

The Linguistics and Theology of Defining, Understanding, Misunderstanding, Liking and Disliking Jews and Judaism

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The words “Jew,” “Jewish,” and “Judaism” have offered a treble-definitional problem in the sweep through history and in particularly Christian-Jewish relations during the past two millennia. (1) The failure to distinguish “Jew/Jewish” from “Judaean” is a starting point of misconceiving the group that shares a common spiritual heritage with Christianity from which each turns in its own direction in the first few generations after the crucifixion of Jesus. (2) On the other hand, the emergence in the West from a strict if troubled adherence to a religion-based identity on the part of Christianity, offered a temporary respite from 15 centuries of negative feelings regarding Jews; Jews were able to shift from the margins to the mainstream of socio-economic and cultural realities. In the end this yielded to a reinvigorated negative that, through the new academic disciplines of linguistics and anthropology, derived from a redefinition of Jews as a race, allowing a newly-coined, race-based hostility, “antisemitism” to replace the “anti-Judaism” of the medieval period. (3) One further layer of language-and-concept-based complication evolves with the development of Romantic Nationalism in the nineteenth century, with consequences both for outsider definitions of Judaism and for Jewish self-definition. These complications have merged into a newly nuanced complexity in the response to the events in Israel-Palestine-Gaza between October 7, 2023 and the time of this writing. Ignorance of the definitional and conceptual issues of the past two millennia have helped reshape the possibility of meaningful dialogue into powerful but meaning-deficient rhetoric with confusing and violent consequences.

Judaeans, Jews, and Christians In and Around the Time of Jesus

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The failure to distinguish “Jew/Jewish” from “Judaean” is a starting point of misconceiving the group that shares a common spiritual heritage with Christianity from which each turns in its own direction in the first few generations after the crucifixion of Jesus of Nazareth. Aside from other problematic details within the Gospels regarding the life and more importantly, the death, of Jesus, the focus on the culpable group as “Jews” and not as “Judaeans” as those texts evolve, offers a religion-based logic to more than eighteen centuries of negative Christian-Jewish relations—to say the least.¹

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1. The other problematic details include the middle-of-the-night arrest and trials by an illegitimately configured “Sanhedrin,” including the identifying kiss by Judas of an individual

This is a simple and at the same time complicated issue. In Hebrew, Aramaic, Greek, and Latin—the key languages operative during the time of Jesus—one cannot distinguish these terms: Hebrew *yehoodē*, Aramaic *yehuday*, Greek *ioudaios*, and Latin *iudaeus*, may all be translated either as “Judaean” or as “Jewish/Jewish.” Nearly the entire population likely to have been present at Jesus’ demise—the most obvious exceptions being Roman leaders like Pontius Pilate and the Roman soldiers actually responsible for Jesus’ death, and perhaps a scattering of Idumaeans—would have been Judaeans. And the term labelling them would itself have been susceptible to at least three possible meanings. Someone called a Judaean—*yehoodē.yhooday/ioudaios/iudaeus*—could have been so-labelled ethnically: that s/he claimed decent from the tribe of Judah or at least more loosely from the tribes of Israel. One could be so-labelled religiously/spiritually: that s/he believed in the God of Israel whose primary shrine was the Temple in Jerusalem—as universal and the only true God. One could also be so-labeled politically: that s/he was an inhabitant of the polity, Judaea.

Thus, for example, by the time of Jesus’ birth, the recently deceased King of Judaea, Herod, was half-Idumaeen (on his father’s side) and half-Nabatean (on his mother’s side) in terms of ethnicity, and his sons Philip, Herod Antipas and Herod Archelaus fell into the same ethnic category. Religiously, while Herod may have begun as a follower of the Israelite-Judaean God through his father and perhaps pagan gods through his mother, by the time he usurped the Judaean throne from the last of the Hasmonean house, he had become—or at least presented himself as—a full-fledge believer in the Israelite-Judaean God. Politically he was obviously a Judaean—the King of the Judaeans!—but so were the many possibly pagan Idumaeen workers whom he imported into Judaea to work on his building projects. Most notable of these projects was the transformation of the small fishing village of Straton’s Tower into the most important Roman port in the Eastern Mediterranean: Caesarea.

So to begin with, the term “Judaean” is complicated, and then the Judaeans—most particularly those who are Judaean by religion—began to bifurcate during and after the time of Jesus, in part based on their differing perspectives on who and what Jesus *was*. One might refer to one group as “Judaeans for Jesus” and the other as “Judaeans not for Jesus.” The point is that both groups were Judaeans, and as the bifurcation became increasingly distinct—by the end of the first century and beginning of the second, not before—both groups began reaching out to pagans, to bring them into the fold of the “True Faith.” Thus both groups grew to include those who were not Judaean by ethnicity, but only became so by religion.

The two groups were competing not only with regard to the question of whose faith was the true heir to the Israelite-Judaean tradition—*verus Israel*—but with

presumably known by everyone for his allegedly subversive teachings; the otherwise unheard-of Passover “custom” of allowing the Judaeans to choose between two criminals as to who would be executed; the depiction of Pontius Pilate as benign, which contradicts Roman sources significantly; among others.

regard to which of the two was accepted by the pagan Roman authorities as legitimate in the political sense. For late in the Hasmonean period, in 63 BCE, Pompey the Great, as he passed through the region on Rome's behalf, after violent complications (beyond this discussion), ended up granting to the Judaeans and their Temple in Jerusalem *religio licita* status.² This meant that their faith was accepted as legal and that the Temple was protected as were the funds sent annually from throughout the Judaeian diaspora for its upkeep. Given that both Judaeian groups claimed to be the True Israel, both laid claim to that status—the opposite of which was *superstitio*, meaning “political subversion.”

And by the third or fourth decade of the second century, one group was calling itself “Christian” while the other continued to use the term “Judaeian” (which might gradually become, in English, “Jewish”) to refer to itself.³ The Christians were subject to persecution from the pagan Roman authorities, perceived as a *superstitio*, and, depending upon the specific era, either barely tolerated or severely persecuted—the latter particularly during the third-century reigns of Septimius Severus, Thrax, Decius, and, most notoriously, Diocletian. There is a logic to this, having little to do with the specifics of Christian (versus Jewish) belief, about which the pagan Roman authorities would have had little understanding. Rather, it had to do with the pagan Roman assumption that Jesus, who at least by the time of Suetonius' writings (ca 116 CE) was understood to have been executed by the Romans by crucifixion for political subversion—that he claimed, or his followers claimed, that he was the King of the Judaeians, when the only king for Judaeians and all others within the Roman ambit was the Emperor. If the applicable term was Christ—Greek: *Khristos*; anointed one—then by referring to themselves as *Christians*, the former Judaeians for Jesus were acknowledging an association with that political subversion.

Eventually the situation would not only change—Christianity would be accepted as a *religio* through Constantine's Edict of Milan, in 313—but reverse itself. By ca 380, under the Emperor Theodosius, Christianity would achieve status as the official *religio* of the empire—the *only religio*—and any and all other forms of faith, including Judaism, would be relegated to *superstitio* status. That reversal would be accompanied by a reinforcement of negative feelings on the part of Christians for Jews and Judaism. The misreference to the population who either cheered or wept when Jesus was crucified as Jews rather than as Judaeians, combined with the misconstrued mythohistory of the narrative leading up to the Crucifixion, so that the blame for Jesus' demise was removed from Roman to Judaeian—*Jewish*—

2. For details, see Solomon Zeitlin, *The Rise and Fall of the Judaeian State*, Vol I (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1962), 348-57.

3. The most obvious distinctions between Judaeian and, eventually, Jewish is that the latter term refers to a group with a definitively canonized Hebrew Bible, and a distinct array of annual festivals, and lived across a scattered diasporic landscape. In Jesus' time and its aftermath, the first and third of these features were not yet in place, and the second only partially so.

shoulders, would have implications for Christian-Jewish relations for the next sixteen centuries.

Jews, Christians, Religion and Race in a New Era

The anti-Jewish issue, on the other hand, would undergo an apparent transformation by the late eighteenth century, encompassing a second definitional issue pertaining to “Jew” and “Judaism.” The emergence in the West from a strict if troubled adherence to a Christian religion-based identity, came about gradually, through a concatenation of events that disturbed the certainty regarding both God’s involvement in human affairs—and eventually God’s existence. Between the Age of Exploration that began with Columbus and Magellan between 1492 and 1522, and that was completely reconfiguring the European sense of the *physical* world, and Martin Luther’s 95 theses nailed to the Wittenberg church door in 1517, which initiated a radical Reformation of the Western Euro-Christian sense of proper *spiritual* reality,⁴ the Counter-Reformation that began by ca 1550 led to more than 150 years of Catholic-Protestant religious wars. This all led, in turn, to a growing array of questions regarding the nature of God and divine engagement with humans. An array of seventeenth-century thinkers (Bacon, Descartes, Spinoza, Leibnitz) introduced different ways of thinking about both the creation and the creator. By the time of the industrial, technological, scientific, political, and philosophical revolutions of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, the central role of religion in the western Euro-Christian world was slipping off-center, toward an increasingly secular edge.

This gradual spiritual and intellectual transformation—Voltaire (1694-1778) might serve as a symbol of the new thinking at its most emphatic, since he considered anyone who still believed in a traditional God and used religion as a guide for living, particularly religion as an othering instrument, to be backwards, a medieval artifact—came to offer a temporary respite from eighteen centuries of Christian anti-Jewish negativity.⁵ Jews were able to shift gradually from the

4. It should not be forgotten that internal Christian belief and/or leadership problems had evolved with the evolution of the Church and its political success—from the heresy-creating Council of Nicaea in 325 to the schism separating the Western from Eastern churches in 1054, to the self-imposed exile of the papacy from Rome to Avignon in 1309-78 to the Great Western Schism that divided Western Christendom between supporters of the Pope in Rome and the so-called anti-Pope in Avignon (and a further papal claimant at Pisa), between 1380 and 1417 (with an epilogue mini-schism continuing until nearly 1430)—among other Church crises that precede the Protestant Reformation and the Age of Exploration.

5. Yet Voltaire was certainly still filled with at the very least distaste for Jews, who “are, all of them, born with raging fanaticism in their hearts, just as the Bretons and the Germans are born with blond hair. I would not be surprised if these people would not some day become deadly to the human race: (“Letter of Memmius to Cicero,” 1771, in which he placed

margins to the mainstream of socio-economic and cultural realities. Several decrees by the Hapsburg Emperor Joseph II beginning in 1782 officially acknowledged the Jews as citizens of the regime, permitted a new range of rights (such as attending government schools, and serving the general community as lawyers, doctors, and soldiers) equal to those of imperial subjects from other Hapsburg-ruled nations; and on September 28, 1791, in the aftermath of the first phase of the French Revolution, French Jews were similarly declared to be French—who happen to be Jews who attend synagogue on Saturday rather than Catholics who attend Church on Sunday—as opposed to being considered Jews who have *incidentally* resided in France for eighteen centuries.

In the longer run, however, the antipathy toward Jews as a consequence of so many dozens of generations of religious teachings against them outlasted the theoretical dissolution of religion as an underpinning ideology for societal organization. So the brief inclusionary positive yielded again, by the 1830s, to a reinvigorated negative that, thanks to the new academic disciplines of linguistics and anthropology, legitimized itself through a redefinition of Jews and Judaism as a *race*, allowing a newly-coined, race-based hostility, “antisemitism” to replace the religion-based “anti-Judaism” of the medieval period. That is: the new discipline of anthropology, which divided humanity into three major racial categories, borrowed terminology that first emerged within comparative linguistics for the categorization of language groups. Linguistics, in turn—ironically, given the secular basis of these new disciplines—had derived the terminology from the Bible: specifically, Genesis 9:18-19 and the reference there to Noah’s three sons.⁶

Europeans were considered to comprise a “race” associated with Japheth; Africans were associated with Ham—the Noahide curse upon whom was also incidentally used to validate the enslavement of Africans that had already been in process for several centuries—and Asians were associated with Shem. Given the—

his words in a fictional comment by the Ancient Roman politician and philosopher), and in his 1772 essay “One Must Take Sides,” as he mocks religion in general, he is most severe toward the Jews, who “have surpassed all nations in impertinent fables, in bad behavior and in barbarism. You deserve to be punished, for this is your destiny.” There are many other pithy comments that he made about Jews over the years.

6. In brief: comparative linguistics had emerged in the hands and minds of German thinkers in particular in the late eighteenth century, who recognized how certain languages (eg, German and English, or French and Italian, offered phonemic-semantic patterns of consistent similarity as well as dissimilarity, from which they were understood to derive from common ancestors. With languages like French and Italian, the Latin-language ancestor was all but provable thanks to the survival of Latin language and literature and the well enough known history of the Roman Empire. Eventually, an entire family of languages—both siblings and cousins, as it were—was asserted to have a common ancestor, called Indo-Germanic (a term later emended to Indo-European). Gradually, with the emerging nineteenth-century archaeological, cultural, and later political interest in the Middle East, languages like Arabic, Hebrew, and in antiquity, Aramaic and Akkadian were perceived to be part of an altogether different family—which was called “Semitic.”

inaccurate—assumption that all Jews came from the Middle East (the southwest corner of Asia), they were now referred to in an increasing array of circles as Semites. The most obvious and direct implication of this formulation is that Jews could not therefore—ever—be Europeans by race and ethnicity. So for the purveyors of this tidy little racial idea, they could never actually be German, Austrian, French, etc., all of which groups are subsets of the European “race.”

There are, of course, several problems with this idea, apart from the irony that its terminology is derived from a biblical source within a self-proclaimed secular academic pair of disciplines. For one, the story in Genesis 9:25-7 refers to Shem as divinely mandated to rule over his brothers; it does not suggest that the descendants of Japheth will rule the others, contrary to the otherwise prevailing European theory of the European White Man’s Burden and its concomitants. Furthermore, the idea assumes that all Jews originated in the Middle East, ignoring the historical reality that those who joined Judaism in the Roman period were mainly Mediterranean-area Europeans. Or, further, that the Turkic—not Semitic—Khazars who apparently embraced Judaism *en masse* in the 8th century comprised a substantial wave that, arriving in the 11th-12th centuries, eventuated as the dominant ethnolinguistic part of the Eastern European Jewish community. The notion of including as “Semites” all Asians, from Palestine to Japan, would appear absurd to anyone not blinded by the desire to find a means of specifically excluding Jews from a European pedigree. And excluding Muslim and Christian Arabs who demographically dominated the Middle East from the category “Semite,” in favor of focusing only on the Jews, also offered a profound historical miscue.

The point, however, was to find a means for re-marginalizing the Jews. Racializing them through the term “Semite” spread as a principle as the nineteenth century moved forward. One might say that it culminated with the pair of essays penned by the German political philosopher, Wilhelm Marr, in 1862 and again in a slightly different guise in 1879, in which he reflected on the notion that the Jews are not Germans and never can be—thanks to their non-German racial make-up—and on the fact that the previous few generations of Emancipation had afforded Jews opportunities and with them, great socio-economic success.⁷ The essays’ ultimate message was one of warning: that, allowed to continue in the mainstream, the Jews will overrun and overwhelm Germany; the nation will be subservient to an outside force—an alien *race*.

Edouard Drumont offered the same sort of warning to his fellow French

7. The first version of his essays was his 1862 pamphlet “The Way to Victory of Germanism over Judaism,” in which he asserted that “Germans and Jews” were locked in a longstanding war derived from their racial differences. He warned that Jews, allowed by the process of Emancipation during the previous 80 years to dominate German industry and finance, were winning that war. Initially all but ignored, the pamphlet—under a slightly different title “The Victory of Judaism over Germanism”—was re-issued in 1879, at which time it became a best-seller.

Catholics, in writing the book *La France Juive* (*Jewish France*), in 1886.⁸ So a century after diverse instances of Emancipation in Western and Central Europe, Jews found themselves once again marginalized, or at least partially so, through redefining what and who “Jews” are, and reclassifying them not as a religion but as a race.

Jewish Nationalism and Its Contexts from the 1890s to the 2020s

By that time, yet another layer of language-and-concept-based definitional complication had evolved with the development of Romantic Nationalism that had gradually emerged in the early the nineteenth century, with consequences both for the definition of Jews and Judaism and for Jewish self-definition. The notion of national identity, which grew with the proliferation of new or definitively shaped nation-states in and after the Age of Revolutions, interwove itself with cultural Romanticism to assert a ineluctable connection between who and what one is and the land where one was born—as if the earth from that land flowed through one’s veins—as well as to the music drawn from the melodies heard on one’s grandmother’s lap, to the poetry and prose built from one’s mother-tongue, and to the paintings depicting one’s people and one’s national landscape. In some cases, this would lead to unification—as with Italy in 1848-61—and in others, break-up, as in the redefinition of the Hapsburg Empire as the Austro-Hungarian Empire in 1867, and eventually, through World War I, into myriad ethnocentric states.

European Jews were affected by this evolution; some of them began to re-shape their sense of Jewish identity, not as religious or ethnic/racial, but as political: are we, perhaps a *nation*? The idea—inspired by the *Risorgimento* and Mazzini’s theorizing about unifying Italian identity and thus reclaiming the glory of ancient Rome—was first articulated in 1862 by the Franco-German Jew, Moses Hess, in his *Rome and Jerusalem*, and came to an activated fruition with the 1896 pamphlet written by the Austrian Jewish journalist, Theodor Herzl, who by 1897 organized the First Zionist Congress, in Basel, Switzerland.⁹

The Jewish Nationalist—Zionist—Movement very quickly became preoccupied with the question of its identity: was it to be political, its purpose to offer an

8. The explosive emergence of antisemitism in France in the context of *L’Affaire Dreyfus* in 1894 and the years following was significantly aided and abetted by Drumont by means of his daily *feuilleton*, *La Libre Parole* (*Free Speech*), in which he continuously excoriated Dreyfus and his supporters as part of the nefarious Jewish conspiracy engaged in trying to destroy France—and the post-Christian world in general.

9. It might be noted that the initial choice for a location for this gathering was Germany, but the Reform rabbinical leadership fought against it: having spent the better part of a century trying to reinforce to their Lutheran and Catholic fellow-Germans that they were Jews only by religion, and Germans by nationality, the last thing they wanted was the promotion of the idea of Judaism as a nationality within their domain! Basel offered a hastily organized plan B location.

instrument of physical survival in the face of the ugly manifestations of antisemitism that were revealing themselves from the East in Tzarist Russia—its plethora of pogroms—and in the West, in France, as manifest in the Dreyfus Affair?¹⁰ Or should it be religious, its purpose to offer an instrument of spiritual reunification and survival in the face of nearly a century of fragmentation into a Jewish community of communities—Reform, Orthodox, Conservative; Hassidic, rabbinic, secular, and further variants—often at verbal war with each other regarding what constitutes being a proper *Jew*?

The eventual shaping of a “Jewish state” by 1948 did not really answer the question, not only because of the different perspectives of different groups of Jews within it as to what “Jewish” or “Jewish state” mean—including groups like the *Neturei Karta* who, while living in the State of Israel, do not recognize its legitimacy, due to their conviction that a Jewish polity into which the dispersed exilic Jews are ingathered can and will only come about in God’s good time when the Messiah comes, rather than through human action. The question also remains unanswered because the Jewish state interweaves theocracy and secular democracy, in which there are citizens who are not Jewish at all: Muslims, Christians, Mormons, Hindus, and Baha’is are the most obvious groups.¹¹

So, too, contrary to Herzl’s dream—that an independent Jewish polity would end antisemitism by offering Jews a new platform from which to relate to the Christian (and Muslim) world on an equal, state-to-state basis, rather than as a “guest” minority within a non-Jewish “host” majority as had been the case for eighteen centuries—was never realized.¹² The animosity and criticisms directed to Israel for its malfeasances, real and imagined, dwarf in size and intensity those offered across the media and popular consciousness for equally or more seriously egregious acts of malfeasance on the part of other nation-states, such as China, India, Malaysia, Russia, Turkey—or the United States.¹³

10. The Dreyfus Affair was the framing, mis-trial, and incarceration on Devil’s Island of the Jewish army officer, Alfred Dreyfus, in 1894, for alleged spying on behalf of Germany; the continuation of the case toward resolution for twelve years; and the wide and deep expressions of antisemitism that emerged with it, fanned in particular, as noted in fn 8, by Edouard Drumont in his *feuilleton*, *Libre Parole*, over that entire period of time.

11. Historically—until events of the past decade under the unfortunate, ugly Prime Ministership of Benjamin Netanyahu, Israel was analogous, as a “Jewish state” to the United States as a “Christian State”—each dominated demographically by a particular religious majority that has affected certain of its norms and wide-held customs, but without imposing any sort of religious qualification in order to be either an inhabitant or a citizen of the polity (although the US initially left the matter of religion as a criterion for suffrage in the hands of individual states; non-Christians (functionally: Jews) could not vote, much less hold office, in Maryland until 1826; and in New Hampshire not until 1877.

12. For details, see Herzl’s 1896 pamphlet, *der Judenstaat* (*The Jewish State*).

13. For an interesting commentary on the phenomenon of this double standard by an American Catholic theologian, see Eva Fleischner’s “Response to Emil Fackenheim” (his paper on the Relationship Between the Holocaust and the State of Israel”), in the 1977 book

Even within the context of Israel's unhappy relationship with the Palestinians, while legitimate upset over Israel's role is repeatedly offered in so many fora, far less awareness of or interest in the responsibility for the difficulties on the part of the Palestinians and the Arab world is shown—most obviously, Jordan and Egypt, in the evolution of the conflict between 1920 and 1947 regarding the proposed shaping of British-controlled Palestine, and between 1949 and 1967.¹⁴ It is hard to disconnect the disparity between criticism of Israel and other countries or Israel and her neighbors from the long negative history of defining and redefining Jews. That history, on the part of the Christian majority—and eventually, thanks to European colonialist interventions in the Middle East, the Muslim majorities—witnessed the ongoing evolution of anti-Jewish sentiment, culminating with political, cultural, and other expressions of antisemitism.

These complications have merged into a newly nuanced complex in the response within the Christian and Muslim worlds to the events in Israel-Palestine-Gaza between October 7, 2023 and the time of this writing. The horrifying nature of the Israeli response to the slaughter of Israelis on that day engendered by the leadership—specifically Mr Netanyahu and his right-wing adherents—is abhorrent. Intense criticism is not only justified but necessarily expansive, as the list of egregious Israeli acts expands. But the astonishing lack of an equivalent response against Hamas is disturbing.¹⁵ This organization, that has had no interest in the welfare of Gazan or West Bank Palestinians at any point in its brief, ugly history; that has used literally billions of dollars of funds that were donated to build schools, hospitals and provide other socio-economic services to Gazans—instead using the

that she edited, *Auschwitz: The Beginning of a New Era?*, based on papers delivered at a July 1974 conference in NYC. She had organized the conference, specifically, to reflect on the Western responses to the Yom Kippur War between Israel and Egypt and Syria of October, 1973. Many other papers echo her comments—and the situation that she and others describe has hardly changed in the half-century since the conference took place and the book came out.

14. I am referring first to the half-dozen proposals for how to divide the 25% that remained of the original "Palestine Mandate" after the British had handed over governance of the 75% east of the Jordan River to the non-Palestinian Hashemite family (who fled the Kingdom of the Hijaz—now Saudi Arabia—after losing a civil war for power to the family of Ibn Sa'ud). The Jews reluctantly accepted each proposal but one, including the final one offered by the United Nations in 1947; the Muslim/Christian Palestinians rejected every single one, demanding nothing less than all of it. I am referring, secondly, to the seizure of Gaza and the West Bank by Egypt and Jordan, respectively, in the aftermath of the 1947-49 war that yielded an independent State of Israel, and their refusal to permit the establishment in either or both spaces of a Palestinian state; nor did they grant Palestinians Egyptian or Jordanian citizenship, relegating that population to a grey no-man's-land regarding political identity. In short: nobody but Palestinians worried about the Palestinians until after the June 1967 Six-Day War. See Soltes, *Untangling the Web of the Middle East*, 36-8,95-104,126-74.

15. It would have been nice to hear or see some awareness of what Hamas did on October 7 and why, in terms of the history of the organization in Gaza during the last 15 years.

funds to dig hundreds of miles of tunnels and secure an extraordinary array of armaments to be used against Israel—has received virtually no comments from across the world. That there is rarely a comment regarding how Hamas so fully divides its *raison d'être* between destroying Israel and Jews in general and expanding its own power at the expense of Gazan lives, is distressing. It would be *astonishing*, were it not for the fairly consistent pre-October 7 history of uneven responses to events in that corner of the world.

A double standard between how Israel and others are judged in the courtroom of world opinion is not so astonishing given the history briefly outlined in the previous paragraphs. And ignorance of the definitional and conceptual issues of the past two millennia has helped reshape the possibility of meaningful dialogue into powerful but meaning-deficient rhetoric with not only confusing but exceedingly violent consequences.¹⁶

That potential, in turn, continues to be actualized by a perfect storm: current Israeli-Jewish leadership that does not care about Israel and its Jewish (much less non-Jewish) population, meeting nose-to-nose a Gazan leadership that is similarly disinterested in the welfare of its own Muslim population. One of the pre-Herzl Zionist thinkers, Leon Pinsker (1821-91), a physician by training, referred to antisemitism—after the Odessa pogroms in Tzarist Russia of 1871 and 1881 dismantled his view that Jews could be assimilated into the Russian Empire—as a cancer, psychosis, and pathological disorder without a known cure.¹⁷ Herzl thought that he had *articulated* a cure in suggesting the creation of a Jewish state. Alas, the long history of defining, understanding, misunderstanding, liking and disliking Jews and Judaism has metastasized further. For that cancer both often offers Israel as a convenient mask for antisemitism and also, for current Jewish Israeli leadership and its supporters it offers the wherewithal to turn the negative side of this series of terms not only outward toward non-Jews but also inward toward themselves. The implications that begin with language end up encompassing both politics and theology—and are, above all, disturbing.

16. One might note, apropos of ignorance that is both linguistic and geographic, that when students—I can only attest, from personal knowledge, to those at Georgetown—were chanting “from the river to the sea, Palestine will be free!” in November-December 2023 protests, many of them had no idea which bodies of water were the reference points for their shouts: asked about this, several responded: “I believe it is the Tigris River and the Black Sea, yes?”

17. He therefore preferred the term “Judaephobia” to “antisemitism,” as in the text of his 1882 pamphlet, *Autoemancipation*—published originally anonymously and in German. For more detail, see Arthur Herzberg, *The Zionist Idea*, 178-99.

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