

Antisemitism and the Aesthetic

Charles Blattberg
(Université de Montréal)

Everything seems impossible or frighteningly difficult
without the providential arrival of antisemitism. Through
it, all things fall into place and are simplified.

Charles Maurras¹

I. Introduction

Why wasn't Rousseau antisemitic? It is not the kind of question one normally asks, but he was quite exceptional in this respect. "On the whole hostile" is how one commentator sums-up the general view in Rousseau's intellectual milieu regarding Jews.² Not that there was much familiarity with actual Jews, who made up only a tiny minority of the population. But this has never stopped antisemites before – especially those who suffer, like Rousseau, from frequent bouts of paranoia.³

He did meet four of them at a hospice once. Yet he managed no more than exchanging a few flirtatious glances with the beautiful Jewess. As for the three men, one had pretended conversion to Calvinism and then Catholicism, while the other two were busy impersonating Moors. And one of the latter was a remarkably ugly gentleman who reeked of tobacco and made sexual advances that Rousseau had strenuously to fend off. He succeeded, but not before "something sticky and whitish" had spurted from the man. This left Rousseau "more agitated, more troubled, more frightened even than I had ever been in my life, and ready to be sick."⁴

* A chapter from *Towards One, As Many* (forthcoming). A shorter version (minus the epilogue) appears as "Antisemitism and the Aesthetic," *The Philosophical Forum* 52, no. 3 (Fall 2021): 189–210. Thanks to Alastair Cheng, Mihail Evans, Missila Izza, Mario Ionuț Maroșan, Normand Mousseau, Allan Nadler, Christopher J. Pal, Catherine R. Power, and the journal's peer reviewers for comments on, or helpful discussions about, ideas contained in this article. Thanks as well to Douglas Lackey for the encouragement.

¹ "L'Exode morale," *L'Action française*, 28 March 1911, p. 1. ("Tout paraît impossible ou affreusement difficile sans cette providence de l'antisémitisme. Par elle, tout s'arrange, s'aplanit et se simplifie.")

² Jonathan D. Marks, "Rousseau's Use of the Jewish Example," *Review of Politics* 72 (2010): 463–81, p. 467.

³ See Leo Damrosch, *Jean-Jacques Rousseau: Restless Genius* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2005), pp. 421ff., 477ff.

⁴ Quoted in Damrosch, p. 54.

So why no antisemitism? Or, to pose the more obvious question: Why were those around Rousseau prejudiced against Jews? Why, for that matter, are so many people in general drawn to antisemitism? What purpose does it serve?

My answer will surprise many: first and foremost, none at all. Normally, accounts of antisemitism are functionalist. That is, they claim it meets certain psychological, religious, political, economic, intellectual, or other such ends. But all these miss what seems to me to be its primary motivation, which is enjoyment.

Enjoyment is not an end like the others, since one can only experience it by taking on a disinterested attitude, leading to actions carried out for their own sake. We act, in other words, as if the act itself was the end. Think of following a game's rules: only when we do so for their own sake, "just because" they constitute the game and nothing more, can we really play (and so enjoy) it. Yes, we often say that we play *for* fun, but we mean this only indirectly. Directly, we play to play.⁵

Of course, some also play for additional reasons. Professional athletes, for instance, do so in order to earn a living, achieve recognition, reward their fans, and so on. But just like the ends functionalists invoke to explain antisemitism, all these lie outside the game. To actually play it, one must meet strictly *internal* ends – scoring goals, sinking baskets, making saves, and so on.

Such disinterested pursuit is also the key feature playing games shares with the three other modes of aesthetic experience. As explained in more detail below, these three consist of fantasizing, savouring, and putting on shows or spectacles. But I take this classification to have implications far beyond artistic or leisure activities. Over the course of this article, I make the case that attending to the aesthetic dimensions of antisemitism can help our efforts to not just better understand this resurgent threat, but more effectively contain it.

Here's how we'll proceed. In the next section, I outline why we should think of antisemitic conspiracy theories as primarily aesthetic phenomena. Such analysis, the following section then argues, helps expose antisemitism's implicit metaphysics. Indeed, my claim is that its affinity with both monism and a certain kind of atomism provides the most compelling explanation for not only Rousseau's unusual tolerance but also Martin Heidegger's philosophical predispositions to Jew-

⁵ Here's another way to think of this: one reason I avoid staying in expensive hotels is that, when I pay a lot, having a good time becomes overly important to me. I feel pressure to enjoy myself, and this very feeling makes it difficult to do so. The goal of enjoyment, then, must remain in the background – which is another way of saying that it cannot be aimed for directly.

hatred, which I'll explicate in the fourth section. This yields an original, philosophically informed understanding of antisemitism, used in the next section to assess other possible interpretations of the phenomenon. For obvious reasons, I've chosen to focus on the few texts I've come across that invoke aesthetics. None of them stop there, however, going on to offer various functionalist explanations in ways that end up undermining their aesthetic analyses. As a result, they fail to get the metaphysics right. But it is only by doing so, I suggest in the final section, that we can develop the most effective measures for limiting antisemitism's spread.

II. Conspiracy Theories Are Fun

Sooner or later, antisemitism always takes the form of a conspiracy theory. These range from medieval libels about infant sacrifice and eighteenth century warnings about international puppet masters to contemporary allegations of Jewish-engineered immigration policy designed to "replace" Western whites with non-white foreigners. But despite endless variations, all such theories purport to reveal secret plots by powerful, malevolent Jews. Of course, the allegations are false.

What tends to be missed, however, is how harbouring such conspiracy theories entails quintessentially aesthetic activities. In fact, I'd argue that they tend to fulfill all four of the aesthetic modes mentioned earlier.

First, there is conspiracy theories' playfulness, since entertaining one amounts to participating in a kind of puzzle-solving game: by uncovering the plot, players pass tests of ingenuity. Consider the many "serious" German intellectuals who supported Nazism. As Max Weinreich has shown, the Nazi regime's machinations appealed very strongly to people attracted by complexity: "Many fields of learning, different ones at different times according to the shrewdly appraised needs of Nazi policies, were drawn into the work." The jurists recognized how Nazi legislation raised "many and intricate" questions, so they "spared no effort in molding the abstruse ideas of the new rulers into clear-cut articles of laws and directives." The scientists allegedly discerned in the Nazi leadership ideals animating their own research, including "the spirit of clarity without residue, of honesty toward the outer world, and simultaneously of inner unity." And the linguists set to work providing numerous translations of conspiratorial tracts such as the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion* (1903) – to which were appended so-called supplementary studies, given "the rule that propaganda in order to succeed must also have in mind the intellectuals who look for scientific 'proof'." So it

goes without saying that all these academics saw themselves as contributing to the solution for the “Jewish question.”⁶

(Nazi aesthetics was a mere way-station, however, since its antisemitism was evil in a profound, fundamentally destructive sense. This is why, as World War II progressed, the Nazis chose to exterminate as many Jews as they could instead of putting them to work, despite the regime’s increasingly desperate labour shortfalls. As Weinreich remarks, “on a rational plane, nothing could be attained for Germany by killing these people.”⁷)

Second, it should be evident how the internal ends of conspiracy theorizing as a puzzle-solving game receive support from fantasy, the exercise of the imagination unconstrained by what’s actually the case. Because antisemitic conspiracy theories all rely upon imagined variations of “the Jew.” These figures are substantial symbols, meaning they combine relatively fixed, transhistorical forms – in this case, those outlining the imagined conspirators’ activities – with evolving contents – in this case, those specific to “Jews.” And both elements are found *within* the world of fantasy.

As for savouring, think of the exaggerated hooked noses, dark beady eyes, and drooping eyelids of the ugly, swarthy, hairy Jews depicted in many relished caricatures and cartoons; or conversely, of the seductive allure of *la belle juive*, a figure either sinful or noble. It’s not for nothing that the dust jacket on Sara Lipton’s *Dark Mirror: The Medieval Origins of Anti-Jewish Iconography* describes the book as “lushly illustrated.”⁸ Nor should we ignore the intricate beauty of some conspiracy theories, those whose arrangements are so complex and all-encompassing that, to the aficionado, it’s almost sublime.

Finally, regarding show or spectacle, we can understand how, once they’ve solved the puzzle, conspiracy theorists will be found enthusiastically presenting their solutions to others. For instance, as Amanda J. Crawford remarks in her portrait of James H. Fetzer (author of “Did Mossad death squads slaughter American children at Sandy Hook?” among other absurdities): “he enumerates every accolade he’s received since high school in a practiced soliloquy larded with

⁶ Weinreich, *Hitler’s Professors: The Part of Scholarship in Germany’s Crimes Against the Jewish People* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999, 2nd ed.), pp. 7, 38, 17, 12, 14, 115, 8.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 164; and see my “Good, Bad, Great, Evil,” in *Patriotic Elaborations: Essays in Practical Philosophy* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2009). Moishe Postone misses this: “Anti-Semitism and National Socialism: Notes on the German Reaction to ‘Holocaust’,” *New German Critique*, no. 19 (Winter 1980): 97–115.

⁸ See “[Stereotypes of Jews](#),” and “[La belle juive](#),” both in Wikipedia, pages consulted 14 April 2020; and Lipton, *Dark Mirror: The Medieval Origins of Anti-Jewish Iconography* (New York: Henry Holt and Co., 2014).

self-laudatory pronouncements: ‘It was a big deal.’ ‘It was a hit.’ ‘It was a sensation!’.’⁹ There’s also the fact that, in societies where the establishment is not antisemitic, the people who are sometimes get to enjoy provoking moralizers by playing the transgressive clown or trickster. I imagine that this was at least partly behind that Holocaust-themed parade of dancing “Nazis” who recently performed during a Spanish carnival. In banalizing the genocide, it should be seen as a complement to the many Holocaust-denying antisemitic conspiracy theories.¹⁰

Taken together, this multifaceted aesthetic appeal seems a plausible explanation for the considerable magnetism such often-ludicrous conspiracy theories can exert – it’s the best available account, that is, for the undeniable enjoyment people take in them.

And while it might seem counterintuitive for antisemites to take pleasure in fantasies of malign and powerful Jewish enemies, their feeling is not the practical trepidation that comes from perceiving a genuine threat. It’s arguably something much more enjoyable, like comfortably watching a good horror flick. In fact, antisemites can also aestheticize the fear they instill in others. Consider this comment from a letter by Gershom Scholem to Hannah Arendt, following the publication of her *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil* (1963):

I don’t picture Eichmann, as he marched around in his SS uniform and relished how everyone shivered in fear before him, as the banal gentleman you now want to persuade us he was, ironically or not. I refuse to go along. I’ve read enough descriptions and interviews of Nazi functionaries and their conduct in front of Jews – while the going was good – to mistrust this innocuous *ex post facto* construction. The gentlemen enjoyed their evil, so long as there was something to enjoy. One behaves differently after the party’s over, of course.¹¹

⁹ Fetzer’s article was published by Iranian state-run Press TV as well as on the Veterans Today website: <http://www.veteranstoday.com/2012/12/23/mossad-death-squads-slaughtered-american-children-at-sandyhook>. He later claimed that no children were killed: Fetzer and Mike Palecek, eds., *Nobody Died at Sandy Hook: It Was a FEMA Drill to Promote Gun Control* (Crestview, FL: Moon Rock Books, 2015). Crawford’s portrayal is in her “[The Professor of Denial](#),” *Chronicle of Higher Education*, 5 February 2020.

¹⁰ See Sam Jones, “[Spanish carnival’s Holocaust-themed parade of dancing ‘Nazis’ sparks outrage](#),” *The Guardian*, 25 February 2020. The day before, another antisemitic parade took place in Belgium: “[Belgian city of Aalst says anti-Semitic parade ‘just fun’](#),” *BBC News*, 24 February 2020.

¹¹ Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil* (New York: The Viking Press, 1965, rev. ed.); and Scholem, letter to Arendt (2 August 1963), in *Gershom Scholem: A Life in Letters, 1914–1982*, ed. and trans. Anthony David Skinner (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002), p. 402.

This seems right. After all, there is a reason we don't find it odd when the villains of fairy tales and comic books are shown gleefully cackling.

Aesthetic pleasure likewise helps account for the persistence of even the most outlandish claims. Consider conspiracy theories' "self-sealing quality,"¹² which makes them impervious to countervailing evidence and so extremely difficult to debunk. Many see this as a mark of pseudoscience, and so call for the infusion of genuine science. But I don't believe science has anything to do with it. Think of Karl Philipp Moritz's 1785 essay on disinterestedness and aesthetics, the very first written on the subject. On approaching a beautiful object, Moritz says he regards it "as something that is not complete in me but is rather *complete in itself*, that thereby constitutes a totality in itself and accords me pleasure *for its own sake*."¹³ This certainly sounds like the kind of thing that would be able, on its own, to close off any penetration of its integrity. The suggestion, in other words, is that the self-sealing quality is an enduring feature of aesthetic attention, indeed a necessary prerequisite for aesthetic disinterestedness, and so enjoyment. No wonder even the social scientific literature has begun to register "a significant relation between conspiracy mentality and enjoyment."¹⁴

III. Why Jews?

In this section, I lay out the metaphysical framework that I believe underlies antisemitism. I pay particular attention to atomism and monism, both conceptually and in their social affinity for conspiracy theories. Finally, I consider why it is that this metaphysics leads some people to prefer Jews for the role of (imaginary) conspirators.

Accounting for aesthetic experience is particularly important, I'd suggest, because it is one of the three basic dimensions of being, and so one of the fundamental ways that we can relate to the world. Disinterest is, as already discussed, the chief characteristic of what we might call *the aesthetic*. Then there are the dimensions containing the aims favoured by functionalists: *the*

¹² Cass R. Sunstein and Adrian Vermeule, "Conspiracy Theories: Causes and Cures," *Journal of Political Philosophy* 17, no. 2 (2009): 202–27, p. 204.

¹³ Moritz, "An Attempt to Unify All the Fine Arts and Sciences under the Concept of *That Which Is Complete in Itself*," trans. Elliott Schreiber, *PMLA* 127, no. 1 (Jan. 2012): 97–100, p. 97.

¹⁴ Kenzo Nera, Myrto Pantazi, and Olivier Klein, "'These Are Just Stories, Mulder': Exposure to Conspiracist Fiction Does Not Produce Narrative Persuasion," *Frontiers in Psychology* 9, no. 684 (May 2018): 1–17, p. 1.

natural, where our instinctive ends are found; and *the practical*, the home of our interests. Human life is thus a locus of overlapping and interspersing dimensions, one of many. Think of it: to enjoy life is aesthetic, to be driven to live is natural, and to be interested in living well is practical.

We can further distinguish these dimensions by their combination of two features. One is mereological, having to do with parts and wholes. Mereology ranges from atomism, which sees parts and wholes as discrete or independent from each other, to holism, which sees them as dependent. The other is “hiburological,” my neologism for a certain way of approaching the classic metaphysical theme of “the One and the Many.” *Hibur* is Hebrew for “connection,” and I distinguish monists from pluralists in terms of how connected they see reality as being: the former emphasize cohesion, the latter fragmentation.¹⁵

We can discern both mereology and hiburology in the line just cited from the eighteenth century work on aesthetics by Moritz. Let’s further explore what he might mean by it.

To say that something is “a totality in itself” makes the mereological claim that it’s an atomic whole. We’re saying it stands independently, such that we could (metaphorically) draw a solid line around it. For some time now, cosmologists have been arguing over whether this is true of the universe. The answer depends on how much mass (including energy) it turns out to contain. As Einstein showed, gravity above a certain amount would cause space-time to bend, closing like a sphere. Within it, anyone travelling in what appeared to be a straight line would eventually find themselves traversing the beginning of their journey. Below this gravity threshold, however, and the universe would be “open,” hence of infinite size.¹⁶ More precisely, it would be “absolutely infinite”; whereas if it was self-enclosed it could be, at most, “transfinite.”¹⁷ That is, some of what

¹⁵ See, respectively, my “Parts and Wholes: Relations of Structure” and “The One and the Many: Relations of Connection” (both forthcoming).

¹⁶ See Einstein, “Cosmological Considerations in the General Theory of Relativity (1917),” trans. W. Perrett and G.B. Jefferey, in *The Collected Papers of Albert Einstein, Volume 6, The Berlin Years: Writings, 1914–1917*, trans. Alfred Engel (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987).

¹⁷ The distinction between these two kinds of infinity comes from Georg Cantor. To him, the absolutely infinite is beyond our comprehension, unlike the transfinite which, though constantly increasing in magnitude, can always be grasped as a set. See Cantor, “Foundations of a General Theory of Manifolds: A Mathematico-Philosophical Investigation into the Theory of the Infinite (1883),” trans. William Ewald, pp. 916–17 n. 1–2; and “Cantor to Hilbert (26 September 1897),” trans. Ewald, p. 927, both in Ewald, ed., *From Kant to Hilbert: A Source Book in the Foundations of Mathematics, Volume II* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996). And for a recent defence of the minority view that the universe is “closed,” see Eleonora Di Valentino, Alessandro Melchiorri, and Joseph Silk, “Planck Evidence for a Closed Universe and a Possible Crisis for Cosmology,” *Nature Astronomy* 4 (2020): 196–203.

it contains might continue forever, like our traveller going round and round, even as being contained leaves such a universe in some sense limited.

What I call the natural certainly could not be absolutely infinite, since it doesn't include the other two dimensions. So there are boundaries between it and them. The practical, in its own way, should also be situated somewhere between absolute infinity and transfinity. As a holistic whole, any line we might wish to draw around it would have to be dotted rather than solid (or blurry rather than sharp). Finally, Moritz's implication that the aesthetic is a totality in itself amounts to the claim that it is, at most, transfinite.

Saying that something is "complete in itself," by contrast, means there are no gaps in it, a condition that makes it hibiurologically unified. This may indeed be true of the aesthetic – at least we can, after all, always choose to imagine it in that way. It therefore differs from both the natural and the practical, since each of them appears to be at least to some degree fragmented. The laws of physics break down at certain singularities – whether due to the universe's infinite density just "before" the Big Bang, or because of the infinitely strong gravity at the centre of black holes.¹⁸ As for the practical, the possibility of irresolvable ethical dilemmas in our lives suggests that it is similarly disunified.¹⁹

All this helps explain why monist metaphysicians, who see reality as unified, tend to be aestheticists. That is to say, they tend to treat non-aesthetic parts of reality as if they were aesthetic. Or so I would claim.

My argument here, however, is that the aesthetic's combination of mereological atomism and hibiurological monism is a necessary condition for antisemitism. That is why Rousseau wasn't antisemitic: fundamentally, his metaphysics is neither atomist nor monist.²⁰ It is also why we need

¹⁸ See, for example, John Earman, "Tolerance for Spacetime Singularities," *Foundations of Physics* 26, no. 5 (1996): 623–40.

¹⁹ See my "[Dirty Hands: The One and the Many](#)," *The Monist* 101, no. 2 (Apr. 2018): 150–69.

²⁰ Rousseau's holism is reflected, above all, in his views on social ontology and education. See, for example, Philip Pettit, "Defining and Defending Social Holism," *Philosophical Explorations* 1, no. 3 (Sept. 1998): 169–84, pp. 169, 172; and Robert Mitchell, "Holistic Education: The Jungian Dilemma," in Christian McMillan, Roderick Main, and David Henderson, eds., *Holism: Possibilities and Problems* (New York: Routledge, 2020), pp. 85–86. As for Rousseau's acceptance of disunity, see Jonathan Marks, *Perfection and Disharmony in the Thought of Jean-Jacques Rousseau* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005). In her "A Tragic Desire: Rousseau and the Modern Democratic Project," *Telos* 154 (Spring 2011): 8–28, however, Alice Ormiston argues that Rousseau continually affirmed the viability of the monist ideal, while conceding personal defeat near the end of his life. I'm inclined to side with Marks. Incidentally, I think Ludwig Wittgenstein's holism and pluralism are likewise behind why Béla Szabados

to fight antisemitism in a new way. But the first step involves no more than underscoring the strong affinities between atomism, monism, and conspiracy theory, often expressed in aesthetic common ground.

Consider Parmenides, who was not only one of the first Western philosophers, but also remains the tradition's most extreme atomic monist. In fact, he went further than even his fellow Presocratic Heraclitus, for whom "It is wise to agree that all things are one."²¹ Because to Parmenides, there is only one thing. This is, to say the least, hard to credit, so it is more than a little ironic that Parmenides also claimed that everyone (everyone but him, that is) has succumbed to fantasy. The idea is not paranoid in the sense of persecution associated with beliefs in secret plots, but rather in its delusions of grandeur. Regardless, Parmenides' *On Nature* is a major source of the venerable philosophical distinction between appearance and reality. The poem describes two paths: The Way of Opinion (*doxa*), which leads to popular beliefs, and The Way of Truth (*aletheia*), leading to knowledge that there is only one thing. The former is responsible for the illusions of many, while only the narrator has purportedly taken the latter.²²

Even if they wouldn't go as far as Parmenides, those with a weakness for conspiracy theories also tend to be radical monists. For it turns out a key element of the conspiracist worldview is the assumption that nothing ever happens by chance, that there is no event without some cause. And this is a corollary of the idea that everything is interconnected, that there are no gaps in the whole.²³ When monist metaphysicians entertain it, they sometimes refer to "the principle of sufficient reason" – a principle assumed by the very use of theoretical reason, it's worth noting, given its aim of formulating unified explanations. In any case, we can readily understand how, if someone thinks it normally possible to see how things fit together, exhibiting a oneness, they will be at least somewhat averse to the idea that major events are the result of sheer chance, or even just

was right to conclude that he wasn't antisemitic: "Was Wittgenstein an Anti-Semite?" *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* 29, no. 1 (Mar. 1999): 1–28.

²¹ See G.S. Kirk, J.E. Raven, and M. Schofield, eds., *The Presocratic Philosophers* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983, 2nd ed.), ch. 6, no. 196.

²² See *ibid.*, ch. 8.

²³ See Michael Barkun, *A Culture of Conspiracy: Apocalyptic Visions in Contemporary America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), pp. 3–4. Incidentally, Gilles Deleuze has also noticed the link between monism and paranoia: "Two Regimes of Madness," in *Two Regimes of Madness: Texts and Interviews 1975–1995*, ed. David Lapoujade, trans. Ames Hodges and Mike Taormina (New York: Semiotext(e), 2007), p. 14.

unintended consequences.²⁴ And should they entertain conspiracy theories, such people will tend to portray the conspirators as all-powerful. Because if the earth is flat, how else to account for the fact that so many – from astronauts to frequent fliers – have been induced to cover it up? As Jonathan Kay observes, conspiracy theorists tend to compress life’s “genuine randomness into a single, identifiable point-source of malign power.”²⁵

Such fantasizing can easily lead to even more paranoia, in at least two ways. First, by encouraging suspicious questions. Who knows if there were other things you missed, before lighting upon the theory? Or what if the conspiracy described has been going on for some time? And what if, during that time, you failed to perceive how others were perceiving you? Maybe you said or did something incriminating, or at least inappropriate, only no one mentioned it? So maybe it would be better to abandon your practical perceptions and judgments, or at least be far more sceptical of them? And so on.²⁶

Second, seeing the conspirators as cunning and all-powerful often brings with it the idea that they cannot be accommodated – even a little bit. For once they have managed to attain significant influence over people or institutions, they are bound to win. This, in turn, can lead to an excessive concern with purity, one only augmented by the prior belief in unity. Then follows the exclusion of the possibility of irreconcilable ethical dilemmas, and that dirtying one’s hands might be unavoidable. This possibility is particularly disturbing for many who closely link unity as an ideal and perfection. Because perfectionists, it goes without saying, are troubled by the smallest things.²⁷

Conspiracy theorists also tend to view their communities as unified, at least ideally, and so morally pure.²⁸ This is one reason why they often identify perceived communal threats with

²⁴ On conspiracy theorists’ neglect of unintended consequences, see Karl Popper, “Towards a Rational Theory of Tradition,” pp. 167–68, and “Prediction and Prophecy in the Social Sciences,” pp. 459–60, both in *Conjectures and Refutations: The Growth of Scientific Knowledge* (London: Routledge, 2002 [1963]).

²⁵ Kay, *Among the Truthers: North America’s Growing Conspiracist Underground* (Toronto: HarperCollins, 2012), p. 72.

²⁶ Perhaps this paranoia explains why conspiracy theories may actually *undermine* the ends identified by functionalists. For example, the belief that important events are caused by malevolent forces can have a disempowering effect which thwarts the theorists’ motives, as Karen M. Douglas, Robbie M. Sutton, and Aleksandra Cichocka suggest in their “The Psychology of Conspiracy Theories,” *Current Directions in Psychological Science* 26, no. 6 (2017): 538–42, p. 540.

²⁷ See Jesse S. Summers and Walter Sinnott-Armstrong, *Clean Hands? Philosophical Lessons from Scrupulosity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019).

²⁸ The motto of the QAnon conspiracy theory, currently popular in the United States, is “Where We Go One, We Go All.”

hidden, unnatural forces. Should the theorists be establishment types, as were the leaders of the Nazi regime, they will usually blame the threats on inferiors. But many white supremacists today see themselves as marginalized victims instead: they've obviously come to accept that, at least for the time being, they're anything but supreme (though their purity remains a central anxiety).²⁹ Commentators often suggest that, in such cases, conspiracy theories serve as balms to wounded pride, allowing rationalization of failures by pointing to powerful, hidden enemies.³⁰ Or the theorists tell themselves such stories in order to feel more secure, given conditions of uncertainty.³¹ Or they serve as a recruiting tool, getting others to support their agendas.³² And so on.

While conceding that there is some truth to all such functionalist explanations, I nevertheless still think the key motivation is something essentially different: the theorists simply want to have a good time. And that is what makes them so dangerous, because if conspiracy theories are fun, then we might expect proponents to target their enemies as killjoys. "What's a Jew with a gasmask?" begins the antisemitic joke. "A spoilsport." Spoilsports ruin others' fun by undermining their games or other enjoyable activities. So they must be excluded from them, an often futile task:

Slam the window, bolt the door,
 Yet he'll enter in and stay;
 In to-morrow's book he'll score
 Indiscretions of to-day.³³

²⁹ See Frank Furedi, "[Whiteness: A Nonsense Category](#)," *Spiked*, 14 August 2017. On how the idea of white superiority collapsed by the end of World War II, see Furedi, *The Silent War: Imperialism and the Changing Perception of Race* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1998), ch. 6.

³⁰ See Jacob Bronshter, "[Why Trump Supporters Are So Susceptible to Conspiracy Theories](#)," *The New Republic*, 21 October 2016.

³¹ See Jan-Willem van Prooijen and Nils B. Jostmann, "Belief in Conspiracy Theories: The Influence of Uncertainty and Perceived Morality," *European Journal of Social Psychology* 43, no. 1 (2013): 109–15. José Ortega y Gasset suggested as much some time ago: "For the truth is that life on the face of it is a chaos in which one finds oneself lost. The individual suspects as much, but is terrified to encounter this frightening reality face to face, and so attempts to conceal it by drawing a curtain of fantasy over it, behind which he can make believe everything is clear." *The Revolt of the Masses*, ed. Kenneth Moore, trans. Anthony Kerrigan (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1985 [1930]), pp. 142–43.

³² See Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor, "The White Power Presidency: Race and Class in the Trump Era," *New Political Science* 40, no. 1 (2018): 103–12, p. 107.

³³ Robert Graves, "The Spoilsport (1917)," in *War Poems*, ed. Charles Mundy (Bridgend: Seren, 2016), p. 110.

Not that Robert Graves means here to portray the spoilsport as a kind of player. As Johan Huizinga has pointed out, spoilsports are anti-play:

The spoil-sport is not the same as the false player, the cheat; for the latter pretends to be playing the game and, on the face of it, still acknowledges the magic circle. It is curious to note how much more lenient society is to the cheat than to the spoil-sport. This is because the spoil-sport shatters the play-world itself. By withdrawing from the game he reveals the relativity and fragility of the play-world in which he had temporarily shut himself with others. He robs play of its *illusion* – a pregnant word which means literally “in-play” (from *inlusio*, *illudere* or *inludere*). Therefore he must be cast out, for he threatens the existence of the play-community.³⁴

Some have suggested that Jews became pariahs because of either ancient religious or modern socio-political reasons.³⁵ But I think it has more to do with the sense that they (for some reason) don't like having a good time. “What, are there masques?” demands Shylock. Then

Lock up my doors; and when you hear the drum
And the vile squealing of the wry-neck'd fife,
Clamber not you up to the casements then,
Nor thrust your head into the public street
To gaze on Christian fools with varnish'd faces,
But stop my house's ears, I mean my casements:
Let not the sound of shallow foppery enter
My sober house. (*Merchant of Venice* II.v.876–84)

³⁴ Huizinga, *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play-Element in Culture* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1949), p. 11.

³⁵ Max Weber does the former and Arendt the latter. See Weber, *Ancient Judaism*, eds. and trans. Hans H. Gerth and Don Martindale (New York: Macmillan, 1952), pp. 3–5, 336–55; Weber, *The Sociology of Religion*, trans. Ephraim Fischhoff (Boston: Beacon Press, 1993), pp. 108–11; Arendt, “The Jew as Pariah: A Hidden Tradition (1944),” in *The Jewish Writings*, eds. Jerome Kohn and Ron H. Feldman (New York: Schocken Books, 2007); and Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (New York: Harcourt Brace & Co., 1979, new ed.), pp. 62–83. Note that, for Arendt, it was strictly between ancient and modern times that Jews can be said to have lived their political lives in what I would call the aesthetic, “the realm of imagination alone.” Arendt, “The Jewish State: Fifty Years After, Where Have Herzl's Politics Led?” in *The Jewish Writings*, p. 377.

All of which suggests that there's a very deep reason for assigning Jews the role of spoilsport. Because if the aesthetic is at its most enjoyable when unified, those who would undermine it must personify disunity.³⁶

That we do. It all began with religious Judaism's belief in God as the ultimate unity. "Hear O Israel," announced Moses upon descending the mountain, "the Lord is our God, the Lord is One" (Deut. 6:4). And if the One transcends the world, the latter cannot be unified. Or as the inference runs in the opposite direction, "the creator must be of an intrinsically different nature than its creation. And as the world contains plurality, the creator must be a perfect unity."³⁷

Mere hibuological unity, however, isn't enough to induce monotheists to capitalize the first letter of "One." For there are many such unities, even within the dimensions that may be – unlike the aesthetic – not potentially unified overall. So if there is to be transcendence, unity must be combined with some form of infinity. Not absolute infinity, though, since that may be what the universe is, and only pantheists such as Spinoza (allegedly) would equate it with God. But transfinitude isn't tenable either. This is because although God must have at least one boundary, that between Him and Creation, Kabbalah teaches that He is also *Ein Sof* ("The Infinite," literally that which is "without end").³⁸ Expressed temporally, and we get "I will be what I will be" (Exod. 3:14), which was God's reply when Moses asked what he should say if the Israelites inquire about His name. Regardless, God's infinity violates transfinitude's enclosedness, for He simply cannot be so limited. All of which points to one way of understanding Judaism's proscription of idolatry: the worship of an embodied and so finite, immanent being – whether natural, practical, or aesthetic – as if it combines the qualities of both unity and infinity, and so deserves to be treated as divine.³⁹

³⁶ In a sense, then, George Steiner's hypothesis that the driving force behind Jew-hatred derives from the Jewish origination of "the ideal" is the opposite of my own. See Steiner, *In Bluebeard's Castle: Some Notes towards the Redefinition of Culture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1971), ch. 2.

³⁷ Sarah Stroumsa, "Saadya and the Jewish *Kalam*," in Daniel H. Frank and Oliver Leaman, eds., *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval Jewish Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p. 73.

³⁸ See, for example, Sandra Valabregue-Perry, "The Concept of Infinity (*Eyn-sof*) and the Rise of Theosophical Kabbalah," *Jewish Quarterly Review* 102, no. 3 (Summer 2012): 405–30.

³⁹ Emil Fackenheim's account of idolatry as "the *literal* identification of finiteness and infinitude" is thus inadequate, since it captures only one of these two conditions. Fackenheim, "Idolatry as A Modern Possibility," in *Encounters Between Judaism and Modern Philosophy: A Preface to Future Jewish Thought* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), p. 189; see also p. 186. The commandment forbidding polytheistic worship of graven images (Exodus 20:4) can also be understood in terms of the two qualities, since revering a physical image as if it was one of many gods means treating a pluralistic finitude as an infinite unity.

Rabbinic Judaism took up this theme of the immanent's disunity. Variations range from the paradoxes of the Talmud to contemporary philosophies of difference, as advanced by thinkers including Arendt, Judith Butler, and Emmanuel Levinas. Kabbalah did so with Isaac Luria's cosmogony of the "Breaking of the Vessels" (*Shevirath Ha-Kelim*). It even appears in the obscure tradition I follow, which I call dialogical, Levitical Judaism: traceable from the ancient Mushite priesthood through to Martin Buber's philosophy, it assumes disunity as a necessary condition for dialogue. Only the Biblical Judaism that came to be dominated by the Aaronide priesthood, descendants of Aaron rather than associates of Moses, can possibly be considered monistic. That, at least, is what's behind the Pharisees' accusation that the Sadducees were too close to the ancient Greeks.⁴⁰

It's a different story with secular Judaism, of course. Just think how many leading secular Jewish intellectuals have been monists, not least Marx, Freud, and Einstein. Then again, more recent such thinkers have been otherwise, from Isaiah Berlin and Jacques Derrida to Judith N. Shklar and Michael Walzer. Secular Yiddishkeit is another case in point. Consider its figure of the schlemiel, a bungler who is always either breaking things or stumbling on already-broken ones in ways that make the situation worse. Larry David, creator of the television comedy *Curb Your Enthusiasm*, is an excellent example. Much of his show's humour revolves around conflicts over minutiae of daily social life, in which a fictionalized "Larry" takes one side and some unfortunate friend, acquaintance, or passerby the other. By highlighting these small and seemingly irreconcilable gaps in the everyday, *Curb* shows the world to be broken.⁴¹

IV. Heidegger's Metaphysical Antisemitism

In associating antisemitism with a whole dimension of being, I evidently think it's best understood metaphysically. In fact, I would say that one of my account's distinctive advantages is how it helps make sense of the most notorious explicitly metaphysics-derived antisemitism: that of Heidegger.

⁴⁰ On the Breaking of the Vessels, see Gershom Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism* (New York: Schocken Books, 1974), pp. 265–68; on Levitical Judaism, see Mark Leuchter, *The Levites and the Boundaries of Israelite Identity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018) and Martin Buber, "With a Monist," in *Pointing the Way: Collected Essays*, ed. and trans. Maurice S. Friedman (New York: Harper & Row, 1963); and on the Sadducees as overly Greek, see Levinas, "The Temptation of Temptation," in *Nine Talmudic Readings*, trans. Annette Aronowicz (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), p. 46.

⁴¹ For more on Larry David, see Ruth R. Wisse, *No Joke: Making Jewish Humor* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013), pp. 236–39; and on the schlemiel in general, see Menachem Feuer, *Jewish Philosophy and the Schlemiel* (forthcoming).

So this next section is devoted to demonstrating the connection between his antisemitism and his ontology. Unlike how others have attempted to do this, I argue that fundamental aspects of Heidegger's thought are both atomist and monist, given its portrayal of Being as a self-enclosed, unified whole. And as we'll see, this view correspondingly casts Jews as a threat.

The evidence of Heidegger's personal Nazi commitments is incontrovertible. He was a member of the party, and issued a decree applying Nazi "cleansing" legislation to the University of Freiburg while he served as its Rector. He also never satisfactorily condemned the Holocaust – which is no surprise, given comments he made to his students during a 1933–34 course. When it comes to struggle with the enemy, he told them, it is important "to cultivate and intensify a constant readiness and to prepare the attack looking far ahead with the goal of total annihilation."⁴² Of course, Heidegger also subscribed to an antisemitic conspiracy theory: "World-Judaism," he wrote in his *Black Notebooks* in 1941, "incited by the emigrants allowed out of Germany, cannot be held fast anywhere and, with all its developed power, does not need to participate anywhere in the activities of war, whereas all that remains to us is the sacrifice of the best blood of the best of our own people."⁴³

Given my argument above, we should expect that, for Heidegger, the personal would also be philosophical. So though he would certainly never have accepted the label "aestheticist," his ontology consistently upholds the aesthetic's combination of mereological atomism and hiburological monism. Let's take a look at some examples.

Often, the ontology is said to begin with Heidegger's famous pronouncement that we have lost our sublime wonder at the fact anything exists.⁴⁴ He blames this on our forgetfulness of Being – of how every manifestation of its truth necessarily emerges out of a prereflective background from which it is never cut off. This is why no account of Being can ever be total, in the sense of

⁴² Heidegger, *Being and Truth*, trans. Gregory Fried and Richard Polt (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010), p. 73.

⁴³ Heidegger, *Ponderings XV*, in *Ponderings XII–XV: Black Notebooks 1939–1941*, trans. Richard Rojcewicz (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2017), p. 208. Karl Jaspers reported that once, when he dismissed the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, Heidegger replied that "there truly is a dangerous international alliance of Jews." Cited in Peter Trawny, *Heidegger and the Myth of a Jewish World Conspiracy*, trans. Andrew J. Mitchell (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015), p. 27.

⁴⁴ See Heidegger, "What is Metaphysics? (1929)," trans. David Farrell Krell, in *Basic Writings*, ed. Krell (New York: HarperCollins, 2008, new ed.), p. 109; and *An Introduction to Metaphysics* (1953), trans. Gregory Fried and Richard Polt (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014, 2nd ed.), pp. 1–56, 125–26.

fully articulated or transparent. It's also why every time one part of it is revealed, another is concealed.

The implication is that its parts are related holistically. When considered as a whole, however, Being is atomic. Heidegger says as much when he tells us that it provides the "horizon" (a circular boundary) against which every individual being-in-the-world, or Dasein, must strive for authenticity. The horizon offers many possible ways of life and, to be authentic, we must choose one of them in a moment of vision (*Augenblick*).⁴⁵ This idea also lends itself to being understood hibiurologically, since the authentic individual can be seen as imposing unity on a situation composed of plural possibilities.

Authenticity also thus requires facing the guilt accompanying such imposition, which necessarily excludes whatever the declined choices would have brought about.⁴⁶ As Heidegger puts it, "resoluteness is freedom to *give up* some definite resolution."⁴⁷ So those who inauthentically deny the guilt by pretending they can make up for their choices later are merely tranquilizing themselves. Not so the Dasein who accepts that he or she is finite, a being-towards-death. This does not refer to death per se – that is, to Dasein's being-at-an-end – so much as to the fact that one is *dying*. Still, it does mean one will not be around forever and so that, eventually, it will no longer be possible to make up for whatever one's chosen path discarded. For this reason, we must accept "the possibility of the impossibility of every way of comporting oneself towards anything, of every way of existing."⁴⁸

Doesn't being-towards-death undermine unity? Not at all, since living and dying can be considered two sides of the same coin. In which case Dasein, as a finite being, exemplifies Heraclitus' notion of the unity of opposites.⁴⁹ Moreover, any synchronic decisions occur against a

⁴⁵ See Heidegger, *Being and Time* (1927), trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1962), esp. pp. 387–88, 396.

⁴⁶ See *ibid.*, pp. 330–35.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 443.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 307. Heidegger also tells us that, at its death, Dasein's "specific possibilities" are what "get taken away from" it. This is why "for the most part, Dasein ends in unfulfillment." *Ibid.*, p. 288. For helpful commentary, see Denis McManus, "On Being as a Whole and Being-a-Whole," in Lee Braver, ed., *Division III of Heidegger's Being and Time: The Unanswered Question of Being* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2015).

⁴⁹ On the unity of opposites, see Kirk, Raven, and Schofield, *The Presocratic Philosophers*, ch. 6, nos. 199–209. For comments by Heidegger on Heraclitus' monism, see Heidegger, "The Anaximander Fragment," p. 33, "Logos (Heraclitus, Fragment B 50)," pp. 70–75, and "Aletheia (Heraclitus, Fragment B 16)," p. 114, all in *Early Greek Thinking: The Dawn of Western Philosophy* (1943–54), trans. David Farrell Krell and Frank A. Capuzzi (New York:

diachronic background. So Being as a whole should be viewed as unfolding in an “ecstatic” temporality, with the past flowing into the present and the present into a future that unsettles the past. (The present self is thus always “outside” of itself.) This too provides unity, in that it connects two levels of understanding. One is the “existentiell,” in which ontic individuals understand by choosing to live authentically. Then in the “existential,” philosophers such as Heidegger understand by, for example, articulating an analytic of Dasein. Because an “*understanding of Being is itself a definite characteristic of Dasein’s Being*,” and “no matter how fragmented our everyday existence may appear to be . . . it always deals with beings in a unity of the ‘whole’.”⁵⁰

By “whole,” Heidegger evidently intends not only a hibiurological claim but a mereological one. The word can mean unbroken, so implies unity, but it also entails a holism that is bounded, hence atomic. And both claims are still present in his later work, following the famous turn (*die Kehre*) in his thinking.

Scholars almost all describe this switch as a shift in emphasis from investigating human being to investigating Being as such, with the former seen as mere preparation for the latter. Some explain the turn as arising from Heidegger’s recognition he needed to avoid relativism, one possible interpretation of Dasein’s implication that there is plurality of authentic individual ways of life. Others instead invoke his realization that the analytic is true strictly of a particular historical “event” within the horizon of Being. But both accounts, it’s worth noting, present this turn as serving Heidegger’s need to maintain the unity of his thought.⁵¹ Likewise, Being itself clearly remains a unified whole in the later work’s account of “the gathering of the fourfold” (earth, sky, mortals, and divinities). As Heidegger tells us, “by a *primal* oneness the four . . . belong together in one,” and the presence of a single meaningful thing – say, a jug – can serve as a focal point of convergence or “onefold.”⁵²

Harper & Row, 1975); and Heidegger and Eugen Fink, *Heraclitus Seminar 1966/67*, trans. Charles H. Siebert (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1979), pp. 21, 23, 115.

⁵⁰ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 32; and “What Is Metaphysics?” p. 99.

⁵¹ See, for the first explanation, Frederick A. Olafson, “The Unity of Heidegger’s Thought,” in Charles B. Guignon, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Heidegger* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993); and for the second, Laurence Hemming, “Speaking out of Turn: Martin Heidegger and *die Kehre*,” *International Journal of Philosophical Studies* 6, no. 3 (1998): 393–423.

⁵² Heidegger, “Building Dwelling Thinking,” pp. 151, 147, and “The Thing,” p. 177, both in in *Poetry, Language, Thought*, trans. Albert Hofstadter (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1971). Derrida, for one, has questioned the presumption of monism in Heidegger’s notion of “gathering.” See Derrida, “Envoi (1980),” trans. Peter and Mary Ann Caws, in *Psyche: Inventions of the Other, Volume I*, eds. Peggy Kamuf and Elizabeth Rottenberg (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007), pp. 120–22; and “Heidegger’s Hand (*Geschlecht II*) (1985),” trans. John P. Leavey

As for atomic boundedness, it also remains evident in aspects of Heidegger's later work, such as the limits to his conception of social transformation. He never sees this as a matter of creating radically new practices; on the contrary, Heidegger understands maximal change as coming from no more than success at reconfiguring certain already-present but marginal practices. Specifically, he focuses on meaningful alternatives to the nihilistic, technological understanding of Being he sees as central to modernity. This is why Heidegger calls for "the development of new, historically *spiritual* forces" – where "historical" goes with the idea that any such development involves no more than uncovering "the hidden fullness and wealth of what has been."⁵³

So Heidegger's conception of originality never goes beyond the re-interpretation of already-existing meaning. This means that there's no room for change driven by inspiration from an external source, which would by definition be newly introduced.⁵⁴ To Heidegger, novel ways of life are ultimately manifestations of nothing other than an "earth" that is never fully disclosable, because it is "essentially self-secluding."⁵⁵ Likewise, truth remains strictly a matter of unconcealment (*aletheia*), the negation of forgetfulness. In that sense, his view never breaks out of what Charles Taylor would call a "closed world structure."⁵⁶

The forgetfulness of Being began, Heidegger claims, with Socrates and Plato's inauguration of theoretical philosophy, or "metaphysics." Then Aristotle attempted to capture the unity of meaningful presence in the form of self-identical substance.⁵⁷ Heidegger sees in all such

Jr. and Elizabeth Rottenberg, in *Psyche: Inventions of the Other, Volume II*, eds. Peggy Kamuf and Elizabeth Rottenberg (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008), pp. 52, 54, 60, 62.

⁵³ Heidegger, *An Introduction to Metaphysics*, p. 43; and "The Thing," p. 184. It is true that, along with "the divine in the world of the Greeks" and "the preaching of Jesus," Heidegger cites "prophetic Judaism" as being among the marginal practices he would have us retrieve. Evidently, he means to displace Rabbinic Judaism, which has been the dominant form of the religion since the destruction of the Second Temple in 70 CE.

⁵⁴ Heidegger himself claims that, rather than infinite divine knowledge, human beings cannot get beyond "thinking as such," which is "the mark of finitude." And because "finite knowledge is intuition that takes things in stride," it is "delivered over to the being which already is." For that reason, "finite knowledge is noncreative intuition." *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics*, trans. Richard Taft (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997, 5th ed.), pp. 17, 21, 18.

⁵⁵ Heidegger, "The Origin of the Work of Art," in *Poetry, Language, Thought*, p. 47. As J.M. Bernstein has described, for Heidegger the earth stands as "a non-historical principle of transcendental opacity, a principle of reserve." Bernstein, *The Fate of Art: Aesthetic Alienation from Kant to Derrida and Adorno* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1992), p. 119.

⁵⁶ See Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007), pp. 551–92.

⁵⁷ See, for example, Heidegger, *Contributions to Philosophy (Of the Event)*, trans. Richard Rojcewicz and Daniela Vallega-Neu (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2012), pp. 221, 295, 297, 369.

philosophies a totalizing drive for transparency and control, culminating in the “homelessness” – a contrast to Hölderlinian “rootedness” – entailed by modernity’s technological understanding of Being. This is why he calls for a return to Heraclitus, that we set aside our obsession with efficiently managing things and learn instead how to “station ourselves in the storm of Being.”⁵⁸

When it comes to achieving this, however, Jews are supposedly a crucial obstacle. The assumptions underlying this accusation can be understood in Heideggerian terms. Heidegger takes Plato to have been wrong about theory, which carries on in the spirit of Parmenidean monism, but right about pluralism, its temptations represented in his allegory of the cave by the deceptively varied shadows on its wall. And Judaism is pluralism. Jews are “those addicted to mere beings and those alienated from being”; we are “the a-historical” because we exist “in the most varied and opposed forms.”⁵⁹

Thus do we inauthentically turn away from the mystery of Being and towards “what is readily available, onward from one current thing to the next.”⁶⁰ And thus have our “machinations” contributed to the rise and domination of technology. Unlike a Parmenidean monism, though, we stand for a destructive pluralism, a “criminality [that] is not mere breakage [*Zerbrechen*]; instead, it is the devastation of everything into what is broken. The broken is broken off from the beginning and assigned the domain of brittleness.”⁶¹ Otherwise put: “Jewry is the principle of destruction.”⁶²

To Heidegger, this destructive pluralism also has (anti-)mereological implications. As pluralists, Jews shatter existence’s wholeness, and so its horizon. This leaves us unbounded: “The question of the role of world-Judaism is not a racial question, but a metaphysical one about a kind of humanity [*Menschentümlichkeit*], that of the absolutely unbound [*schlechthin ungebunden*], which can undertake as a world-historical ‘task’ the uprooting of all beings from being.”⁶³ It’s hard

⁵⁸ Heidegger, “Logos (Heraclitus, Fragment B 50),” p. 78.

⁵⁹ Heidegger, *Ponderings VIII* (1938–39), in *Ponderings VII–XI: Black Notebooks 1938–1939*, trans. Richard Rojcewicz (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2017), no. 4, p. 75. In his *Nietzsche, Volume III: The Will to Power as Knowledge*, ed. David Ferrell Krell, trans. Joan Stambaugh, Krell, and Frank A. Cappuzzi (New York: Harper & Row, 1987), p. 164, Heidegger claims that to posit “the exclusive preeminence of beings over Being” reflects a will to power.

⁶⁰ Heidegger, “On the Essence of Truth (1930),” trans. John Sallis, in *Pathmarks*, ed. William McNeill (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 150.

⁶¹ Heidegger, *Ponderings XV*, p. 211.

⁶² Heidegger, in his *Black Notebooks* sometime between 1942–48, quoted in Trawny, p. 73.

⁶³ Heidegger, *Ponderings XIV* (1941), in *Ponderings XII–XV: Black Notebooks 1939–1941*, p. 191 (translation emended).

not to stop and savour this bitter claim, which brings to mind a corrupt jailer complaining about the freedom of those he would imprison. But we must continue. Heidegger sees monism, whether Parmenidean or Heraclitean, as constitutive of a self-enclosed whole. So pluralism must be its diametric opposite – which is to say, no whole at all. And indeed, he claims that the Jews of the Diaspora, those “Semitic nomads,”⁶⁴ are pure fragments.

Moreover, this unboundedness means that we must also deny – Heidegger would say something like “flee inauthentically from”⁶⁵ – finitude, being-towards-death. So he would surely see the Jewish affirmation of life as supporting a one-sided subversion of the unity of opposites. (Perhaps due to ignorance of Judaism, however, he never makes the accusation explicitly.) For it is indeed true that Jews regularly toast “to life” (*l’chaim*), with חַיִּים (*chai*, life) being a prominent symbol in modern Jewish culture; likewise, rabbis have long affirmed *pikuach nefesh*, the precept that facing a life-threatening situation nullifies almost every religious obligation. However, I imagine Heidegger would have found most offensive this claim by Rabbi Barukh of Mezbizh (1753–1811): “If there were no forgetting, man would incessantly think of his death. He would build no house, he would launch on no enterprise.”⁶⁶

All this helps set the scene for Heidegger’s famous Davos debate with Ernst Cassirer, whom he once reportedly called “the Jew.”⁶⁷ Heidegger admittedly didn’t put his critique here explicitly in terms of Jewishness. David Nirenberg is right to remark, though, that Heidegger saw Cassirer as “peddling the fantasy that through reason humanity could achieve freedom from finitude.”⁶⁸ And this is why Nirenberg suspects that the audience

could hear a resonance between Heidegger’s claim that Cassirer’s philosophy “blocks the path” to a deeper understanding of our humanness, that it “unties us from ourselves . . . [so that] our flight and disorientation, the illusion and lostness, become more

⁶⁴ Heidegger, “On the Essence and Concept of Nature, History, and State,” trans. Gregory Fried and Richard Polt, in Fried and Polt, eds., *Nature, History, State: 1933–1934* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), p. 56.

⁶⁵ See Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 296.

⁶⁶ From Martin Buber, *Tales of the Hasidim: The Early Masters*, trans. Olga Marx (New York: Schocken Books, 1947), p. 96.

⁶⁷ See Peter E. Gordon, *Continental Divide: Heidegger, Cassirer, Davos* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010), pp. 324, 340.

⁶⁸ Nirenberg, *Anti-Judaism: The Western Tradition* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2013), p. 453; see also Gordon, pp. 170–72.

acute,” and the more explicitly anti-Jewish critiques of modernity that were everywhere swirling in the political discourse of the day.⁶⁹

No wonder Cassirer’s wife worried that Heidegger meant to drag her husband’s work “into the dust and, if possible, to destroy Ernst.”⁷⁰

Like Plato and Aristotle, Heidegger believed that philosophy was born from the primal experience of wonder. Yet he saw wonder as increasingly eclipsed by mere curiosity: an attitude related to modern science’s endless quest for new results, which he considered a form of inauthentic “falling.”⁷¹ It is true that, ever since Joseph Addison’s essays in the early eighteenth century, novelty has been recognized as an aesthetic category.⁷² But applied science, at least, is certainly not carried out for its own sake, making it practical rather than aesthetic. In any case, isn’t philosophical wonder, along with the contemplation it inspires, supposed to be engaged in for its own sake? That means it, too, is aesthetic. Which brings to mind the ancient philosopher Thales, depicted in legend as gazing up in wonder at the stars when he fell down a well. Perhaps Heidegger would also have done better to practice a less wondrous, more serious, form of philosophy.

IV. Antisemitic Aesthetics?

So how does the metaphysically grounded account of antisemitism we’ve developed so far compare to others? We’re now equipped to answer this question, through this section’s brief review of certain works – the few, again, that invoke aesthetics – from the vast literature on antisemitism.

Let’s begin with Sartre’s *Anti-Semite and Jew* (1946). He can be found here complaining about how “it is fun to be an anti-Semite,” and how antisemites can be spotted “amusing themselves” in

⁶⁹ Nirenberg, *Anti-Judaism*, pp. 453–54.

⁷⁰ Cited in Gordon, p. 264.

⁷¹ See Heidegger, *Basic Questions in Philosophy: Selected “Problems” of “Logic”*, trans. Richard Rojcewicz and André Schuwer (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), § 36–38; “The Age of the World Picture (1938),” in *Off the Beaten Track*, trans. Julian Young and Kenneth Haynes (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp. 59–66; and *Being and Time*, pp. 214–17, 396–400.

⁷² See Robin Dix, “Addison and the Concept of ‘Novelty’ as a Basic Aesthetic Category,” *British Journal of Aesthetics* 26, no. 4 (Autumn 1986): 383–90.

discussions, since they “like to play with discourse.”⁷³ Undermining functionalist explanations immediately follow, however: Sartre says the fun arises from antisemites’ sadistic ability to “beat and torture Jews without fear,” and that they intend the frivolous discourse to discredit, intimidate, and disconcert their interlocutors. References to many other instrumental ends are scattered throughout the book. He says antisemitism serves antisemites as a means of joining a certain tradition and community (p. 15); establishing their status (pp. 17, 26–27); fleeing responsibility (p. 19); explaining events (pp. 26, 107); purifying society (p. 30); favouring laziness (pp. 8, 31); providing self-reassurance (p. 31); and reflecting sexual attraction (p. 33).

As if this “kitchen sink instrumentalism,” as we might call it, weren’t enough, Sartre also goes on at length about “the Jew” this and “the Jew” that (see esp. p. 90), so much so that Jews become less people than reflections of a type – one formed, Sartre argues, dialectically with the antisemite. This makes way for reading his own book as a conspiracy theory, albeit an inversion of the antisemite’s. Rather than having genuine and distinct cultures of our own, that is, he effectively sees Jews as a merely apparent people who have been partly conjured up by antisemites (pp. 26, 103). So Judaism itself becomes a conspiracy, with antisemites playing the role of co-conspirators instead of theorists. Depressingly, the book then ends by arguing that authentic Jews, said to reflect a social pluralism (pp. 98–100, 108), should be accepted as such to facilitate their “assimilation” (p. 106) into a social monism. However, this would eliminate not only antisemitism, but also Judaism (p. 108). With friends like these.

Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno’s essay on antisemitism in *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (1947) marked the former’s move away from the notion that antisemitism is grounded in the practical reality of Jews’ association with money.⁷⁴ But while the essay refers to fantasy, as well as to the aesthetic qualities of purposelessness and unity, it also emphasizes antisemites’ need to meet psychological, political, and (above all) economic practical ends.

Moreover, Horkheimer and Adorno’s argument concludes by identifying the motivation for “false projections” in anthropological terms. To the authors, it is the attraction to – and terror of – the enchanted world of myth that has driven antisemites’ fantasies about Jews. For it was the Jews

⁷³ Sartre, *Anti-Semite and Jew*, trans. George J. Becker (New York: Schocken Books, 1995, rev. ed.), pp. 33, 13. Subsequent page references refer to this edition of Sartre’s book.

⁷⁴ On Horkheimer’s repudiation of that association, see Dan Diner, “The Limits of Reason: Max Horkheimer on Anti-Semitism and Extermination,” in *Beyond the Conceivable: Studies on Germany, Nazism, and the Holocaust*, ed. Joel Golb, trans. Golb and William Templer (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000).

who first stepped decisively away from enchantment and towards enlightenment when they prohibited idolatry; by extension, they also encouraged wariness towards embodied expressions of meaning. So this is how substantial symbols, such as those of spirits and demons, are overcome: instead of mythological mimesis and its attendant fears, Judaism is said to favour the representational mimesis associated with abstract law and the formal symbols of mathematics, which can then be used to control nature.

The Jews failed to go all the way, however, as can be seen from their ban on the use of God's name. Horkheimer and Adorno say nothing about the reasons behind it, but we can readily grasp at least one of them: proper names are for addressing people – calling them – and this presumes a degree of egalitarianism that no creature should ever arrogate before its Creator (or creator – there's a reason we don't call our parents by their names). Yet if the Jews still recognize the power of proper names, which link form and content, or "name and essence," then they must not have completely converted to the generic names that denote formal symbols. Judaism should thus be seen as representing a repressed form of myth, one that makes it an obstacle to history's redemptive culmination via the conquest of nature and, because of this, a force for disunity.⁷⁵

However, the idea of infinity is mereological, not hiburological. Judaism itself attests to this. While its days of the Messiah are said to realise unification, they're not located at the very end of history.⁷⁶ Or think of the many monists, not least Kantians, for whom progress aims for a point at infinity that we can approach but never reach. So there's reason to question Horkheimer and Adorno's claim that a Judaism which stands in the way of final redemption implies disunity.

Regardless, both see all of the above as originating in the human need to civilize as a means of overcoming dread towards an enchanted nature. And since they identify this need as primal, because grounded in humans' "biological prehistory," their account of antisemitism is ultimately natural rather than aesthetic.⁷⁷

⁷⁵ See Horkheimer and Adorno, "The Concept of Enlightenment," in *Dialectic of Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments*, ed. Gunzelin Schmid Noerr, trans. Edmund Jephcott (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002), esp. pp. 17–18.

⁷⁶ See, for example, *The Code of Maimonides: Book Fourteen, The Book of Judges*, trans. Abraham M. Hershman (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1949 [1180]), treatise 5, chs. 11–12.

⁷⁷ Horkheimer and Adorno, "Elements of Anti-Semitism: Limits of Enlightenment," in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, p. 148; see also p. 161. Accordingly, Anson Rabinbach has described this conception of antisemitism as emerging "at the very threshold of human evolution." Rabinbach, "Why Were the Jews Sacrificed? The Place of Anti-Semitism in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*," *New German Critique*, no. 81 (Autumn 2000): 49–64, p. 61.

A.B. Yehoshua's "An Attempt to Identify the Root Cause of Antisemitism" (2008) returns us, and in a fascinating way, to an emphasis on the psychological. But unlike Sartre, Yehoshua emphasizes a single factor: individual mental illness, arising from mythological fear. His account starts with ancient Judaism's unique combination of religion and nation, which made way for the latter to be subsumed under an imagined version of the former. According to Yehoshua, Jews exiled from Israel and dispersed throughout the Diaspora transferred their territory, language, and national framework into the imagination. And they've since preserved them there:

The actual territory of the Land of Israel has been kept as the symbol or metaphor of a Holy Land in prayer or religious texts; Hebrew became a holy language restricted to prayer; the sovereign institutions, the royalty, and the army became symbols and metaphors which the Jews could shape with various spiritual interpretations to suit their wishes and needs, but not by action in the physical world.⁷⁸

Yehoshua then invokes the Zionist pioneer Leon Pinsker's claim that this imaginative turn left Jews like ghosts, their national "life" conducted among real peoples with real homelands.⁷⁹ For regardless where they resided, Jews laid claim to a foreign homeland situated in the imagination. Moreover, these "ghosts" were otherwise exceptionally varied. Antisemites throughout the ages have therefore seen Jews as the quintessential Other – hence as unassimilable, foreign infiltrators. Their identity's basis in imagination has also meant that Jews are particularly open to change. And for outsiders with a weak or disturbed sense of identity, this invites the projection of murderous fantasies.

While Yehoshua is surely on to something important here, there are also numerous problems with his account. For one thing, like all religions, Judaism is most authentic when it takes a spiritual form, not merely an aesthetic one. It's not for nothing that the Mishna's Rabbi Ya'akov declares: "One who, while walking along reviewing his studies, breaks off from them and says 'How beautiful is this tree! How beautiful is that plowed field!'", the Torah regards him as if he has

⁷⁸ Yehoshua, "An Attempt to Identify the Root Cause of Antisemitism," trans. Riva Rubin, *Azure*, no. 32 (Spring 2008): 48–79.

⁷⁹ See Pinsker, "Auto-Emancipation: An Appeal to His People by a Russian Jew," in Arthur Hertzberg, ed. and trans., *The Zionist Idea: A Historical Analysis and Reader* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1997), pp. 184–85. But as ghosts don't have bodies, I wonder if zombies would have served Pinsker better as an undead comparison.

forfeited his soul” (*Ethics of the Fathers* 3:7). Religious Jews of all kinds do not aim to establish a separate, virtual world that is superior to the “real” practical or natural one. Instead, they hope to make the whole world holy, and thereby redeem it.

In any case, even a thoroughly aesthetic “Judaism” shouldn’t be understood in terms of formal symbols, fillable like variables in any old way. As we’ve seen, it consists instead of substantial symbols whose formal structures are to some degree fused with their contents, thereby restricting the latter. Perhaps the most serious problem with Yehoshua’s account, however, is its facile conclusion that antisemites are simply crazy. For despite his claim otherwise, this explanation effectively absolves them of responsibility for their actions. Moreover, even Yehoshua admits that there is something “peculiar and contradictory” about his argument from insecurity, since “throughout history [Jews] have been essentially most vulnerable and weak.” Nonetheless, he thinks labelling the antisemite’s fear “insane and absurd” can preserve his explanation. But surely this begs the question.

I’d like to turn now to Nirenberg’s remarkable study, *Anti-Judaism: The Western Tradition* (2013). While its title lacks the scare quotes, the book is clearly an account of evolving critical conceptions of “Judaism” (the substantial symbol) rather than Judaism (the lived reality).⁸⁰ Where researchers such as Robert S. Wistrich explore practical history through “the various mutations of the abstract and protean Jewish *symbol* where it connects with contemporary social or political crises,”⁸¹ Nirenberg mainly focuses on what I would identify as the symbol’s aesthetic history alone.

He certainly seems to begin by describing how ideas of Judaism became unmoored from natural and practical realities. When ancient Egyptians criticized Jews for being anomalous, however inaccurately, their arguments at least drew on firsthand experience. This began to change with the Evangelists and early Church Fathers, who had significantly less contact with actually existing Jews. But that didn’t stop them, or those following them, from repeating negative stereotypes that became embedded within “the Jew” as substantial symbol. Nirenberg then shows

⁸⁰ Compare the title of Jean-François Lyotard’s *Heidegger and “the jews”*, trans. Andreas Michel and Mark S. Roberts (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1990), about which he says on p. 3: “I use quotation marks to avoid confusing these ‘jews’ with real Jews.” By contrast, in their “Heidegger, ‘les Juifs’ et nous,” *La Règle du Jeu*, nos. 58/59 (Sept. 2015): 7–16, Joseph Cohen and Raphael Zagury-Orly alternate between referring to Jews and Judaism with and without quotation marks.

⁸¹ Wistrich, *A Lethal Obsession: Anti-Semitism from Antiquity to the Global Jihad* (New York: Random House, 2010), p. 55.

how the pattern recurred and developed through increasingly abstract portrayals by classic Christian theologians, Mohammed, Shakespeare, and a number of modern philosophers.

It's worth noting that an analogous abstraction took place within the history of mathematics. Jacob Klein has shown how Vieta took the decisive step, in the sixteenth century, when he detached formal symbols from practical and natural realities.⁸² This made them into fully aesthetic concepts, capable of being grasped wholly for their own sake. But unlike mathematicians, intellectual historians also need to confront the epistemological status of the phenomena they investigate. They might, for example, ask if the representations are fictional or non-fictional. Nirenberg unfortunately ignores this question, leaving a crucial ambiguity in his book. *Anti-Judaism* consistently emphasizes how imaginative thinkers used the symbols he traces to make sense of and criticize their world – a thoroughly serious, non-fictional endeavour that has practical relevance, as they surely intended. But while each form can have serious or unserious ends, fiction tends to the latter, if only because it has greater potential than non-fiction to entertain – and to distort.

Shakespeare offers a striking example of such fictional possibilities, with his take on the figure of the Jew in *The Merchant of Venice*. It surely aims at much more than working out certain ideas. After all, Shakespeare intended the play to answer Marlowe's very successful *The Jew of Malta* (ca. 1589)⁸³ and, more than anything, this meant it had to entertain.

All of which leads me to pose two further questions. One, regarding the seriousness of those thinkers Nirenberg discusses: Did they use their imaginations strictly in pursuit of truth, or did they not also fantasize, at least occasionally? And two, regarding their efforts for truth: Were they driven by no more than the critic's desire to interpret – to make sense and understand – or sometimes also by the artist's desire to create?

Eve Gerrard's powerful essay, "The Pleasures of Antisemitism" (2013), rightly emphasizes aesthetic satisfaction in accounting for why antisemites tend to be so irrational.⁸⁴ But after declaring that "antisemitism is fun," she doesn't stop there; instead, she goes on to identify

⁸² See Klein, *Greek Mathematical Thought and the Origin of Algebra*, trans. Eva Brann (New York: Dover Publications, 1968).

⁸³ See Jay L. Halio, "General Introduction," to William Shakespeare, *The Merchant of Venice* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), p. 28.

⁸⁴ Gerrard, "The Pleasures of Antisemitism," *Fathom* (Summer 2013).

numerous practical psychological rewards. (Among these are antisemitism's ability to enhance self-esteem and to supply easily fulfilled moral imperatives.) Consider her discussion of antisemitic criticism of Israel, for instance, built either on falsehoods or the application of double standards. While Gerrard identifies an aesthetic motivation – virtue-signalling – for such criticism, she then immediately obscures it by invoking the feelings of satisfaction that can accompany morally upright behaviour. “What’s in play is not serious moral concern,” she writes, “but rather an easy simulacrum of it, along with a conviction of moral rectitude which, though misplaced, offers distinctive pleasures of its own.” Unfortunately, she repeats the same two-step in explaining how those who allege Jewish wrongdoing are able to draw on traditional Jew-hatred “without embarrassment, indeed with a delicious frisson, because the transgressiveness defuses in advance any objections based on more conventional concerns about racism.” The frisson is aesthetic, but the defusing of objections is practical. And so on.

VI. Fighting Antisemitism in a New Way

I conclude by offering some suggestions as to how, given the proposed account of antisemitism, we should combat it. There are never any guarantees, of course, but if I’m right that there’s a better way of understanding it, then we should also be able to become better at dealing with it.

My son was maybe five when I showed him *Mary Poppins* (1964), his first musical. The moment the first number began, he turned to me and earnestly asked: “Why are they singing?” We might ask antisemites a similar question about their excursions into the “wild kingdom” of the aesthetic: Why do they keep punching that ticket?⁸⁵ The primary answer – whether or not they will give it – is enjoyment. Not relaxation, which is Aristotle’s explanation for why people play; nor because crisis-ridden times lead people to seek security in traditional symbolism, as Ernst Robert Curtius has observed; nor any of the other reasons functionalists give.⁸⁶ No, like all fundamentally aesthetic activities, people engage in antisemitic conspiracy theories first and foremost for their own sake. So they don’t actually believe in them; they “believe” in them. (And they usually can’t tell the difference.)

⁸⁵ Scott Merritt, “[Wild Kingdom](#),” from the album *Violet and Black* (Toronto: I.R.S. Records, 1989).

⁸⁶ See Aristotle, *Politics* 1339b16; and *Nicomachean Ethics* 1176b33–37. And according to Curtius, “In messianically and apocalyptically excited periods, faded symbolic figures can be filled with new life, like shades which have drunk blood.” *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages*, trans. Willard R. Trask (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013 [1948]), p. 104.

This has major implications for how antisemitism should be fought. Given the seriousness of our concerns, those of us who would combat it operate in a wholly different dimension of being than antisemites. That's why, if we are to confront them, we must go to them. Normally, the attempt to coax aesthetes out of the aesthetic is a mug's game: when people have fallen for a myth, facts usually won't convince them to abandon it. So there's little sense trying to engage antisemites in dialogue; presenting earnest arguments intended to convince; or demonstrating that their "beliefs" are unfounded, implausible, or simply wrong. All these will be ineffective at best, counter-productive at worst. At the very least, they risk conferring practical legitimacy on such theories, obscuring the reality that their origins have nothing to do with the attempt to accomplish something practical. At worst, such efforts will actually strengthen antisemites' convictions. After all, there's certainly precedent for attempted debunking leading to the deepening of adherents' commitment to bizarre beliefs.⁸⁷

What, then, to do? I wouldn't abandon conventional means of combating antisemitism, which assume it is – one way or another – essentially useful to the antisemite. But I do think they should be considered as no more than supplements to my proposals below.

The most obvious of these consists of attempting to undermine, or at least reform, the substantial symbol of "the Jew." One lesson of Romanticism (as distinct from Neoclassicism) is that such symbols are not fixed universals. They are open to change. Regarding "the Jew," then, perhaps accepting its broad outlines while attempting to alter the valence would be our easiest option. Because as we can see from the image of Jews in China (where hardly any live), it's possible to correspond to Western stereotypes, but with the signs reversed.⁸⁸ Once, while I was a visiting professor in Beijing, my wife and I had a very pleasant dinner with some Chinese academics. Over dessert, one of them asked me:

"You are Jewish, correct?"

"Yes."

⁸⁷ See, for example, Leon Festinger, Henry W. Riecken, and Stanley Schachter, *When Prophecy Fails: A Social and Psychological Study of a Modern Group that Predicted the Destruction of the World* (London: Pinter & Martin, 2008, new ed. [1956]).

⁸⁸ See Fu Youde, "Distinctiveness: A Major Jewish Characteristic," in James Rodman Ross and Song Lihong, eds., *The Image of Jews in Contemporary China* (Brookline, MA: Academic Studies Press, 2014), pp. 43–46.

“Then I have a question for you. It is something I have wondered about for quite some time. You people are clearly smart (Jesus, Marx, Einstein, and so on), and you are extremely good with money.”

“Well...”

“So why on earth do Westerners not like you?”

This suggests that shifting the symbol’s inflection is at least worth a try. It’s not as if that sort of thing has never happened before. Think of the proclamation whenever a king dies and a queen accedes the throne: “The King is dead, long live the Queen!”

More difficult, but also worth attempting, is the wholesale replacement of the symbol with some rival. Roland Barthes makes the mistake of treating myths more as signs, which can be undermined when deciphered, than symbols. He is well aware, though, that “there is no fixity in mythical concepts: they can come into being, alter, disintegrate, disappear completely.”⁸⁹ So artists should be able to replace them:

Truth to tell, the best weapon against myth is perhaps to mythify it in its turn, and to produce an *artificial myth*: and this reconstituted myth will in fact be a mythology. Since myth robs language of something, why not rob myth? All that is needed is to use it as the departure point for a third semiological chain, to take its signification as the first term of a second myth. Literature offers some great examples of such artificial mythologies.⁹⁰

Barthes mentions Flaubert’s *Bouvard et Pécuchet* (1881) as superimposing a new myth over the original. However, artists are rightly wary of not only didacticism but also agitprop, wherein their creativity is subordinated to political ends. So perhaps we should call on artisans instead. For one thing, they tend to be more comfortable with the need to entertain. For another, they might also be open to doing the opposite. I’m thinking of the question Wallace Stevens once posed about how

⁸⁹ Barthes, “Myth Today,” trans. Annette Lavers, in *Mythologies* (1957), trans. Richard Howard (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2012), p. 230.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 246–47.

symbols can lose their resonance for people, thereby becoming obsolete.⁹¹ Could something similar be done with antisemitic images, to make them boring? Boredom is the bane of the aesthete, so if antisemitic conspiracy theories could be made tedious, they will surely lose popularity. But repetition, the standard route to boredom, doesn't seem to apply in this case. However, what if those who seek the excitement of outrage or indignation through antisemitism found it elicited bored or uninterested reactions instead? This seems worth exploring.

Then again, we could always respond with aesthetic tactics of our own. Ridicule, for example. Because there's nothing wrong with having fun at an antisemite's expense; on the contrary, it seems perfectly fitting. So how about putting our energies into actively mocking antisemitism? I'm thinking here, for instance, of that great line from the American stoner movie *Harold and Kumar Go to White Castle* (2004): "Is that all you Jews ever think about . . . tits?" Of course, we should also mock antisemites. Their barbarism, for example:

It's 1935, in Weimar Berlin, and a Nazi walks into a bar with a big, menacing German shepherd. He takes a seat and the dog takes a seat on the stool beside him.

"Barman!" he barks. "Do you have any schnapps?"

"Yes, of course," replies the barman.

"And are *Juden* served in this place?" Warily, the barman says:

"Well, I am sorry, but yes."

"*Wunderbar!*" shouts the Nazi. "A schnapps for me, and a Jew for my dog."

Finally, we might simultaneously target both antisemitism and antisemites, as the English comedian and cultural phenomenon Sacha Baron Cohen has been doing, for instance.⁹²

Then again, perhaps there are times when it would be worthwhile to try an opposite tack, approaching antisemites with solicitude. After all, we often warn people about the dangers of extreme sports, or wonder at participants in spectacles such as Pamplona's Running of the Bulls, or worry about those who are addicted to amusements. We might likewise recommend meditation

⁹¹ See Stevens, "The Noble Rider and the Sound of Words," in *The Necessary Angel: Essays on Reality and the Imagination* (New York: Alfred A Knopf, 1951), pp. 3–7.

⁹² See Wisse, pp. 232–33.

to discipline fear-inducing imaginations,⁹³ or suggest that people simply ignore any paranoia experienced from indulging in conspiracy theory, just as they should when using cannabis.⁹⁴ And so on.

My final suggestion is to oppose monism politically. In particular, I'm referring to favouring multinational models of the state over the Westphalian, nation-state version – and not only in countries such as Canada and Britain, which have already taken major steps in this direction (though they still have a way to go). Because, if anything, Israel has been regressing in this respect.⁹⁵ I'm thinking of its “Jewish Nation-State” law (2018), which undermines recognition of the country's minority, Palestinian Arab-Israeli nation.

That recognition is perceived, however dimly, as standing in the way of unifying the majority Jewish nation and the state – which is a very good thing, if you ask me. Levinas once warned of the aesthetic temptations to idolatry embedded in Zionism, as in all nationalisms, and how they could lead Zionists to “let ourselves be carried away by the song, in the southern breeze.”⁹⁶ And Rémi Brague has shown how ancient Israelites defined themselves strictly by religion, rather than by territory or allegiance to a king, leading to the paradox of Jewish law being simultaneously detached from the land and of the land; for that reason, “The Diaspora is never more intense than in the Holy Land.”⁹⁷ This has been a source of conflict, to be sure, and the same must be said whenever two or more nations share a single state. But when such conflicts are responded to politically – by which I mean with genuine dialogue – then they have the potential to provide much benefit. Not least, they can serve as a prophylactic to idolatry.

⁹³ See, for example, Jessica Kingston *et al.*, “Mindfulness and Paranoia: A Cross-Sectional, Longitudinal and Experimental Analysis,” *Mindfulness* 10 (May 2019): 2038–45.

⁹⁴ Because as Dale Jacquette points out, “so often what appears to the cannabis user as a worthwhile truth must later be dismissed as illusory.” Jacquette, “Navigating Creative Inner Space on the Innocent Pleasures of Hashish,” in Jacquette, ed., *Cannabis – Philosophy for Everyone: What Were We Just Talking About?* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), p. 129.

⁹⁵ See, for example, my “[Federalism and Multinationalism](#)” and “Going Rabin One Further,” both in *Patriotic Elaborations*.

⁹⁶ Levinas, “Heidegger, Gagarin, and Us,” in *Difficult Freedom: Essays on Judaism*, trans. Seán Hand (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990), p. 233. I would add that I see no tension between my Zionism and not only a genuinely bi-national Israel, where both its majority and minority nations achieve self-determination and are recognized in their specificity by the state they share, but also a future bi-national Palestine. For I'm among those who continue to support a two-state solution to the conflict.

⁹⁷ Brague, *The Law of God: The Philosophical History of an Idea*, trans. Lydia G. Cochrane (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), p. 53.

I conclude with the suggestion that a free Jewish nation in the midst of *Dar al-Islam*, the area of the world under Islamic rule, can play the very same anti-idolatrous role for Muslims. What fundamentalists decry as a stain on their religion’s purity is instead a kind of hole: a gap that ensures disunity, and so wards off confusion that could lead to failure in upholding its supreme belief in the oneness of the transcendent God (*Tawhīd*). This is one reason why Islam, rightly understood, can support Zionism: “And thereafter We said to the Children of Israel: ‘Dwell securely in the Promised Land’” (Qur’an 17:104). There are many others.⁹⁸

Epilogue:

On the History of the Persecution of Jews

Religious and secular Judaisms have tended to be persecuted by different kinds of antisemites. But while they may have divergent conceptions of who Jews are, they all sooner or later agree on what we supposedly do: conspire.

We can begin with Christian “anti-Judaism,” the term used for specifically religious hostility before every form of anti-Jewish prejudice came to be known under the catch-all “antisemitism.” When first coined in the late seventeenth century, the latter had a strictly racial meaning. It referred first to all of the “races” that spoke Semitic languages, then narrowed to Jews alone. Premodern Christians tended to decry Jewish religious *beliefs*, however; above all, they saw the Jewish rejection of Jesus as an obstacle – or worse – to universal redemption.

This led to two basic positions. One was advanced first by Saint Ambrose and then, among others, William of Turbeville, Thomas Aquinas, and Martin Luther. It objects to the very existence of Jews, and so calls for either our conversion or elimination. The other position’s leading advocates were Augustine and many of the popes. It allows that Jews may survive, but no more than this, since we have been appointed the role of witnesses to the prophecies concerning Christ. Of course, both positions still consider Judaism illegitimate, because superseded by Christianity.⁹⁹

⁹⁸ For more along these lines from the Qur’an as well as the Hadith, see Abdul Hadi Palazzi, “Allah is a Zionist,” *Tablet*, 18 March 2010. And for more on gaps, see my “Gaps: When Not Even Nothing Is There,” *Comparative Philosophy* 12, no. 1 (Jan. 2021): 31–55.

⁹⁹ See James Carroll, *Constantine’s Sword: The Church and the Jews, A History* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2001), chs. 14, 20–21, 30, 36. There is scriptural support against supersessionism, however. Peter holds that the day will

As for the conspiracy theorizing, it didn't begin until the twelfth century. The basic premise was that Jews form a league of sorcerers who work for the Devil.¹⁰⁰ From this came theories such as the blood libel, which accuses us of sacrificing our victims. In the version that first circulated in England in 1144, Jews were said to murder Christian children in order to use their blood for religious rituals.¹⁰¹ Then came the mid-fourteenth-century allegation that we caused the outbreaks of Black Death in Europe and the Near East by poisoning food, wells, and streams, leading to possibly hundreds of millions of deaths.¹⁰² Other such allegations followed.

Racist antisemitism is different, since it condemns Jews on biological grounds – or at least it claims to. Whence its attraction to metaphors like “the Jew as virus.” According to one well-known hypothesis, in fact, racist antisemitism was the first case of Western racism, arising from events in Iberia during the late Middle Ages.

Race was arguably irrelevant to the ancients, their “barbarian” having been a strictly cultural category. And the same seems to have been true during the Middle Ages. When medieval Christians referred to people as “monsters” and then “savages,” for example, they were invoking essentially theological concepts.¹⁰³ But based as it was on the idea of contaminated Jewish blood, the Spanish Inquisition seems manifestly racist.

The doctrine of “purity of blood” (*limpieza de sangre*) emerged after conspiracy theories about the Black Death led to scapegoating of the once-powerful Iberian Jewish community. By 1391,

come when Israel will be restored to its land (Acts 3:21), and Paul claims that God is still in covenant with the Jewish people (Romans 11:28–29).

¹⁰⁰ See Joshua Trachtenberg, *The Devil and the Jews: The Medieval Conception of the Jew and Its Relation to Modern Antisemitism* (Skokie, IL: Varda Books, 2001, 2nd ed. [1943]), chs. 4–6, 8, 10, 14–15. Already in John 8:44, Jesus reportedly said to the Jews: “You are of your father, the devil.”

¹⁰¹ See Trachtenberg, chs. 9–10; and Magda Teter, *Blood Libel: On the Trail of an Antisemitic Myth* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2020). Unfortunately, the blood libel still appears today, as with Giovanni Gasparro's painting, “The Martyrdom of St. Simon of Trento in Accordance With Jewish Ritual Murder (2020).” See Ben Cohen, “[Italian Artist Giovanni Gasparro Revives Antisemitic Blood Libel With Graphic Painting of Medieval Child ‘Martyr’](#),” *the algemeiner*, 26 March 2020.

¹⁰² See Trachtenberg, ch. 7; and Samuel K. Cohn, Jr., “The Black Death and the Burning of Jews,” *Past & Present* 196, no. 1 (Aug. 2007): 3–36.

¹⁰³ See David Theo Goldberg, “Modernity, Race, and Morality,” *Cultural Critique*, no. 24 (Spring 1993): 193–227, pp. 198–202. On pp. 202–206, however, Goldberg points to the invocation of racial differences within the mid-16th century debate over how the Spanish empire should treat its Indians, and so he would date the birth of Western racism about a century later than I. George Fredrickson, in *Racism: A Short History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015, 2nd ed.), pp. 31, 169–70, says that the treatment of Jewish converts to Christianity in fifteenth- and sixteenth-century Spain is arguably the “first real anticipation” of “modern racism.” And for yet another view, see Benjamin Isaac, *The Invention of Racism in Classical Antiquity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004).

pogroms and enforced sermon attendance had spread throughout the peninsula. Before long, this produced – or at least appeared to produce – a mass conversion from Judaism to Christianity.

As Nirenberg has recently argued, however, much remains to be determined about racist antisemitism's origins.¹⁰⁴ So I would like to offer my own take. I should confess that I'm wading here into what are for me largely uncharted waters – waters not without turbulence, even for historians. Still, it seems worthwhile to show that Monty Python was wrong that nobody could have expected the Spanish Inquisition. Because though racism appears to give priority to natural aspects of reality, in truth it does so to the aesthetic.

My claim is that the Iberian calamity was inadvertently facilitated by something that happened in Morocco over two centuries earlier. The leader of a fundamentalist Muslim sect had issued an ultimatum to the Jews in Fez: either they declare faithfulness to Allah, the one true God whose prophet is Mohammed, or they would be put to death. Many opted to make the required profession, then continued to observe Judaism in private. And for perhaps the very first time, such deception received support from someone who'd become a major Jewish scholar.

Traditionally, religious authorities interpreted the precept of *kiddush ha-Shem* (sanctification of God's name) as requiring Jews to "choose" martyrdom over apostasy. In his "Epistle on Martyrdom" (c. 1165), however, Moses Maimonides condemns the rabbi who had ruled that the Moroccan Jews should die rather than acquiesce to the public conversion. He does so based on a novel distinction between intention and the public utterance of insincere conversion formulas,¹⁰⁵ one no doubt designed to uphold *pikuach nefesh's* call to protect human life. Widespread crypto-Judaism in North Africa was the result.¹⁰⁶

To be sure, Maimonides would not have countenanced the application of his arguments to the later case of forced conversions in Iberia. One might think this due to his belief that Christianity, unlike Islam, is a form of idolatry, but it is central to his epistle that Judaism sharply distinguishes

¹⁰⁴ See Nirenberg, "Was There Race before Modernity? The Example of 'Jewish' Blood in Late Medieval Spain," in *Neighboring Faiths: Christianity, Islam, and Judaism in the Middle Ages and Today* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014).

¹⁰⁵ See Maimonides, "Epistle on Martyrdom," in *Epistles of Maimonides: Crisis in Leadership*, ed. and trans. Abraham Halkin, discussant David Hartman (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1985), p. 30.

¹⁰⁶ See Jane S. Gerber, *The Jews of Spain: A History of the Sephardic Experience* (New York: The Free Press, 1994), p. 82.

between voluntary and coerced idolatry.¹⁰⁷ No, the reason he may have called on the Iberian community to accept death over conversion is his belief that a Jew must undergo martyrdom “only when it is demanded of him to perform a deed, or something that he is forbidden to do.”¹⁰⁸ And where the Muslims in Morocco had been satisfied with a public profession, the Christian authorities in Iberia demanded much more: Jews had not only to practice Christianity in public, they were also proscribed from observing Judaism in private.

That said, Maimonides did let the (secret) cat out of the bag, so to speak. He also went very far – too far – in whitewashing the Jews’ refusal of martyrdom. It is one thing to see their decision to bypass the traditional interpretation of *kiddush ha-Shem* as an understandable concession to an intolerable reality. But it is quite another to argue, like Maimonides, that they did absolutely nothing wrong.

To Maimonides, in Judaism “one is punished for every sin committed,” including “minor ones.” But in this case he concludes that “the forced individual is not culpable.” Indeed, the Jews who had publicly to profess conversion are “excused by the Torah”; so rather than being merely “not guilty,” they are “absolutely righteous.”¹⁰⁹ Such an approach is only to be expected of an Aristotelian, since there is no room in Aristotle’s monist philosophy for the problem of dirty hands, for the contradictory idea that an act can be both wrong and yet the right thing to do overall.¹¹⁰ This is the reason why I believe Maimonides may be at least partly responsible for the many crypto-Jews, or *marranos*, who came to exist alongside the already-numerous *conversos* in Spain.

¹⁰⁷ See Maimonides, “Epistle on Martyrdom,” pp. 15, 29. He also believed that Christianity can serve a preparatory messianic role, not only Islam. Moreover, he understandably preferred Christianity’s acceptance of the Hebrew Bible in its present form as authentic revelation over Islam’s rejection of it. For helpful commentary, see David Novak, *Jewish-Christian Dialogue: A Jewish Justification* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), pp. 57–67.

¹⁰⁸ Maimonides, “Epistle on Martyrdom,” p. 31; see also p. 20. In later writings, Maimonides makes clear that by “forbidden” he means to refer to any action that threatens great disgrace or the survival of the Jewish people. See Josef Stern, “Maimonides and his Predecessors on Dying for God as ‘Sanctification of the Name of God’,” in Samuel Lebens, Dani Rabinowitz, and Aaron Segal, eds., *Jewish Philosophy in an Analytic Age* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019).

¹⁰⁹ Maimonides, “Epistle on Martyrdom,” pp. 31, 29, 30, 21.

¹¹⁰ See, for example, Karen M. Nielsen, “Dirtying Aristotle’s Hands? Aristotle’s Analysis of ‘Mixed Acts’ in the *Nicomachean Ethics* III, 1,” *Phronesis* 52 (2007): 270–300; and Paula Gottlieb, *The Virtue of Aristotle’s Ethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), ch. 6. According to David Hartman, however, Maimonides saw the Jews’ refusal of martyrdom as constituting a guilty and sinful compromise, even though on the whole justifiable. See Hartman, “Discussion of the Epistle on Martyrdom,” in *Epistles of Maimonides*, pp. 51–53, 56–57, 63–64, 66; as well as the echoes in Abraham Halkin’s notes, pp. 38 n. 76, 43 n. 166. By contrast, Gerber seems to me correct that, for Maimonides, the Jews did what they did “without compromising Judaism.” Gerber, p. 82. Because as Stern, p. 175, puts it, “*sanctification of God* sometimes requires transgression.”

For his claim that one can profess another religion publically while observing Judaism in secret and still keep one's hands clean surely served to make this option appear that much more attractive – or rather less unattractive – than it otherwise would have been.

Perhaps, then, given the marked compassion of Maimonides' epistle, it should be considered as in a sense tragically ironic, and so stand as a warning to well-meaning philosophers and theologians everywhere. Because it wasn't long before the discovery of false conversions led the Spanish authorities to distinguish between the pure-blooded old Christians and the Jewish-contaminated new ones. And in 1451, the King of Castile formally approved a regulation (promulgated several years earlier in Toledo) that for the very first time defined Judaism by blood rather than religion.

So the new Christians, including former Muslims as well as Jews, had to be ferreted out. That was the initial goal of the Spanish Inquisition's tribunals and their first lead official, Torquemada, whose own Jewish ancestry apparently fueled his hatred. And once again we find monism in the background. Some have suggested that the Inquisition would never have been possible without the Catholic absolutism asserted by Pope Boniface VIII, way back in 1302, when he declared the Church to be the only path to salvation.¹¹¹ He did so in a bull whose title and subtitle make its monism hard to miss: *Unam Sanctam: One God, One Faith, One Spiritual Authority*.¹¹²

Racist antisemitism also took some time to manifest as conspiracy theory. It eventually took hold with the infamous "Simonini letter" of 1806, circulated in Paris by its recipient, the reactionary Jesuit priest Augustin Barruel. Barruel is best known for his own conspiracy theory, published in five volumes, that the French Revolution and its upheavals were caused by the Freemasons and Jacobins, led by the Illuminati. According to Simonini's letter, however, the Illuminati were themselves led by Jews disguised as Christians, an international cabal that aimed to rule the world. The *Protocols of the Elders of Zion* then adopted and propagated these claims. Purporting to be the minutes of a secret meeting between Jewish leaders, this fabricated Russian

¹¹¹ See, for example, Carroll, pp. 315–18, 338–55.

¹¹² That the bull's monism is hiburological – rather than merely numerical – is evident from its claim that no conflict is possible between the two "swords" (i.e. authorities) that it recognizes, one spiritual and the other temporal. For "one sword ought to be subordinated to the other and temporal authority, subjected to spiritual power." Boniface VIII, *Unam Sanctum*, in *Internet Medieval Source Book* (New York: Fordham University History Department, 1996). This reminds me of the lexical priority that John Rawls asserts between his two principles of justice, Rawls being the leading monist political philosopher of our day. See my "Taking Politics Seriously," *Philosophy* 94, no. 2 (Apr. 2019): 271–94.

text went on to become the most popular, and pernicious, of contemporary antisemitic conspiracy theories.¹¹³

But it was in Germany, of course, that antisemitic depictions of “the Jew” took their most dangerous form.¹¹⁴ First came the variant popular on the so-called left, identifying conspirators with Jewish bankers and other financiers.¹¹⁵ Notice that, as a secularization of the Christian symbol of the moneyed Jew, this isn’t distinctively racist. When the commercial and urban revolution of the eleventh century had required Church authorities to formulate a Christian economic morality, they turned to Scripture. Jews were associated with both the commerce that Jesus appeared to denounce and the materialism condemned by Paul. In this way, the Church encouraged Christians to shun usury, for instance, and view pawnshops as “Synagogues of Satan.”¹¹⁶

In fact, Marx drew on exactly this stereotype of the Jew as “huckster” to argue that the Jewish religion is merely a spiritual reflection of Jewish economic life. For Marx, Jews are one of the main groups behind money becoming “a world power” – which is why overthrowing commerce will bring their emancipation, along with everyone else.¹¹⁷ A similar universalism underlies the many contemporary criticisms of Zionism (and Jewish particularism more generally) levelled by some human rights activists, albeit often applied with double standards.¹¹⁸ When the latter, this anti-Zionist antisemitism has come to be identified as a “new” form of the hatred, one in which Zionists play the role of imagined conspirators.

However, the German right embraced a thoroughly racist variant of anti-Jewish prejudice during the late nineteenth century, one expressed in the scientific-sounding neologism “anti-

¹¹³ See Norman Cohn, *Warrant for Genocide: The Myth of the Jewish World-Conspiracy and the Protocols of the Elders of Zion* (New York: Harper & Row, 1967).

¹¹⁴ On its aesthetic rather than practical nature, see Shulamit Volkov, “Antisemitism as a Cultural Code: Reflections on the History and Historiography of Antisemitism in Imperial Germany,” *Leo Baeck Yearbook* 23, no. 1 (Jan. 1978): 25–46, esp. p. 34.

¹¹⁵ I say “so-called” because I believe the left is best defined by its willingness to respond to conflict with reconciliatory dialogue, rather than the forceful imposition of equality. See my “[Political Philosophies and Political Ideologies](#),” in *Patriotic Elaborations*. That essay also warns against deriving one’s politics from philosophy, as distinct from merely allowing the latter to shape the former to some degree – a warning of the kind Heidegger should have heeded, as argued earlier.

¹¹⁶ See Trachtenberg, ch. 13; and Sara Lipton, “A Terribly Durable Myth,” *New York Review of Books*, 27 June 2019.

¹¹⁷ Marx, “On the Jewish Question (1844),” in *The Marx-Engels Reader*, ed. Robert C. Tucker, trans. Ronald Rogowski *et al.* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1978, 2nd ed.), p. 49.

¹¹⁸ On how human rights discourse is, given its abstractness, not only counter-productive but also highly manipulable, see my “[The Ironic Tragedy of Human Rights](#),” in *Patriotic Elaborations*.

Semitism.” The imagined Jewish threat it identified could soon be found at the centre of political programs designed to revive a Germany supposedly corrupted by “Judaization.”¹¹⁹ Such images then became a staple of Nazi propaganda.¹²⁰ While sometimes incorporating Jewish financiers, especially later, Nazi theories fastened onto the myth of Judeo-Bolshevism – a particularly insidious falsehood because while there were many Jewish Bolsheviks, they never saw themselves acting either as or for Jews.¹²¹

Muslim theories have since joined the forefront of contemporary antisemitism, with an incoherent mixture of religious, racist, and above all anti-Zionist variants. Central here is a conception of Israel as “the Jew among nations.” Antisemitic representations of the Jew are certainly present in the Qur’an, as well as in later Islamic religious texts.¹²² But it’s especially since the events leading to modern Israel’s establishment that this antisemitism became a major force in the Islamic world.¹²³ That also corresponds with the rise of Muslim fundamentalism,¹²⁴ a decadent form of the religion that I see as a product of aestheticization: belief in the oneness of the transcendent God (*Tawhīd*) is central to Islam, yet such a principle is, as already noted, incompatible with the aesthetic’s monism. All-too-many adherents in the Muslim world have taken up, added to, and popularized the earlier antisemitic conspiracy theories mentioned above, however.¹²⁵

¹¹⁹ See Jonathan Judaken, “Antisemitism and the Jewish Question,” in Mitchell B. Hart and Tony Michels, eds., *The Cambridge History of Judaism, Volume VIII: The Modern World, 1815–2000* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), pp. 568–71.

¹²⁰ See Jeffrey Herf, *Jewish Enemy: Nazi Propaganda During World War II and the Holocaust* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006); and Judaken, pp. 576–78.

¹²¹ See Gary Saul Morson, “[Lenin and Maimonides](#)” (Review of Paul Hanebrink, *A Specter Haunting Europe: The Myth of Judeo-Bolshevism*), *Jewish Review of Books*, Winter 2019, <https://jewishreviewofbooks.com/articles/4988/lenin-and-maimonides/>.

¹²² See Andrew G. Bostom, ed., *The Legacy of Islamic Antisemitism* (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 2008).

¹²³ See Robert S. Wistrich, *Muslim Anti-Semitism: A Clear and Present Danger* (New York: American Jewish Committee, 2002), p. 5.

¹²⁴ See, for example, Abdul Hadi Palazzi, “The Islamists Have It Wrong,” *Middle East Quarterly* 8, no. 3 (Summer 2001): 3–12; and, for an interesting recent account of a decidedly non-decadent Islam, see Shahab Ahmed, *What Is Islam? The Importance of Being Islamic* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016).

¹²⁵ See, for example, Wistrich, *A Lethal Obsession*, pp. 790–816.