initiation into the great mysteries, a mind that gains its knowledge of the First Cause not from created things, as one may learn the substance from the shadow, but, lifting its eyes above and beyond creation, obtains a clear vision of the uncreated One. . . . The mind of which I speak is Moses, who says [Exodus, 33:13], “Manifest Thyself to me, let me see Thee that I may know Thee,” [by which he meant], “For I would not that Thou shouldst be manifested to me by means of heaven or earth or water or air or any created things at all, nor would I find the reflection of Thy being in aught else than in Thee Who art God, for the reflections in created things are dissolved, but those in the Uncreated will continue abiding and sure and eternal.”

Note that Philo begins this passage about Moses with the *Republic*’s metaphor of seeing the shadows of true existence and shifts in mid-course to the *Phaedo*’s metaphor of seeing true existence’s reflections. And while Philo fails to specify the medium in which such reflections are “manifested” and “dissolved,”—that is, come and go—and may have been thinking like Plato of water, the Greek word he uses in the phrase “nor would I find the reflection of Thy being in aught else than in Thee Who art God,” *katoptridzo*, means “to behold in a mirror” and derives from the noun *kàtoptron*, a mirror of polished metal. The noun used by Paul in “though a glass darkly,” *eisoptron*, is practically the same.

Could Paul have been directly or indirectly familiar with this passage from Philo? (He may have spoken with someone who had read Philo rather than read Philo himself.) It’s possible. Could the rabbis have had similar knowledge of it when they spoke of Moses seeing God in a mirror that was bright or polished? That’s possible, too. Or perhaps it was the other way around and Philo knew of a Platonically inspired rabbinic metaphor for Moses’s knowledge of God that was already in circulation long before being recorded in *Y’vamot*. This metaphor, in any case, differs from both Paul’s and Philo’s, since according to it, not even Moses could dispense with seeing God’s reflection rather than God Himself. He alone, however, *Y’vamot* states, saw it with perfect clarity.

Which leaves us with one last puzzling question. If the King James’s “glass” as a translation of Paul’s *eisoptron* means, as we have said it does, “looking glass,” i.e., mirror, how does one see *through* it, darkly or not, when a mirror is precisely something that cannot be seen through because it reflects light rather than transmits it? We’ll try to answer this next week in our third and concluding column on the subject.



President Joe Biden and second gentleman Doug Emhoff during a celebration marking Jewish American Heritage Month in the East Room of the White House on May 16, 2023 in Washington, DC. Chip Somodevilla/Getty Images.

TIKVAH PODCAST AT
MOSAIC AND TEVI
TROY

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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.

Tevi Troy is a presidential historian and former White House aide. In 2001, he served as the first director of the Office of Faith-Based Initiatives at the Department of Labor. His latest book is *Fight House: Rivalries in the White House from Truman to Trump*.

Podcast: Tevi Troy on the Biden Administration's Plan to Fight Anti-Semitism

The D.C. veteran joins us to talk about what the government can do to fight anti-Semitism, and what, despite good intentions, it can't.

Podcast: Tevi Troy

At the end of May, the Biden administration released the first-ever U.S. National Strategy to Counter Anti-Semitism. This document looks at the threat anti-Semitism poses to America, outlines ways the federal government can improve the safety and security of Jewish communities, offers plans for countering anti-Semitic discrimination online, in media, and in schools, and describes the administration's vision for partnering with various religious and civic groups to address the issue.

The existence of this strategy is both praiseworthy and worrying. Often in Jewish history it has been the very governments to which Jews are subject that themselves fuel or carry out anti-Semitic attacks; now, the government is trying to prevent them. Still, the fact that such a national strategy is needed is a sign of some disturbing trends in American culture and American public life.

Tevi Troy, a veteran of the American government, recently analyzed the Biden administration's National Strategy to Counter Antisemitism in a

new essay, called “How to Combat Anti-Semitism,” for the journal *National Affairs*. Here, he joins *Mosaic*’s editor Jonathan Silver to discuss his ideas.

In particular, he wonders if, however, praiseworthy or well-intended the impulse behind this national strategy might be, the federal government has the wherewithal to do any good here. Then, looking a little more deeply into the report, he raises other questions—questions having to do with the definition of anti-Semitism, the strategic conceptions deployed to fight against it, the partners that have been enlisted to help implement these initiatives, and so forth.



A stereo card of the Dome of the Rock from the late 19th century. Wikipedia.

MARC MICHAEL
EPSTEIN

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About the author

Marc Michael Epstein is professor of religion and visual culture and director of Jewish studies at Vassar College. He is the author of, among other books, *The Medieval Haggadah: Art, Narrative, and Religious Imagination* (2011) and *Skies of Parchment, Seas of Ink: Jewish Illuminated Manuscripts* (2015).

The Once and Future Temple, Part I

Why do Christian depictions of the Jewish Temple look like the Dome of the Rock, the 7th-century Muslim structure built on that site?

This is part one of a two-part essay on the depiction of the Temples in Jerusalem in art made primarily for Christians. Part two, focused on specific examples of concepts outlined in part one.

It's 1979, and I'm in Israel for the first time. I am there on a Zionist tour for high-school seniors. We've gone to the Western Wall for Friday evening services, where I've had my initial experience of the male-bonded intensity of yeshiva-style dancing. Our group is now being hosted for dinner at the home of wealthy Americans who have emigrated to Israel. They live in a vast apartment directly overlooking the Temple Mount. Before dinner, I am assisting the maid in preparing plates of gefilte fish at the kitchen counter, and I find myself directly in front of an arched window, framed in Jerusalem stone. Through the window is a view so iconic as to seem positively unreal: highlighted against a sky of dark blue velvet and dramatically moonlit, is the golden Dome of the Rock—the *Qubbat al-Sakhrah*—the mosaics on its octagonal architrave so vivid and close that, had I been able to read Arabic, I would have been able to understand the words so beautifully figured upon it.



The Temple Mount and the Dome of the Rock. Chris McGrath/Getty Images.

Those words, mostly quotations from the Quran, adorn the entire perimeter of the structure. Facing south, towards the kitchen window from which I gazed, were the words of a particular Surah, inscribed in monumental Kufic letters the height of a tall person—Surah *al-Ikhlās*—“The Unity”: “In the name of God, the Beneficent, the Merciful. Say: God is One. The One upon Whom all depend. God begets not, nor is begotten, and none is like God.”

I have since come to understand that, in this particular location, that verse is not only a theological statement, but an adversarial religious argument. For in 691 CE, when the Dome of the Rock was completed and adorned with this passage, if one stood under that inscription and looked south, one would note that Jerusalem was already dominated by another large, impressive dome.

The other dome was the cupola surmounting the Church of the Holy Sepulcher, which had by then occupied for over 350 years what Christian tradition asserted was the site of Jesus’ crucifixion. It was the holiest spot in Christendom, proclaiming Christ’s divine Sonship and identification with God’s Self.

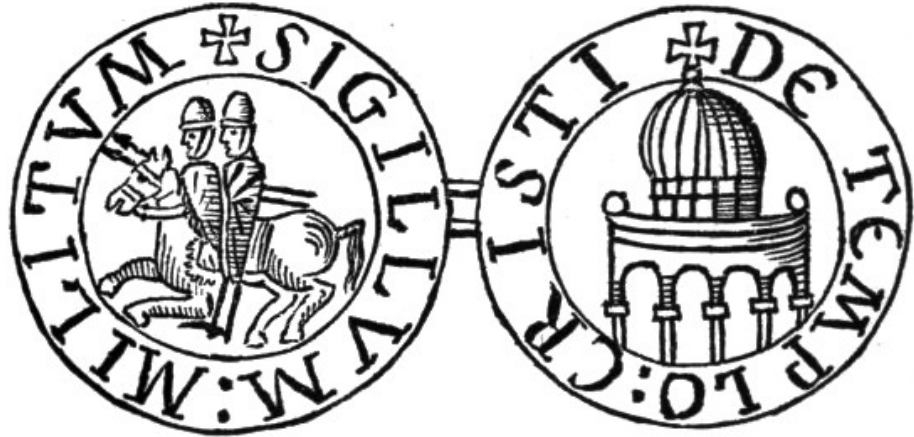
When the Umayyad caliph Abd al-Malik (r. 685-705 CE) raised the *Qubbat al-Sakhrah*, he built a dome higher and larger than that of the Holy Sepulcher, thus offering an architectural rejoinder to the doctrinal statement made by the Christian monument: “You say that God has a Son? This is false. The Prophet has definitively and finally established the truth—God’s unity is a perfect and ultimate unity. God is a unique entity, the source of all being, who creates all creatures, but is not a created being, and who thus has neither parents nor children.” Abd al-Malik built the *Qubbat al-Sakhrah* as Islam’s theological billboard—a clarion broadcast in support of the idea of God’s incomparable Oneness.

The Caliph's choice of a text to adorn his building was thus deliberate and polemic, rejecting Christianity's foundational claim, the divine Sonship of Jesus, and hearkening back to an ideal of absolute Divine Unity. His choice of site was no less considered and retrospective. The Dome was built on the only site higher than Golgotha—the hill on which the Holy Sepulcher had been built. This was the Temple Mount, so-called because it had once housed the two since-destroyed Jerusalem Temples of the Jews. So firm was this association that it was called by Muslims *Bayt al-Makdis*. This appellation derives from, and is analogous to, the Hebrew *Beit Ha-Mikdash* (“the Holy House”) and refers, indisputably, to those Jewish Temples. In acknowledgement of that same, foundational history, the crusaders who established the First Kingdom of Jerusalem (1099-1187) would call the conquered and occupied Dome of the Rock *Templum Salomonis* (“the Temple of Solomon”) or *Templum Domini* (“the Temple of the Lord”)—“the Lord” referring not to the Israelite God generally, but to Jesus, this being the Temple that was known to him and visited by him during his earthly life.



The Temple of Solomon anachronistically depicted as the Dome of the Rock in a print by Salvatore & Giandomenico Marescandoli of Lucca, 1600. Wikipedia.

The Templars, in fact, called themselves “The Knights of the Temple of Christ.”



A seal of the Knights Templar dating to 1196. Wikipedia.

At age fifteen, gazing in wonderment at the Temple Mount out of the kitchen window, I was unaware of those layers of nuance and association. But something else did strike my eye: a framed poster, hung on the wall next to the window. It depicted the identical view I was looking at, but with the Dome of the Rock replaced by a photograph of another building—the Second Jerusalem Temple. I would later learn that the image of the Temple in this montage was a photograph of the famous 1:50 scale model of the Second Temple designed (and continuously updated,) by a team led by the Hebrew University archaeologist Michael Avi-Yonah since 1966. At that time, it was located in the garden of the Holyland Hotel in Bayit VeGan, Jerusalem, and moved in 2006 to the Israel Museum.



A view of a model of the proposed Third Temple on display in Jerusalem's Old City in 2007. Mendy Hechtman/Flash90.

So, before me, “in real life” was a view so iconic that I was already familiar with it before I ever set foot in Jerusalem. Then, next to it, a new image—a vision, simultaneously of the past and the future—that challenged the Dome of the Rock, itself erected in order to challenge the cupola crowning the Church of the Holy Sepulcher. My hosts’ photograph portrayed history as prophecy. It depicted the once and future Temple.

Had I known enough to perceive the politics of my hosts, I would have understood that their views were not representative of most American Jews, or Israelis for that matter. Nonetheless, my eyes were opened to the image, and I started to notice this poster in more and more places beyond the Old City: in falafel joints and drugstores, in lottery kiosks, and even a “kosher” yoga studio in Nachlaot. This vision of what once was and what could again be seemed to have captured the imaginations of a wide swath of religiously observant Jerusalemites.

Looking back on that night in Jerusalem, I have come to realize that the desire to erase the present and replace it with a particular past is not unique. It is the impulse that led al-Malik to construct the Dome of the Rock on the identical physical footprint of the heart of the Jewish Temples—the stone of sacrifice—the principal focus of Jerusalem’s Jewish past. And the text chosen to decorate the Dome “answered”—and was meant to succeed, usurp, and render heretical or irrelevant—the major monument of (what was then) Jerusalem’s Christian present. The photomontage of the restored Second Temple imagined that the same thing could one day be accomplished in a new context made possible by the restoration of the Jews to their historical homeland.

The photomontage has an unexpected precedent in the history of visual culture. Depictions of Christian churches as the Jewish Temple occur with surprising frequency throughout the history of Christian art, if one is attuned to them.

On the surface, such depictions would seem to pay homage to Christianity’s ancient Jewish past, and in a sense, they do. But that homage is also diminished by an understanding of the Jewish past as merely anticipating the Christianity that is yet to come, and the Temple as but an adumbration of the Church that would replace it. These depictions, no less than the photomontage in that beautiful Jerusalem apartment, present a vision of what *should* stand on the Temple Mount, as opposed to what *does*.

But since 691, Jews and Christians have had to reckon with the fact that a building already stood on the Temple Mount. From that day to this, the Dome of the Rock had a physical reality in the way the destroyed Temples or the Church-yet-to-come did not. And so in art made for both Jews and Christians, the Jewish Temples of yore began to be depicted in the guise of the Dome of the Rock.

The Dome of the Rock as the ancient Jewish Temple (for Jews), or the ancient Jewish Temple as foreshadowing the Church (for Christians), requires following a train of admittedly circuitous historical imaginings. It is, after all, a Muslim edifice “posing” as a Jewish building that has validity in a Christian context only in the sense that it points to the Church that was thought to supersede it. Moreover, the use of the Dome of the Rock to represent the Jewish Temple is doubly surprising because the Temple was known—and not just by scholars—to have been utterly destroyed in antiquity. The fact of the Temple’s destruction was, of course, a reality very much present in the consciousness of Jews, who prayed—daily and on each major festival—for its restoration of the Temple, and who fasted four times a year in solemn commemoration of its destruction. But the destruction of the Temple was no less obvious to Christians, who read both the New Testament as well as the Jewish historian Josephus, and who knew that Jesus had prophesied in the Gospel of Mark that of the Temple not a stone would be left unturned.

Yet, in spite of what Jews and Christians knew about the historical facts of the destruction of both Jerusalem Temples, the extant Dome of the Rock was seen by both groups as an avatar of the buildings that once resided there. It is perhaps understandable why the Christian imagination was prepared to see the Dome of the Rock as a suitable manifestation of the Temple they believed to foreshadow the Church. And that is because the Church being foreshadowed was more than a building, it was an idea, a hope, a promise. The *Ecclesia* was ultimately undepictable, it was a community of faith that, under God’s grace, was to unite all people on the face of the earth.

Having established this unfolding of the Christian imagination, with the architectural features of the Dome of the Rock depicting the ancient Jewish Temple, itself an allegory for the spiritual dominion of Christianity, we are nearly ready to look at how this scene was further refined and customized according to the local cultural aesthetics of Renaissance painters. But we must first add one other important component, which has to do with Christianity’s theological self-understanding as both incorporating and succeeding Judaism.

Just as the New Testament was added to the Hebrew Bible in order to make an encompassing, new-old Christian Bible, so an architectural representation of the Christian “fulfillment” of “completion” of Judaism was added onto representations of the Temple. Now, the Temple was not simply a singular structure, but it was seen as having two parts, an older and newer, with more “antique” architecture representing the Temple and its Old Dispensation, and the addition of more “Christian” architecture representing the New Dispensation.

That is where regional variation comes in, for “Christian” buildings in Northern and Southern Europe emerged out of different architectural traditions. Northern artists tended to depict the Temple as a combination of

a Dome of the Rock-like structure, often with Romanesque features, with an added Gothic façade. Italian masters preferred to show the Temple in classical Graeco-Roman style, as a *tempio* or a quasi-symbolic, gazebo-like *tempietto*, the New Dispensation represented less by the architecture than by the New Testament narratives occurring in the space.

Each modality—the High Gothic and the classicizing—was intended to evoke “the once and future Temple.” The High Gothic was the prevailing style in the North in the 15th and 16th centuries. Thus, to the Northern viewer, the Temple-as-High Gothic cathedral would have read as contemporary. Romanesque features represented the Old, having been derived from (Roman) antiquity, thus extending the legacy of pagan Rome reborn as Christian Rome in the West. That is why, in Northern painting, you’ll often see architectural features of the Dome of the Rock rendered in Romanesque style.

Things were quite different, even reversed, in the Italian Renaissance, which championed the revival of classical antique architecture. The Gothic elements that seemed so contemporary in the North in the early decades of the 1400s would have appeared, to the Italian viewer of 1500, as out of date. Because Gothic was not contemporary but “ancient” for early-16th-century Italians, when viewing or depicting the Jewish Temple as a High Gothic edifice, they would think of the scenes from the Christian narrative unfolding there as transpiring in “the ancient Jewish Temple.”

At the same time, in the Italian Renaissance quest to revive the even older style of classical antiquity, the architectural elements of ancient Greece and Rome became the new and contemporary again. For Southern artists, locating biblical events in a classical (and not Gothic) setting, thus, cast them as both antique and contemporary, situating them in a sort of visual “past continuous,” a fitting style to evoke the theological “once and future” history of the Temple and its promise in the Church.

Thus, we have Northern painters construing a hybrid Temple according to the visual cues that, to them, signified past and present: a Romanesque inflection of the Dome of the Rock represented the old, and the High Gothic cathedral representing the new. In the South, that same Gothic style was thought of as old, and the very ancient classical architecture of Greece and Rome, now revived and reborn, was seen as new.

Finally, we come to a difficulty encountered by all painters—Northern and Southern—and in seeing how they dealt with it, we can open a window onto the Renaissance theological and artistic mind. The problem: decoration. Recall that, particularly in the North, the newer, Christian additions to the Temple were rendered in the style of the Gothic Cathedral. Cathedrals, as everyone knew, were full of beautiful furnishings—tapestries, stained glass, statuary, and precious manuscripts, stones, and metals—

which bore the images of Christ and the saints and told the Christian story. Christians rarely conceived of the Temple in a manner that accorded with what they knew of history from Scripture. They more usually retrojected onto the ancient Jewish Temple the decoration of their own cathedrals, as well as the style and function of the beautiful objects that filled them.

This was partly because most Renaissance Christians knew relatively little about the actual, living Jewish religion. But descriptive and polemic literature reveals that they were familiar with at least two important things about Jewish doctrine—aniconism, that is, the categorical refusal of the so-called “graven image,” and, of course, the rejection of the messiahship and divinity of Jesus.

From the Old Testament, Christians knew that the Jews had received and had “clung to” the Law, and that primary among the commandments of that Law—coming directly after the commandment to believe in God—was the prohibition of the “graven image.” Nonetheless, the thought that Jews would not have had any visual images at all in their holy places seems to have strained Christian credulity in a way that even Jewish disbelief in Jesus did not.

Christians could accept that there were disbelievers in the world. They could see how idolaters might venerate the “wrong” images, and, in fact, frequently depicted such misguided worship in imagined scenes of pagan or idolatrous rituals. But the idea that a space consecrated for worship could be utterly without images was inconceivable to them.

Thus, Christian knowledge of Jewish aniconism was trumped by the conviction—among image-creating and -consuming Renaissance Catholics—that the ecclesiastical function of any church was defined by visual images. To the Renaissance Christian mind, there could be no worship space, neither Christian church nor Jewish Temple, without images.

Once we have arrived at the point where we understand that Northern Renaissance painters thought it logical to depict the Temple as a Gothic cathedral, and we further understand that as a Gothic cathedral images were necessary because they define it as a worship space, we are now in the position to ask which images would fittingly decorate the Temple of the painter’s imagination—aside, that is, from the accoutrements of Ark and lampstand, altars, and vessels mentioned in the Bible.

The answer to this question arose from the other important thing that Renaissance Christians knew about Jews, that they rejected the claim that Jesus was the Messiah, the Son of God, part of a triune Godhead. Thus, it was clear to Christians that it was theologically implausible for Jews to have had images of Christ or the saints in their holy places.

Also, Christians were aware that the Temple existed before Christianity as well as during the unfolding of the Christian story, simply because many events of the Gospels and the Apocrypha are depicted as occurring within its precincts. Images of Christ and the saints would, logically, be absent from Christian visualizations of the Jewish Temple because the events on which they are based had not yet transpired, or were just occurring at the time of the narratives depicted.

So, while images would have been *de rigueur* for Christians imagining any house of worship, images of Christ and the saints, the very staples of decoration in Renaissance churches and cathedrals, would have been implausible in the context of the Jewish Temple. Consequently, Christian artists needed to determine what were the appropriate subjects of the “Jewish devotional images” that they imagined adorning the Temple space. These subjects, as we will see in tomorrow’s installment, came from the Old Testament, and, for the most part, they were deliberately unflattering to Judaism.

We’ll see in some detail how Christian artists imagined the “Jewish” spaces in which they situated the foundational Christian story. On certain rare occasions, the depictions are based on the contemporary lives of real European Jews, and thus they provide a glimpse into actual Jewish sacred and domestic interiors. But, as depictions of Jewish spaces are more often the product of the imagination of the Christian artists, they suggest the extent to which Christians thought of Judaism as a sort of proto-Christianity without the figure of Jesus.



From Raphael's *Marriage of the Virgin*, 1504.

MARC MICHAEL
EPSTEIN

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About the author

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The Once and Future Temple, Part II

Christian Renaissance paintings of the Temple are the visual record of a theology that had devastating consequences in the lives of Jews from antiquity to the Middle Ages and beyond.

This is part two of a two-part essay on the depiction of the Temples in Jerusalem in art made primarily for Christians. Part one, which outlined the concepts this part provides examples for.

In the first part of this examination of the depiction of the Temple in Jerusalem in Renaissance painting, we saw that it very often took on architectural features of the 7th-century monument erected on the physical site of the Temple Mount, the Dome of the Rock. Northern and Southern Renaissance painters adapted the dome design to the religious, historical, and aesthetic sensibilities of their time and place. And we brought that discussion to a close by observing the dilemma felt by painters—Northern and Southern—for whom sanctified, religious space was defined by graven images that they thought the Jews were prohibited to display.

Keeping all this in mind, I want to examine and juxtapose two Renaissance depictions of the imagined Jewish Temple. The first is an example from the Northern Renaissance: “The Miracle of the Rod and the Betrothal of the Virgin” by Robert Campin. Painted between 1420-30, it is now housed in the Prado in Madrid.



To Campin's work I will compare a painting by Raphael Sanzio da Urbino, one of the most distinguished masters of Renaissance. His much more famous rendition of the same two episodes joined in a single scene, and usually given the title "The Marriage of the Virgin." This work, dated 1504, is currently in the Brera, Milan.



In the second part of this examination, I'll consider the architectural style and decoration of these two works—separated by almost a century and by a thousand miles as the crow flies—in order to assess how the religious imagination of Renaissance Italy related to Judaism.

First, it is necessary to review the story being portrayed in each work. Both Campin's and Raphael's paintings depict a famous Christian miracle, that of Joseph's flowering rod, and the ensuing betrothal (or marriage) of Joseph and Mary. The story is from the apocryphal *Protoevangelium of James* (c. 150 CE) According to this text, the Virgin Mary had been offered by her parents to the Temple, where she resides with a group of other virgins from the age of three. When she turns fourteen, the high priest Zachariah, garbed in the priestly vestments, is instructed by an angel of the Lord in the Holy of Holies that he is to find a husband for her. Zachariah is told to gather representatives of the Israelites, each with his staff, whereupon, he is assured, a sign will be given that one of them is Mary's destined bridegroom.

Joseph, "throwing down his ax," goes out to join them. The high priest gathers all the rods, brings them into the Temple, and prays. He then re-emerges and returns each rod to its owner. None show any sign of change, save that of Joseph: "Finally, Joseph took his rod. Suddenly, a dove came out of the rod and stood on Joseph's head. And the high priest said, 'Joseph! Joseph! You have been chosen by lot to take the virgin into your own keeping.' Joseph, anxious about his betrothal to the much younger Mary, worries . . . 'I have sons and am old, while she is young. I will not be ridiculed among the children of Israel'" (9:5-8). The high priest warns him that if he disobeys the sign, divine wrath will pursue him as it did the rebels of Korah's party (Numbers 16). Chastised by fear of punishment, he takes Mary to his house, where she spins scarlet wool for the Temple veil, and he goes out "to build houses." Shortly thereafter, when Joseph is away, an angel announces to Mary the impending birth of her son.

The account of the miracle of the rod is repeated in the Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew (ca. 7th century). In this telling, Joseph does not need to be coerced by threat of punishment. Pseudo-Matthew portrays him as self-effacing, adding details such as the fact that Joseph's rod was the shortest, and left on the altar by the high priest after Joseph bashfully neglected to return to claim it, so in doubt was he of his suitability as a husband of a fourteen-year-old virgin. The disparity between these portrayals of Joseph testifies to the wide spectrum of attitudes towards him in medieval textual and visual lore—he can appear as anything from blind cuckolded buffoon, to temperate, long-suffering and saintly.

The tale was known throughout Europe in the Middle Ages through *The Golden Legend*, composed in approximately 1260 by the Italian Dominican Jacobus de Voragine, who eventually became the archbishop of Genoa. It

is in the account in the *The Golden Legend* that the rod of Joseph—unique among the other suitors’ rods—flowers while resting on the altar in the setting of our study, the Temple.

The architecture of the Temple dominates Campin’s “The Miracle of the Rod and the Betrothal of the Virgin.” The interior, on the left of the painting, contains features influenced by the Dome of the Rock; the façade, on the right side of the painting, is cathedral-like. Notice how Campin separates the scene of the “Miracle of the Rod,” which transpires in the domed simulacrum of the Jewish Temple, from that of the “Betrothal of the Virgin,” which occurs before the yet-unfinished façade of a Gothic cathedral.

Let’s focus on how Campin renders the Jewish space of the Temple. In order to make it recognizable as the primeval form and model for the cathedral, Campin invented “Jewish devotional images” from whole cloth. Thus, the architecture and furnishings of the Temple contain images, but not images of Jesus. The content of these images is conceptualized as “Jewish,” in the sense that they come from Hebrew scripture. The particular subjects were chosen both to highlight the violence of the era before Grace, and to foreshadow the coming of Christ. Thus, as usual in Christian art of the medieval and Renaissance periods, the Jewish past was acknowledged, but also represented as unaware of its own incompleteness.

These Jewish images, forming the backdrop of Jewish worship, seem to murmur in the background, insinuating the clannishness, jealousy, heresy, and enmity of the Jews. But these particular images bear a theological rebuke, too. Jews—including the high priest in archiepiscopal garb—are depicted as worshiping among objects portraying a history they regard as their own, depicting a Scripture of which they boast privileged familiarity. Yet, they remain ignorant of the fact that, right under their noses, the very objects with which they surround themselves proclaim Christ through the typological stories they tell. In a Christian reading, Cain, for instance, represents the Jews and Abel, Jesus; Samson destroying the Philistine temple is Christ bringing down the Synagogue; and David—Jesus’ ancestor—embodies the New Dispensation of Grace, destroying the grotesque and overgrown giant who personifies the top-heavy edifice of the Old Dispensation of the Hebrew Law.

Now, let’s have a look at the Jewish figures that Campin portrays. The actual Jews depicted in Campin’s Temple space are exotically and extravagantly garbed, with pointed hats, non-European features, bizarre coiffures, and a variety of sartorial clues to their gross and stupid (or wily and deceptive) materialism, their criminal ruffianism, and above all, their general otherness. They can be obscenely obese, disturbingly bony, or simply stupid-looking, like the high priest marrying Mary and Joseph, with his unshaven jowls and donkey-like gaze. They group together, hissing their

slander jealously and conspiratorially, exhibiting baleful glances, with ugly faces and hateful gestures—all the hallmarks of what Joseph Leo Koerner has characterized as “enemy painting.”

The hostility of the image extends even to Joseph. As mentioned, Joseph was represented in a wide and diverse spectrum of ways during the Middle Ages. As a transitional figure, appearing in both the “old” and the “new” registers of the painting, he could have been depicted more honorably, but Campin chose to show him unshaven, frowning and with a closely cropped head—a type identified by scholars of medieval physiognomy as a criminal.

Both Joseph and the other Jews appear in deliberate contradistinction to the few members of the Holy Family designated and delineated as “proto-Christians” in spite of their clear Jewishness in the text of the Gospels. These figures are more pleasant to look upon than “the Jews,” and comport themselves with refinement. The decadence and decay of the Old is brought into even sharper focus when contrasted with the New; the heavy burden of Law, when compared with the lightness and joy of Grace.

In Raphael’s “The Marriage of the Virgin,” the Temple lacks any cathedral-like features. Its architecture is more immediately influenced by the Dome of the Rock and contemporary Renaissance neoclassical architecture, notably the small commemorative monument to the martyrdom of St. Peter, called the *Tempietto*, designed by Donato Bramante and built in the courtyard of San Pietro in Montorio on the Janiculum Hill in Rome in 1502.



We'll return to Raphael's portrayal of the Temple in detail shortly. But the very first thing we notice when we juxtapose Campin's painting with Raphael's is that the latter seems, on the surface, to be much less hostile. This is due, of course, to the legendary "polish" of Raphael's works, from which passionate emotion (and indeed anything ugly or imbalanced) seems to be banished. Even the much-remarked-on suitor breaking his rod is famously balletic in the midst of his violent act. But the lack of polemic here is also a result of the fact that in Italy, simple typology does the heavy lifting of Christian supersessionist theology as opposed to the overtly hostile mode of "enemy painting" we encounter in the North.

To illustrate the polemical work done by typology, let's briefly look at Mantegna's *Circumcision of Jesus* of 1461, now in the Uffizi in Florence.



In this painting, we are afforded an interior view of the Jewish Temple, represented as a spacious, high-ceilinged classical edifice clad in porphyry, onyx, and marble, full of cornucopia, swags, wreaths, vases, and vines. On the wall above the scene, in the tympana of two Roman arches, are painted, as if in low gilded relief against black onyx backgrounds, the scene of the Binding of Isaac at left, and of Moses bringing the Tablets of the Law to the Israelites on the right. In the spandrel between the arches, the painter depicts another low relief, this one in red porphyry, of a six-winged seraph. The altar itself is not free-standing, but is represented as a shallow, chest-high marble box against a wall, as if in one of the side-chapels of a neoclassical church or cathedral.

The architectural envelope broadcasts “antiquity” and the decoration contextualizes that antiquity as Jewish. The scenes chosen from the Old Testament are intended to situate the ritual depicted in the setting of its sacred pre-history. Circumcision was enjoined upon Abraham, it was confirmed by Moses, it is now submitted to by Jesus as a foreshadowing of his eventual abuse at his Passion at the hands of “the Jews.” Still, the painting is reasonably free of diatribe: Mary is classically beautiful, as might be expected. But in contradistinction to the work of Campin and other northerners, the male protagonists—the high priest, who embodies “the Jews,” and Joseph, a transitional figure—while somewhat hunched and round-shouldered, old, and tired-looking—are still reasonably dignified. As we’ve noted, the architecture evokes the antique, but the revival of interest in the antique in Mantegna’s day makes the painting into something that is simultaneously plausible as contemporary. Mantegna’s is the once and future Temple as pagan/Jewish synthesis.

With Mantegna as a reference, we can now return to Raphael’s “Marriage of the Virgin” in order to see the pagan/Jewish synthesis taken to its logical extreme. The painting appears to lack any overt iconographic evocations of Old versus New. Some of the figures depicted in the background sport strange or pointed headgear, but none evince aggressive countenances or gestures. This seems to depart radically from the hostile typological model of Campin and even its milder version in Mantegna.

In its preternatural calm, Raphael purges what is ostensibly a depiction of the Jewish Temple of any iconography related to Judaism—indeed, of any iconography at all. Raphael’s *Tempietto* is symbolic, open. Aside from the classicizing details of snail volutes, it contains no furniture, no ornaments, no ritual space, no altar, no images, only a view onto the endlessly receding horizon.

Raphael did not need to imagine accoutrements of Jewish worship, as Campin did. We know that he was aware of the “historically accurate” furnishings of the Jewish Temple because he painted that building in an historicizing fashion on another occasion. In “The Expulsion of Heliodorus from the Temple,” a fresco he created between 1511 and 1513 as part of the

commission to decorate the rooms of the Apostolic Palace in the Vatican, the Jewish Temple appears replete with high priest in full regalia, the Ark, the menorah, the altar, and the other Temple vessels.



Raphael was also familiar with the proper furnishings of a pagan temple. In 1515, he painted what we might call a “true” Graeco-Roman temple, because it bristles with appropriate statuary—armed and helmeted gods and voluptuous goddesses. That temple appears in his “Paul Preaching in Athens, at the Areopagus,” currently in the Victoria and Albert Museum in London.



Again, that image is very dissimilar to the Temple shown in “The Marriage of the Virgin,” which depicts a classical *tempietto* without any of the statuary that would identify it as a site of pagan worship.

Given that he had previously painted both the Jewish Temple, with its distinctive Jewish features, and pagan temples, with their divinities and statuary, it would seem to be a deliberate choice on Raphael’s part to be doing something else here altogether. Exactly what sort of building are we looking at in “The Marriage of the Virgin”? The answer is to be found in Paul’s Areopagus sermon, as recounted in Acts 17:22–31 (and the subject of Raphael’s aforementioned painting of 1515). In it, he makes reference to a most elusive place of worship, the altar to the “Unknown Deity.” Paul emphasizes to the Athenians that Jesus was no “new” god, but rather the god the Greeks *already worshipped* as the Unknown Deity. According to the Church Fathers, the corollary of this is that Jesus was also the God that the Jews had been worshipping all along, albeit blindly and unknowingly. Greek ignorance of the Unknown Deity is the simple result of the eyes of the pagans having not yet been opened. Jewish ignorance of Jesus, by way of contrast, is due to their obstinate and deliberate self-blinding. The Jews, it was thought, were vouchsafed the truth from their earliest antiquity, but stubbornly refused to recognize it.

The Unknown Deity is *implicit* in the Temple and requires no visual representation—neither in the form of pagan statues nor Jewish devotional objects—real or imagined. The Unknown Deity has always been there, yet is always nascent, always to come, as represented in the very theme of the marriage of the Virgin.

The empty space is itself laden with theological significance. Raphael’s *tempietto*—with its vacant interior and the view through its empty space of the infinitely receding horizon—is the Temple of the Unknown Deity, the god who is to come. It is a classical space purged both of any distinctive Jewish and pagan elements, a symbol of unperfected pre-Christianity, which is in the process of being consecrated by the marriage that is occurring in the foreground. In “The Marriage of The Virgin,” Judaism *per se* seems to be entirely glossed over in favor of a general “antiquity.”

Or is it? There is one inescapable element in the composition that disrupts Raphael’s cool classical, iconography-free composition, and thus, the perhaps-too-tidy contention that the building represents the Temple of the Unknown Deity. The building depicted by Raphael is indisputably the Jewish Temple, even if in a classicizing architectural style and even if devoid of all the Temple’s traditional and historical accoutrements. I say “indisputably” for two reasons: according to the texts, the episode of the marriage of the Virgin occurs within the Temple precincts, and the structure depicted is clearly based upon the Dome of the Rock, a building that—as we’ve seen time and again—bears an entire constellation of iconographic associations with the Jewish Temple.

So, Raphael's *tempietto* is the Jewish Temple, after all, but shorn of its recognizable features. This is because it is not the *historical* Jewish Temple, nor some pale foreshadowing of the Church. It is, rather, a Jewish Temple that brings an indictment against the Jews for not seeing what was, in fact, there all along—that the deity they worshipped there with such devotion is none other than Jesus. The inherency of Jesus in the Temple is symbolized by what is now inherent in the marriage before us, ready to burst forth and blossom, from among their own tribes, like Joseph's budding rod.

It was long predicted that the “rod of Jesse” would flower (Isaiah 11:1-2). Why did the obdurate Jews fail to see it? Raphael answers: They were distracted from the way, the truth and the light, by the complexity of the rites and rituals with which they furnished their Temple. Here, the artist has clarified, purified, simplified the space for us, so that we can focus on what is truly important: the Savior and Son of God who is to come, the Unknown Deity emerging from the *apparently* empty space, the void at the center of the Temple, into full, humanized reality through the union of this holy couple.

I can't help but see similarities and differences in the historical imagination and polemic that imbues these Renaissance depictions of the Jews, on the one hand, and that photomontage I saw in Jerusalem on the other. While the Romans erased the actual Jewish Temple in the year 70 CE, the Renaissance Christian paintings and the photomontage of my Jewish hosts each employ a different method to “disappear” the building we see before our eyes, the Dome of the Rock, for centuries considered the “authentic” avatar of the destroyed Temple.

Where Campin's and Raphael's paintings colonize, usurp, and transform the meaning of the Jewish Temple while simultaneously retaining the form of the Dome of the Rock as a marker and reminder of the fact that it was a Jewish Temple, the Jerusalem photomontage *literally* cuts out the Dome of the Rock and replaces it with an equally literal rendition of the Second Temple. The difference, in other words, is between the “merely” *theological* supersession of Judaism versus the *literal* erasure of Islam's holy site.

The physical destruction of a Muslim shrine that has resided on that site for over a thousand years would be an act of physical provocation and invite violent reaction. The paintings we have been examining are not innocent either. They are the visual record of a theology that had real and devastating consequences in the lives of actual Jews, not just in antiquity and in the Middle Ages, but beyond. It is true that the Renaissance was, as Burkhardt described it, the era of “the discovery of the World and of Man” with all the progress that implies. At the same time, even the humanistic Renaissance—still being a Christian Renaissance, after all—could not

purge itself of supersessionist theology. The nullification and erasure of Judaism, and the consequent conception of Jewish inferiority incorporated into that theology have, then and since, leapt from the page (and from the canvas) into the lived experience of Jews—with often terrible and disastrous consequences.

The Zionist Heroes Who Weren't Afraid to Tell the Truth

JULY 3 2023

From Seth Mandel
at *Commentary*

In his book *And None Shall Make Them Afraid*, Rick Richman provides eight portraits (parts of which first appeared in *Mosaic*) of courageous Jews who played a role in the creation of the state of Israel. Alongside such better-known figures as Theodor Herzl and Chaim Weizmann, Richman examines the playwright and screenwriter Ben Hecht, who turned his considerable talents and extensive show-business connections first to alerting Americans to the Holocaust and then to raising financial support for the nascent Jewish state—in ways that were far too bold for the American Jewish establishment. **Seth Mandel** writes in his review:

Hecht did not live an avowedly Jewish life, and that is important. . . . In fact, the Herzls and the Hechts were the perfect Paul Reverses for precisely that reason. The observant Jew could tell you that assimilation would not save you from anti-Semitic regimes, but the plight of the secular, integrated Jew proved it. A novella published by Hecht seven months after Kristallnacht features a “global pogrom,” after which its narrator says: “We who had gone to sleep the night before on the borrowed pillow of civilization woke in the Dark Ages. . . . We were Jews again.”

Hecht himself recounted a telephone conversation with Rabbi Stephen Wise, trying to talk him out of staging his 1943 pageant about the Holocaust, *We Will Never Die*. Wise, then the foremost representative of American Jewry, believed it poor taste for American Jews to call public attention to the mass-murder of their coreligionists in Europe:

Hecht hung up, annoyed and unbowed. Wise may not have liked the script, but First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt, in the audience when the play came to Washington, was blown away. Perhaps Hecht knew better than Wise how to get the attention of those in power: not with meek flattery but by making “the free world” stare right into its own hypocrisy and using the money from ticket prices to make sure that the Jews fighting for their survival might have the necessary guns and ammunition to do so. Ben Hecht was not sorry to bother you.

Why Turkey Arrested an Alleged “Mossad Spy Ring”

JULY 6 2023

From Benny Avni
at *New York Sun*

On Monday, the Turkish internal intelligence agency announced that it had rounded up a network of (mostly Arab) Israeli operatives working within its borders. While it is certainly possible that the Mossad has agents based in Turkey who are observing the activities of Iran or of various terrorist groups, there is also no reason to take Ankara’s version of events at face value. **Benny Avni** puts the story in context:

Israeli sources tell the *Sun* that they are intrigued by the timing of the alleged exposure, as it happened just after Mossad said it uncovered a terror ring in Cyprus and on the same day that Israel launched a major anti-terrorism push in the northern West Bank, targeting groups with ties to Turkey.

Ironically, Ankara is widely advertising the alleged bust of Mossad agents even as a major thaw of relations is under way between Israel and Turkey, which have been on a long collision course. According to various reports, Prime Minister Netanyahu and President Erdogan plan to meet later in July, in a first such powwow since 2008. Last year, Mr. Erdogan hosted President Herzog of Israel.

Members of the ring were allegedly dispatched to Beirut and Damascus to pinpoint Hizballah sites in Lebanon and Syria for attacks by Israeli drones. . . . Some were charged with identifying Hamas-related targets at Istanbul. Unlike Israel, America, and most of Europe, Turkey does not designate groups like Hamas as terrorists. Hamas’s second in command, Saleh Arouri, has long resided in the country and reportedly still maintains a base there.

“While I can’t tell whether the spy-ring story is true, its timing is curious,” one Israeli source who declined to be identified told the *Sun*. “It seems to me that it was widely advertised by Ankara for internal consumption. The message they wanted to convey to their public is, ‘We’re no patsies of the Mossad.’”

While Forbidding Euthanasia, Jewish Law Exhibits Sympathy for Those Suffering from Terminal Illness

JULY 3 2023

From Shlomo Brody
at *Jerusalem Post*

In Canada and some European countries, laws have gradually expanded the circumstances under which doctors may kill their patients. The Netherlands this year has moved to relax its restrictions on the euthanization of children between the ages of one and twelve. **Shlomo Brody** explains the halakhic strictures on such deeds, as well as the ways that Jewish tradition has addressed the humanitarian concerns usually cited by euthanasia advocates:

Judaism certainly places a premium on preserving life and usually calls upon us to do everything to save a life. We value the life of all human beings and certainly do not belittle the inherent dignity of those with physical or mental impairments. We furthermore condemn active euthanasia, assisted suicide, or intentionally hastening someone's death. Judaism does not want humans to "put out a flickering candle," as the [talmudic] sages put it.

Nonetheless, . . . "There is a time for death" (Ecclesiastes 3:2). Sometimes our interventions will not extend living but instead prolong dying. Judaism doesn't value dragging out a painful process of dying. Halakhah allows a person to forego further interventions when their ailments have become too great and their quality of life has become too degraded.

Of course, Brody explains, rabbinic authorities differ on how to find the correct balance:

Jewish law mandates that we can desecrate Shabbat to save the life of a person, even if we will only be extending their life for a short, fleeting amount of time. On this basis, Rabbi Eliezer Waldenberg asserted that even as we treat people for pain, we should generally do everything to extend a person's life, even for a limited time. Similarly, Rabbi Immanuel Jakobovits repeatedly asserted, "Any fraction of life, whether ten years or a minute, whether healthy, crippled, or even unconscious, remains equally infinite in value."

In contrast, Rabbi Yaakov Kanievsky (the "Steipler *gaon*"), followed by Rabbi Asher Weiss, have contended that this sentiment is wrong. Their proof is that halakhah permits removing an impediment to a suffering person's death, if this will prevent severe suffering, as long as one does not move the dying person himself in a way that will cause him to die. Sometimes, we should passively allow natural death.

The White House Is Trying to Buy Pre-Election Quiet by Paying Off Iran

JULY 3 2023

From Elliott Abrams
at *National Review*

During his long career in public office, Joe Biden has frequently professed his sympathy with, and even love for, the Jewish state. While Elliott Abrams believes these professions are sincere, there is little doubt in his mind that the informal agreement President Biden appears to be considering with Iran will greatly increase the dangers to Israel—not to mention those to America:

It is fair to say that the United States is paying Iran to stop taking American hostages and trying to kill Americans, an amazing response by a superpower to violent and unlawful actions by a vulnerable middle power. . . . The deal seems aimed at protecting the United States in part and the Biden administration in part. If Iran keeps its promises for a while, American soldiers in Syria and Iraq, and American visitors to Iran, will temporarily be safer.

It is fair to ask whether Americans, and the United States, are really safer when our response to hostage taking, murderous attacks on American service members, and nuclear blackmail is to pay more money. [However], under this apparent agreement, President Biden will be safer—from having to confront, before the 2024 U.S. election, an Iran steadily moving toward nuclear weapons. He has bought time for himself.

The agreement also makes it harder for Israel to strike at Iran's growing nuclear program, because the administration will now argue that with [uranium] enrichment capped at 60 percent, there's no imminent danger. Iran, meanwhile, can improve its enrichment capabilities, upgrade its centrifuges, and continue secret work on a warhead.

All of this reflects the Biden administration's—and over many years, America's—unwillingness to confront Iran over behavior that has for decades included killing Americans. One can think of other possible responses to the taking of hostages, ranging all the way back to “millions for defense but not one cent for tribute” in 1797. This time, it looks like up to \$20 billion for tribute.

How Jenin Turned from an Economic Hotspot to a Terrorist Hotbed

JULY 5 2023

From Yossi Yehoshua
at *Ynet*

On Monday and Tuesday, the IDF conducted a major operation in the West Bank city of Jenin, killing eleven guerrillas and destroying bomb-making workshops, weapons caches, and three headquarters used for observing and coordinating fighting. The operation, which involved both airstrikes and ground forces, was the largest of its kind in almost two decades, and was aimed primarily against a local branch of Palestinian Islamic Jihad. **Yossi Yehoshua** explains how Jenin has become the epicenter of terrorism in the West Bank, and the source of numerous, often deadly, attacks on Israeli civilians:

The deterioration in the Jenin refugee camp actually began with the outbreak of COVID-19. The Palestinian Authority distanced itself from the area to the point of complete detachment from knowing what was going on. The Palestinian Authority never had a firm grip there, but its weakness turned into a loss of control. Therefore, it is also important to note that we don't see a similar situation in other cities in the West Bank, which is one of the reasons why we are currently far from an intifada, and likewise far from an operation approaching the scale of Operation Defensive Shield, [which effectively ended the second intifada in 2002].

Security forces, backed by the Israeli government and under international pressure, did everything they could to allow Palestinian Authority mechanisms to return to Jenin and maintain law and order within the chaos.

The first ones to suffer from the deteriorating situation [were] Jenin's own residents. These are 40,000 Palestinian who were taken in the past two years as hostages by militants and terrorists. The city, which until 2020 was one of the leading centers of economy and trade in the West Bank, has been suffering a continuous decline in trade volume, especially in relations with Arab Israelis, who are worried about entering the city out of fear of running into armed clashes.

A single operation, no matter how successful, won't turn the camp and its residents into Israel supporters. . . . The IDF should focus on the camp and carry out daily operations against terror.