

***Anti-Judaism: The Western Tradition.* By David Nirenberg.**

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On November 7, 2013, the Yale Program for the Study of Antisemitism and the Judaic Studies Program at Yale University were honored to host a panel devoted to David Nirenberg's important book *Anti-Judaism: The Western Tradition*, published by W. W. Norton in 2013. Four Yale faculty members offered some reflections on the book, which are reprinted below. Included here is also a response by Nirenberg.

Nirenberg's *Anti-Judaism* is less a history of prejudice and persecution than an examination of the persistence of a way of thinking. Why, Nirenberg asks, did so many diverse cultures think so much about Judaism? And what work did thinking about Judaism do for them in their efforts to make sense of the world? The book explores the different ways that people have asked the so-called Jewish question from ancient to modern times and tries to understand what other types of questions—about authority, about flesh versus spirit, about money and capitalism, about the possibility of change, to name but a few—the “Jewish question” has both masked and enabled.

According to Nirenberg, anti-Judaism offers Western culture a heuristic tool—what he calls “a pedagogical fear that gives enduring form to some of the key concepts and questions in the history of thought” (10). This book, therefore, offers a window onto the whole of the Western philosophical tradition. Nirenberg's goal is to get us to see anti-Judaism in a new light, as having very little to do with the Jews themselves and everything to do with how Western culture frames questions about its own identity in ways that change but nevertheless remain identifiable and traceable through time. His real goal, then, is to get us to think critically about what he calls “our own habits of thought and the history of our ideas” (12).

The scholars on this panel come from different disciplines—history, philosophy, and religious studies—and work on periods spanning ancient and modern times. Their challenging comments offer diverse points of entry into Nirenberg's monumental work and suggest some of the ways he has already begun to achieve his aim of stimulating critical thought.

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Anti-Judaism: The Western Tradition is a remarkable achievement. The volume reconstructs the broad, insidious, and extensive presence of anti-Judaism throughout the Western intellectual tradition and shows how we are able to understand the inevitable iterations of nineteenth- and twentieth-century anti-semitism through the prism of intellectual history. The goal of the volume is to recognize the horrors and the devastating forces of the past in our present.

As humans we remain heavily dependent on certain tools of perception and conception that our cultural and biological heritages have taught us are useful. These tools—such as language, causal logic, religion, mathematics—are indeed powerful, but they are powerful precisely because they reduce complexity to intelligibility by projecting our mental concepts onto the world. One consequence of this is that our recognition of significance is always what some philosophers call “theory laden,” meaning that it is shaped by what our theoretical framework and cognitive tools encourage us to recognize as meaningful. Anti-Judaism, as I have argued throughout this book, is precisely this: a powerful theoretical framework for making sense of the world. (463–64)

Nirenberg is, in effect, issuing a warning to Western civilization. If we are not reflective and aware of the penetration of Western tradition by the discourse of anti-Judaism, then we too will repeat the horrors of anti-Judaism.

Much of the book’s discussion involves highly nuanced contextualization in specific historical periods. The contribution of the antiquity section of this volume, however, should be understood in an importantly different manner.

Thus, for example, the apostle Paul is presented as anti-Jewish. Yet in current scholarship it is widely acknowledged that Paul’s relationship to Judaism was far too complex to allow for such a formulation. Anti-Judaism emerged long after Paul’s time, in a “parting of the ways” that was considerably later than used to be assumed.¹ The intimate connectedness between Judaism and Christianity continued long after the destruction of 70 CE. To

¹On the so-called parting of the ways, see Daniel Boyarin, *Borderlines: The Partition of Judaeo-Christianity* (Philadelphia, 2004); Adam H. Becker and Annette Yoshiko Reed, eds., *The Ways That Never Parted: Jews and Christians in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages* (Tübingen, 2003); and James Carleton Paget, *Jews, Christians, and Jewish Christians in Antiquity* (Tübingen, 2010).

speak of anti-Judaism in Paul is thus anachronistic. But it is less problematic if we understand that Nirenberg's interest is in the Middle Ages and in modernity. His chapters on antiquity serve as a backdrop to the later chapters of the book.

Borges famously wrote, "The fact is that every writer creates his own precursors. His work modifies our conception of the past, as it will modify the future."² In accordance with this formulation, the manner that is called "Kafkaesque" is available to future writers, readers, and critics. Once a tradition exists, however, it may serve as a retroactive mode of literary causation. A future writer of genius may succeed in taking Kafkaesque writing in a direction that could not have been anticipated. If it does not constitute a new tradition, this act may reconstitute the existing tradition, since Kafka and his precursors now become the new author's precursors. Texts that were not previously part of the tradition may now be included, while aspects of texts already within the tradition may now be read differently, with an eye or an ear for features that were previously indiscernible or unimportant. Similarly, post-Pauline anti-Judaic writers may be said to have made Paul into their own anti-Judaic precursor. It is with this retroactive tradition, not with Paul himself, that Nirenberg is concerned, and it is in this light that his discussion of Paul should be read.

For at a certain point in the development of Christianity, anti-Judaism did indeed emerge, but it was not as early as Nirenberg's book might suggest. The Marcionite project of purging Christianity of its Jewish roots and the supersessionist project of appropriating the Hebrew Bible for Christianity (promoted by Augustine, for example) were celebrated on the grounds that Judaism was a positive contribution to Christianity, but only in the past. It was a consequence of this latter project that all "good Jews" after the "death of Judaism" had to become Christians retrospectively, so that Philo Judaeus would be remembered or renamed Philo Christianus. It was inconceivable that Philo could have really believed in the law and could, at the same time, have made a vital contribution to the emerging theology of writers such as Clement of Alexandria and Origen. Even the reminder, issued during the Reformation, that Philo had been a Jew was insufficient to end the practice of Christianization. Although Hegel, some 1500 years later, knew that Philo was a Jew, he still had to classify Philo's philosophy within the context of late ancient and medieval Christian philosophy. This was because, on Hegel's account, Judaism had long been dead by the time Philo was writing, so that Philo's vital contribution, along with kabbalah, had to be assigned to Neo-Platonism,

²Jorge Luis Borges, "Kafka and His Precursors," in *Borges: A Reader; A Selection from the Writings of Jorge Luis Borges*, ed. Emir Rodriguez Monegal and Alastair Reid (New York, 1981), 243.

which for Hegel marked the beginning of Christian philosophy. Even today, more sympathetic conceptions of ancient Judaism can still turn out to preserve what some Jews consider to be residues of anti-Judaism.

It is in order to shed light on medieval and modern anti-Judaism, then, that Nirenberg begins his volume with two chapters on antiquity. This is evident in his explanation of his decision to begin in Egypt:

Given our subject, our own voyage to the ancient world will avoid these vast seas of indifference toward Judaism in favor of the few places where our subject became prominent. We begin in Egypt because it is one such place. But we should not forget that by comparison with the cognitive spaces that anti-Judaism would later colonize, those that it occupied in pre-Christian antiquity were tiny islands. It is only thanks to the effects of historical projection that they loom so large. In the maps historians draw of the past, the landscape is always deformed by its future. (14–15)

This is an admirably frank confession, and it is offered here because Nirenberg's chapters on antiquity are more anachronistic than the rest of the book.

This volume invites its readers to participate in a critical reflection on our own categories. As the book makes amply clear, anti-Judaism is generally not, in the first instance, about the Judaism of either past or living Jews. Rather, it is a tradition of thought about religion, society, economics, and culture. Anti-Judaism can also be used against the Judaism of living Jews, however. When it is, the deep roots of the tradition mean that the criticism of anti-Judaism—as historically or religiously inaccurate—comes too late. Nirenberg wields history as a counterweapon. He notes that “dependent as we are on such concepts [anti-Judaism], we can also test them against our evolving experience, refining, transforming, even abandoning them” (464). If we understand the long history of anti-Judaism and its manifold uses over time, then we will be less susceptible to its charms as a critical tool. Historical understanding can set us free—or so Nirenberg's magisterial volume gives us reason to hope.

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In his new book, *Anti-Judaism: The Western Tradition*, as in his earlier *Communities of Violence: Persecution of Minorities in the Middle Ages*, David Nirenberg is engaged by what I would call “Holocaust anxiety” and a preference for “binary analysis.” In the earlier volume, Nirenberg preferred a

contextualization of premodern anti-Jewish events to a “focus on the *longue durée* [that] means that events are read less within their local contexts than according to a teleology leading, more or less explicitly, to the Holocaust.”³ A consequence of seeking historical contexts rather than any single linear narrative of something called “antisemitism” is “that we can be more critical than we have previously been about attempts to link medieval and modern mentalities, medieval ritual murder accusations and modern genocide.”⁴ And, in fact, Nirenberg declared that “the refutation of this widespread notion that we can best understand intolerance by stressing the fundamental continuity between collective systems of thought across historical time, or in this case across one thousand years, is an overarching goal of the present work.”⁵ Nirenberg took on and redefined another binary category in his provocative and original argument that medieval anti-Jewish violence could be a factor of social stability, as seen in certain public rituals, as well as one of destructiveness. Here it was the contrast between “convivencia”—the concept of mutual cultural coexistence or “toleration,” as advanced by historian Americo Castro—and anti-Jewish violence that was potentially undermined. In a brilliant move, Nirenberg argued that this was sometimes a false dichotomy since ritualized acts of violence “can bind and sunder in the same motion.”⁶ By focusing on specific contexts of certain types of violence, we could recognize the surprising fact that “the teleological model has overlooked the fundamental interdependence of violence and tolerance in the Middle Ages.”⁷

In *Anti-Judaism*, too, Nirenberg is concerned with understanding how premodern Jewish history should be related to the Holocaust, but he radically rebalances his earlier assessment of how the same binary categories of contextualized events and continuous antisemitic traditions should be understood. Now he stresses the limitations of the “freedom” or “radical contextuality” that he had promoted in his earlier book: “Others—myself included—dismantled historical teleologies that pointed all of the Jewish past toward the Holocaust” (8). He concedes that “too much ‘liberty’ has blinded us to the power of the past, to continuity, to the possibility that we are somehow constrained by what has been done or thought before us” (9). As a consequence, he asserts “that the Holocaust was *inconceivable and is unexplainable* without that deep history of thought” and that the Nazi enactments “were rather the product of a history that had encoded the threat of Judaism into some of the basic concepts of Western thought” (459).

³David Nirenberg, *Communities of Violence: Persecution of Minorities in the Middle Ages* (Princeton, NJ, 1996), 4–5.

⁴Ibid., 7.

⁵Ibid., 5.

⁶Ibid., 229.

⁷Ibid., 7.

But something else is going on in these two studies as well. In *Communities of Violence*, as part of his critique of linear and teleological interpretations of events from the Middle Ages to Auschwitz, Nirenberg compares violence against Jews with that directed at other groups such as lepers and Muslims. This, too, is a form of contextualizing violence against Jews, but at the same time it decenters Jews from the focus of the discussion. Indirectly, this comparative contextualization bypasses the alleged connection between medieval anti-Jewish violence and the Holocaust by noting that other minorities suffered violence as well, groups that the Nazis did not single out for annihilation, and arguing that therefore the medieval case of violent anti-semitism cannot be the causal link to the Holocaust. Nirenberg shifts the focus further when, in discussing cases of medieval Jewish symbolic violence that could be read as stabilizing as well as destructive, he draws his examples not from medieval German lands, the premodern home of what would become modern Nazi Germany, but from the more irenic sunny lands of Provence and Iberia to the south. Do cases of constructive symbolic violence from the south undercut the linear claim of a long tradition of anti-semitism in Germany? A different reservation about Nirenberg's attention to symbolic violence in Jewish-Christian history in medieval Europe is that the link between medieval history and the Holocaust is based on earlier cases of real violence and persecution, not the ritualized types that upturn the contrast between violence and tolerance. One might therefore feel that Nirenberg's innovative approach to violence is beside the point, if the point is to contest a connection between real medieval anti-Jewish violence and what transpired in the twentieth century.

With his new book, Nirenberg decenters the discussion even more by moving the focus away from the history of the Jews and acts or ideas of antisemitism directed at real Jews. *Anti-Judaism* constructs a new definition of anti-Jewish thinking in the West that Nirenberg claims will explain better than the study of antisemitism per se how the Holocaust was possible.

“Judaism,” then, is not only the religion of specific people with specific beliefs, but also a category, a set of ideas and attributes with which non-Jews can make sense of and criticize their world. Nor is “anti-Judaism” simply an attitude toward Jews and their religion, but a way of critically engaging the world. It is in this broad sense that I will use the words *Judaism* and *anti-Judaism*. And it is also for this reason that I do not use *anti-Semitism*, a word that captures a small portion, historically and conceptually, of what this book is about. (3)

The long history of this newly defined “anti-Judaism” consists of “habits of thought [that] project figures of Judaism into the world” (4). As in *Communi-*

nities of Violence, anxiety about understanding the Holocaust hovers over the analysis:

We will ask how the work done by all these figures of Judaism in the history of ideas contributed to what remains one of the darkest questions of modernity: how, in the middle of the twentieth century, an astonishing number of the world's most educated citizens were willing and able to believe that Jews and Judaism posed so grave a threat to civilization that they needed to be exterminated. And throughout all these chapters we will insist that anti-Judaism should not be understood as some archaic or irrational closet in the vast edifices of Western thought. It was rather one of the basic tools with which that edifice was constructed. (6)

This major revision seeks to understand the Holocaust not by studying how Christians or Muslims, for example, treated historical Jews but rather how the West itself focused on the Jews and Judaism as a trope for all groups that were objects of cultural criticism. Once again, the analysis is grounded in a binary opposition of competing values—this time, Paul's distinction between flesh and spirit—and in a reading of Jews and Judaism as “flesh” in various cultural permutations down to modern times.

In the two chapters that treat the existence of this anti-Judaism in medieval Muslim and Christian societies (chaps. 4 and 5), Nirenberg deviates somewhat from his stated goal. Here we do encounter real Jews as Islam defines and treats them, and we see how medieval Christians accused real Jews of posing threats to the Christian bodies of individuals or society by inventing accusations that sometimes led to anti-Jewish violence. In neither case does Paul's binary of spirit versus flesh actually go very far toward explaining how Muslims (who did not cite Paul) or medieval European Christians understood Jews and Judaism.

For Islam, Jews, like Christians, were *dhimmi*, or protected minority people. They were not uniquely singled out as Other and were valued as “peoples of the book” of revelation. Moreover, the Qur'an does not claim that Islam is the true Israel in a flesh versus spirit contrast. There is a form of supersessionism in Islam's brilliant assumption that Abraham was the first Muslim and that since Jews and Christians misinterpreted the original complete revelation he brought to them, Muhammad now has to bring it to the world again.

And if the Christian West, unlike Islam, can be expected to impose Paul's spirit versus flesh dichotomy on objects of criticism, those objects turn out often enough to be real Jews who are accused of harming not the Christian spirit but Christian bodies. In 1096, for example, Christians attacked Jews in the Rhineland on the rationale that if they were going to attack enemies of

Christ in Jerusalem they surely should attack his enemies nearby in Germany. In the twelfth century, Christian clerics accused Jews of ritually reenacting the crucifixion on young Christian boys, just as later clerics accused them of ingesting Christian blood, or of stabbing the consecrated wafer (the body of Christ), or, during the Black Death, of poisoning the wells of Europe to kill all the Christians.

Nirenberg claims that these persecutions or allegations were directed at Jews because they were protected by the royal government and thus were associated with the material or fleshly realms of this world, in contrast to the spiritual realm of the Church. Perhaps so. But we have here accounts of actual anti-Jewish persecution, not figurative projections of anti-Judaism, and in this chapter, as well as the one about Islam, at least, the program of viewing Judaism as a figurative object of cultural critique does not hold up.

Finally, I raise a basic question about Nirenberg's *Anti-Judaism* in relation to its stated interest in the Holocaust. If the author's goal is to explore factors that account for the Holocaust, is this better achieved by following the history of actual antisemitism in the West or, as in this book, by redefining the problem as an "anti-Judaism" that refers to all objects of cultural criticism? The Holocaust was specifically directed at the extermination of Jews (and Gypsies), not at all objects of cultural criticism. Is a decentered approach that reads anti-Judaism in the West as deeper and broader than hatred of Jews a stronger or a weaker lens through which to examine how the West over time treated and thought about real Jews and eventually tried to exterminate them?

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Books like David Nirenberg's *Anti-Judaism* do not appear very often, and I am grateful for the opportunity to offer some remarks on this veritable tour de force. My comments were prepared for an oral presentation and retain that nature not only in tone but also insofar as they ruminate on disparate issues and raise broad questions more than they illustrate systematically the content and method of the book. In what follows I first address two questions pertaining to the underlying theses of the book; then I turn to issues of historical writing and method that lie at the core of Nirenberg's interpretation by focusing on a specific theme: the perverse and pervasive characterization of Western capitalism as metaphorically "Jewish."

I begin with two concepts: anti-Judaism and antisemitism. In the opening pages of the book, Nirenberg writes: "I do not use *anti-Semitism*, a word that captures a small portion, historically and conceptually, of what this book

is about” (3). The accompanying footnote uses Robert Wistrich’s 2010 volume *A Lethal Obsession* as the foil against which to define anti-Judaism (475 n. 2).⁸ Nirenberg also distances himself from other influential attempts to define antisemitism, which he finds too insistent on the irrationality of prejudice.⁹ In a brief piece elsewhere he explains himself as follows: “I call this system of thought anti-Judaism, rather than antisemitism, because the latter is a narrow sub-set of the former. Antisemitism is the particular, racialised form that Western European anti-Judaism took in the 19th century when it encountered hundreds of thousands of Jewish immigrants from Eastern Europe.”¹⁰ Throughout the book we are discussing, however, Nirenberg offers a more subtle distinction. Antisemitism is a discourse of gentile projections onto and fantasies about real Jews, but anti-Judaism deploys those projections and fantasies in relation to non-Jews as well. It does so in order to organize meanings and articulate values for a society at large and is therefore never random or irrational.

Nirenberg makes this point eloquently, forcefully, and with astonishing breadth. But why is it that the study of “figural Jews,” the projections of gentile imagination, cannot belong to the study of antisemitism? The reason for my question becomes evident if we consider other constellations of pejorative “-isms” that are often cited alongside antisemitism. Racism, sexism, and heterosexism have persisted through the centuries (although only defined as such recently) and have also had the effect of engendering conformity with established norms among all members of a given society, not just within specific groups. That is why racist, sexist, and homophobic epithets are used to denigrate individuals and groups who are not themselves blacks, women, or gays. Racism, sexism, and heterosexism, in this sense, are not at all irrational—indeed, they are used to designate structural inequities whose causes are inextricable from questions about political and socioeconomic power. Like anti-Judaism, they are cultural, social, and psychological tools of coercion; like antisemitism, they can become legal tools of coercion as well. The ultimate challenge that Nirenberg set for himself in this book, as I understand it, was to show that scholars could unlock both the constant interplay and the disjunction between the material and the symbolic in different historical circumstances. The result is a learned exposé that combines

⁸Robert S. Wistrich, *A Lethal Obsession: Anti-Semitism from Antiquity to the Global Jihad* (New York, 2010).

⁹Here, Nirenberg’s reference (577 n. 2) is to Gavin I. Langmuir, *Toward a Definition of Antisemitism* (Berkeley, 1990).

¹⁰David Nirenberg, “Anti-Judaism: A Prejudice Far More Deeply Embedded than Antisemitism,” *The Jewish Chronicle*, September 3, 2013, <http://www.thejc.com/comment-and-debate/essays/111009/anti-judaism-%E2%80%94-a-prejudice-far-more-deeply-embedded-antisemitism>.

close readings and contextualization. But does it require that we define anti-Judaism in opposition to antisemitism or, rather, that we think of the two together?

My second question concerns Islam. If anti-Judaism is a gentile problem and phenomenon, it is also primarily a Christian one. The carnality and literalism with which Paul (formerly Saul) reproaches Jews is possibly the most enduring and poisonous thread that runs across the canvas of the last two millennia of anti-Judaism. Yet in the opening pages of his book Nirenberg takes us by surprise—in a good way, as on so many other pages—by maintaining that “Islam should be included within the rubric [of Western thought]” (2). He thus devotes chapter 4, “‘To Every Prophet an Adversary’: Jewish Enmity in Islam,” to the argument that in ways both similar to and different from early Christianity, the Qur’an and the early Islamic tradition engaged with previous scriptures and deployed figures of Jews and Judaism in order to define a new religion and a new polity. Nirenberg ends the chapter on a cautionary note: “In Islam the Jews’ peculiar positions in scriptural ontology and their peculiar position in Muslim societies *did not often* combine in such a way as to generate politically useful general theories capable of explaining the world’s struggles in ‘Jewish’ terms—*not often, that is, until modernity*” (182, my emphasis). This is a sensitive subject at a time of rising Muslim antisemitism and anti-Zionism.

Nirenberg parts with Islam sometime in the early eleventh century. His modernity is a Western modernity, in which that initial and provocative statement about the inclusion of Islam in Western thought fades away. What does it mean to confine the treatment of Islam to its scriptural and temporal beginnings while claiming that it is part of “the Western tradition”? Can the chronological hiatus in Nirenberg’s account generate, inadvertently, a greater sense of continuity than is warranted between the early Islamic tradition and modern Muslim discourses about Jews? If the inclusion of early Islam in the Western tradition arguably stands for a rejection of the paradigm of the clash of civilizations, the emphasis on the Qur’an and the early Islamic tradition alone may, by contrast, implicitly gesture toward an ahistorical continuity that feeds that very paradigm and sidelines the aggressive insertion of Christian thought and European politics into the Middle East, particularly since the seventeenth century.

The elision of Islam from the treatment of modernity has other implications. For Edward Said, Orientalism and antisemitism mirrored one another.¹¹ Today, some theorists believe that Islamophobia has replaced anti-Judaism as an organizing principle of Western thought. Anne Norton thus

¹¹Commenting on his study of Orientalism, Said wrote: “by an almost inescapable logic, I have found myself writing the history of a strange, secret sharer of Western anti-Semitism. That anti-Semitism and . . . Orientalism resemble each other very closely is a historical, cul-

plays with Karl Marx's famous essay in the title of her latest book, *On the Muslim Question*. Writing about Europe and North America, she claims that "in our time, the figure of the Muslim has become the axis where questions of political philosophy and political theology, politics and ethics meet."¹² For Norton, figures of Muslims have replaced figures of Jews in Western debates about citizenship, equality, sexuality, and democracy.

I am too much of a historian to overlook Said's ambivalence: his Orientalism is sometimes the outcome of a specific historical moment and sometimes a transhistorical figment of the Western imagination. I also do not believe that Islamophobia and antisemitism compete with each other. Nor do I think that Islamophobia and anti-Judaism are entirely analogous. But the insistence with which President Obama has been called a Muslim in order to dispute his loyalty to the United States and his fitness for office raises the question: Are there similarities in the ways in which Islamophobia and anti-Judaism operate today? And if so, is that analogy one of the paradoxical ways in which Islam belongs to the Western tradition?

I now turn to one of Nirenberg's principal concerns: Why have Jews been so "good to think with" about the morality of credit?¹³ Here Nirenberg focuses on two sets of debates: those on usury in the late Middle Ages and the sixteenth century and those on financial and industrial capitalism in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Several scholars have noted the malleability of the figure of the Jewish usurer and its uses, starting in the twelfth century, as a stand-in for the "greedy Everyman" or even to denounce specific groups of Christian moneylenders.¹⁴ Recent revisionist scholarship

tural, and political truth that needs only to be mentioned to an Arab Palestinian for its irony to be perfectly understood." Edward W. Said, *Orientalism: Western Conceptions of the Orient* (New York, 1978), 27–28.

¹² Anne Norton, *On the Muslim Question* (Princeton, NJ, 2013), 2.

¹³For the adaptation of Claude Lévi-Strauss's notion of "good to think with," see Ronald Schechter, *Obstinate Hebrews: Representations of Jews in France, 1715–1815* (Berkeley, 2003), 7, 36.

¹⁴See, e.g., Léon Poliakov, *Les banquiers juifs et le Saint-Siège du XIIIe au XVIIIe siècle* (Paris, 1965), 50–51; Lester Little, *Religious Poverty and the Profit Economy in Medieval Europe* (Ithaca, NY, 1978); Giacomo Todeschini, *La ricchezza degli ebrei: Merci e denaro nella riflessione ebraica e nella definizione cristiana dell'usura alla fine del Medioevo* (Spoleto, 1989); Myriam Greilsammer, *L'usurier chrétien, un juif métaphorique: Histoire de l'exclusion des prêteurs lombards, XIIIe–XVIIe siècle* (Rennes, 2012). I borrow the expression "greedy Everyman" from R. Po-Chia Hsia, "The Usurious Jew: Economic Structure and Religious Representations in an Anti-Semitic Discourse," in *In and Out of the Ghetto: Jewish-Gentile Relations in Late Medieval and Early Modern Germany*, ed. R. Po-Chia Hsia and Hartmut Lehmann (Cambridge, 1995), 161–76.

by Michael Toch on the economic functions of medieval Jews further highlights the distance that separates images from reality.¹⁵ Nirenberg's virtuoso reading of Shakespeare's *Merchant of Venice* is arguably the most eloquent rendition of these interpretations. When he turns to the nineteenth century, Nirenberg shows how "habits of thought, put to work in changing historical circumstances, can create new and powerful ways of thinking about the modern world" (439). What he finds is a convergence between Marxist and various stripes of conservative views on exchange, commerce, and finance. Karl Marx, the papal encyclical *Rerum Novarum* (1891), and Werner Sombart all disliked capitalism and all depicted it as "Jewish." Not so Max Weber, for whom the economic activities of "pariah Jews" did not amount to capitalism. And, we may add, not so Adam Smith, who reconceptualized capitalism without regard to the Jews. Evidently, Nirenberg argues that there is anti-Judaism and that there are different modernities (plural). But he leaves us to speculate: Is economic liberalism more open to commerce and thus less tainted by anti-Judaism?

The major thinkers Nirenberg engages with seem to suggest as much, but that is not the direction *Anti-Judaism* is interested in taking. To counter the impression that societies that affirmed the virtue of commerce are impervious to the allegorical use of Judaism as a criticism of capitalism, Nirenberg cites an arresting 1810 editorial in the *Boston Patriot* in which an anonymous reader denounced local merchants and speculators (presumably none of them Jewish) as betraying "striking marks of resemblance to the children of Israel" (428). The rest of this text is equally stunning. It shows that anti-Judaism circulated well beyond the circles of high learning and surfaced in unlikely contexts; it is thus proof of the obstinacy of the gentile imagination even in a place like the young United States of America, which embraced economic liberalism against British mercantilist regulations, never set any restrictions on Jewish worship, and granted citizenship rights to Jews from the start (at least at the federal level). But is this editorial in the *Boston Patriot* enough to conclude that the specter of anti-Judaism haunted all modern critiques of speculation to the same extent and in the same fashion? Admittedly, this is a rare case in which Nirenberg's textual references are not as voluminous as elsewhere in the book. I ask nevertheless because the relationship between Jews and capitalism is such a vexed question that the line of argument that Nirenberg pursues may demand a fuller spectrum of evidence. More generally, this particular example reveals some of the difficult choices Nirenberg had to make in order to cover over three millennia of history. I cannot help but feel that the sections in which he explores times and places closest to

¹⁵Michael Toch, *The Economic History of European Jews: Late Antiquity and Early Middle Ages* (Leiden, 2012).

his areas of expertise (such as the relation between Jews and political power in medieval Europe or the Spanish Inquisition) have a different texture than the others, in which he often retreats from the specificities of material struggles. I understand this imbalance to be in part the result of a conscious choice to counter decades of marginalization of the history of ideas from the mainstream of the historical profession and the desire to remind us of the power of ideas “to shape our perceptions of and actions in the world” (7). But I wonder to what extent this refuge in the realm of ideas is also dictated by limitations in the sheer feasibility of the project, and what price it may exact from the very goal Nirenberg set for himself: the understanding of the continuities as well as the varieties of anti-Judaism.

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David Nirenberg has succeeded in writing that rare thing: a book that tells the truth. The truth he tells in *Anti-Judaism: The Western Tradition* is that anti-Judaism has been an organizing principle of Western thought since the beginning. So ambitious is the book’s historical sweep that there is no surprise in the fact that Nirenberg’s book does not tell only the truth; and it goes almost without saying that no mortal can tell the whole truth. My task, then, is threefold: to highlight Nirenberg’s important and awful truth, to point out some places within my domain of expertise where he has slipped, and to suggest ways in which his narrative could and should be supplemented.

Crucially, Nirenberg’s thesis concerns anti-Judaism, not antisemitism. This is important, and not only because antisemitism is a nineteenth- and twentieth-century phenomenon, a reaction against the emancipation of the Jews that was eventually underpinned by pseudoscientific theories of race. It is also important because as every well-meaning, liberal-minded contemporary knows—or thinks she knows—antisemitism is a thing of the past, utterly prohibited by civilized society and therefore all but impossible. Surely it is only aging SS men in South America or self-proclaimed Aryans in Idaho who could possibly be antisemites today! This is why the suggestion that, say, an obsessive interest in the vices of the Israeli state may smack of antisemitism causes so much offense. How could a self-proclaimed progressive’s support for boycotting Israel be antisemitic? After all, the hypothetical boycotter is neither a relic from the 1930s nor the devil incarnate. At such moments, the distinction between the criticism of an act and the indictment of a personality, familiar enough in debates about other forms of discrimination, disappears from view.

Is anti-Judaism also consigned to the past? Among well-meaning contemporaries the question is more likely to invite confusion than to provoke offense. Some will plead neutrality or even indifference. How could one criticize, of all things, someone else's religion? It is as ill-mannered as criticizing someone else's family. On the other hand, one must admit that we criticize other people's families quite often. Should it be different, then, when it comes to their religions? If one has a right to be a Christian, a Muslim, or an atheist, does one not have the right to prefer one's own religion and to criticize the religions of others? What is wrong with being anti-Judaic?

Indeed, Nirenberg's point is not that there is something straightforwardly wrong with being anti-Judaic. His thesis is that anti-Judaism is neither a mere prejudice nor a reasonable criticism of the religion or culture of actual Jews. It is a way of thinking—or, rather, a tradition of ways of thinking—that has helped people to make sense of their worlds since the dawn of the West. To name just a few uses: one may criticize certain practices or developments as Judaizing whether they are religious, cultural, aesthetic, or economic; one may brand one's opponents as Jews; one may characterize the change for which one is calling in terms of the supersession of Judaism by Christianity. This framework has proved incredibly plastic. For over a millennium, it has helped Christians and post-Christians make sense of their relationship, not only to actual Jews, but also to each other, and to a wide range of historical changes. (The Islamic world, which clearly requires a book-length treatment in its own right, is given only one chapter here; but the importance of the variations—two Abrahamic faith communities allying against the third, one making war on a second and assigning its enemy's attributes to the third, and so on—is such that the interaction between Christian and Islamic anti-Judaisms should not be neglected.) Over the last few centuries, anti-Judaism has helped people make sense of a broad range of experiences of modernity. The key to its plasticity is its independence from the presence and character of actual, living Jews.

The problem, of course, is that—inconveniently, as it may be—actual, living Jews also exist. Even if anti-Judaism is not primarily about them, it can all too easily come to be about them. An abstract critique of modern economics or art can, under certain conditions, become a concrete critique of real live Jews, who are seen, not in their own right as people who need to be understood, but as instances of the idea of Judaism—a concept that, of course, thanks to the anti-Judaic tradition, everybody thinks they already know. And a concrete critique can become a political or economic attack, or an act of violence. As Nirenberg says, “I am not claiming that the long history of thinking with and about ‘Jewish questions’ inevitably led to or caused the ‘Final Solution.’” “But,” he continues, “I do believe that the Holocaust was *inconceivable and is unexplainable* without that deep history of thought” (459).

I want to highlight a particular strand of the anti-Judaic tradition on which I think Nirenberg has something important to say: the tension between Augustinian supersessionist and Manichaean eliminationist versions of anti-Judaism, which came to the forefront once again in nineteenth- and early twentieth-century German philosophy and theology. Whereas followers of Mani—echoing Marcion—sought to purify Christianity of its Jewish legacy, Augustine sought to vindicate Judaism relative to its proper epoch. As Paula Fredriksen has recently argued, Augustine extended to Jewish practices, including sacrificial rituals, the figural interpretation previously given only to the narrative events of the Hebrew Bible.¹⁶ Not only Manichees like Faustus, Augustine's interlocutor, but also earlier critics of Marcion, such as Tertullian, had been exclusively negative about Jewish practices, which they regarded as having always been based on a misunderstanding of the divine will. In contrast, Augustine's approach was, in the words of the title of Fredriksen's book, a "defense of Judaism." Jews had been right to observe the law, and this included Jews such as Jesus and his apostles. Only with the end of the apostolic generation—roughly, the destruction of the Temple—did the law lose its force. What was wrong with Jews since that time was not that they observed laws intrinsically alien to the divine will, but that they did not understand that with the coming of Jesus the times had fundamentally changed. Judaism had been superseded. What Jews were blind to, in Augustine's view, was the true character of unfolding time.

Drawing on some of Nirenberg's insights, I want to underline some of the complexities of this "defense": the tendency of anti-Judaism, even when it is relatively benign, to morph into a source of danger, and the conditions under which this danger can come to threaten "real Jews," notwithstanding the fact that anti-Judaism is a tradition that thrives in their absence. Nirenberg notes a technique that he attributes not only to Augustine but also to Luther, Hegel, and Weber. It consists not merely in a condemnation of certain traits and tendencies as "Judaizing" but also in "an infinitely flexible way of 'Christianizing' relation, communication, and exchange, while projecting the inescapable residue of stigmatized materialism, literalism, or abstraction into figures of Judaism" (444).

Hegel's anti-Judaism is very much in the Augustinian line. This is especially the case in Hegel's later lectures on the philosophy of religion, where he emphasizes the sublimity of Judaism and its genuine accomplishment in liberating human beings from all varieties of earthly domination. What Jews are blind to is, once again, the character of time—or, in a more Idealist idiom, the participation of human life in the coming-to-be of absolute spirit. Just as

¹⁶See Paula Fredriksen, *Augustine and the Jews: A Christian Defense of Jews and Judaism* (New York, 2008).

Judaism is what Christianity has had to supersede—not only in antiquity but also in the middle ages, and not only in the other but also within itself—so modern philosophy can grasp its time only by overcoming the Judaizing of both Kant and Spinoza. This attributes great significance to Judaism but, for the present task, Judaism takes on an exclusively negative valence. There is certainly an important distance between Hegel’s “appreciation” of Judaism and Fichte’s Manichaean attempt to eliminate it from Christian modernity. But when persistent Judaism comes to seem the main obstacle to progress and when its idea comes to seem embodied in actual Jews—as it did for Bruno Bauer in his movement from Left Hegelianism to Prussian conservatism—this distance is easily traversed.¹⁷

Many are familiar with one or two episodes in the long history of Western anti-Judaism, but few if any of us are familiar with the entirety of the narrative that Nirenberg traces with great lucidity and intricate subtlety. Inevitably, a book of this ambition will slip in ways detectable to specialists, and I want now to mention a few missteps in what Nirenberg says about Kantianism. So intent is he on tracking anti-Judaism that he occasionally sees it where it is not, or amplifies it where it is. There is no doubt, for example, that Kant’s moral philosophy is deeply imbued with anti-Judaism, since its central distinction between autonomy and heteronomy is implicitly an anti-Judaic reading of Romans 2:14 and 7:23, understood as contrasting the gentiles who give themselves the law with the Jews whose “other law” (*heteros nomos*) is given from without. But I do not think this justifies an account of Kant’s theoretical philosophy in anti-Judaic terms that Kant does not use, as Nirenberg does when he compares pre-Kantian philosophers, who fail to distinguish appearances from things in themselves, to the Pharisees (393). And, where Kant does use anti-Judaic terms, we must be careful not to read his rhetoric, even at its most horrific, as a prefiguration—to use Augustine’s term—of the Nazi final solution. At this most challenging moment, Nirenberg slips. It is hard enough, after the Holocaust, to read Kant’s statement in *The Conflict of the Faculties* (1798) that “the euthanasia of Judaism is pure moral religion, freed from all the ancient statutory teachings, some of which were bound to be retained in Christianity (as a messianic faith). But this division of sects, too, must disappear in time, leading, at least in spirit, to what we call the conclusion of the great drama of religious change on earth (the restoration of all things), when there will be only one shepherd and one flock.”¹⁸ But Nirenberg misreads the passage, making it worse: “Kant envisions the ‘euthanasia of Jews and Judaism’ in messianic terms. The Jews,

¹⁷See Paul Franks, “Inner Anti-Semitism or Kabbalistic Legacy? German Idealism’s Relationship to Judaism,” *International Yearbook of German Idealism* 7 (2009): 254–79.

¹⁸Immanuel Kant, “Der Streit der Fakultäten,” in *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 7 (Berlin, 1917), 53, translated by Mary J. Gregor and Robert Anchor as “The Conflict of the Faculties,” in

he says, will convert . . . to a purely moral religion, which will then itself disappear” (360). In fact, Kant does not speak of the euthanasia of Jews at all, and the future he envisions is one without the conflation of politics with religion that he considers not only characteristic of Judaism but also a problematic feature of Christianity. When both Christianity and Judaism are liberated from that conflation—and, hence, from messianism, which of course has remained part of Christianity until this point—then both Christians and Jews will be united in “pure moral religion,” which, as a demand of reason, will never disappear.

Mostly absent from Nirenberg’s narrative—as they mostly are from the tradition that is his topic—are actual Jews, except on the occasions when they have been anti-Judaic thinkers of note. No doubt this was necessary in order to achieve his valuable purpose. The whole truth, however, would bring out the complex, dialectical interaction between Jewish contributions to Western thought and anti-Judaic thought—not to mention philo-Judaic thought. In part because of an ineliminable Christian belief in the mystery of Judaism, even the most apparently insular developments of Jewish thought have been able to make surprising contributions to Western thought in general. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, for example, ideas drawn from the all but inaccessible thought of the kabbalists Moses Cordovero and Isaac Luria played a significant role in philosophy and natural science, thanks to a dedicated group of linguistically gifted Christians and their Jewish teachers. However, the reassertion of anti-Judaism in the nineteenth century meant that these ideas were often appropriated on behalf of Christianity and that their origins in a vibrant Jewish intellectual life were eventually forgotten. It is also worth recalling that anti-Judaism may sometimes involve a genuine critique of Judaism, or at any rate a challenge to which Jewish thinkers may profitably respond. Some of the most important developments in nineteenth- and twentieth-century Jewish thought have involved responses to the Augustinian critiques of Judaism internal to Kantianism and its Idealist descendants. The need to show that Judaism is not heteronomous in Kant’s sense—that it is either autonomous or else heteronomous in a good sense, or that it eludes the dichotomy—has been formative for modern Jewish thought and has contributed greatly to general ethics as well.

David Nirenberg has done all of us a great service. I hope that his enormous achievement, which reveals the work of a master historian who negotiates analytical detail without ever forgetting how to tell a story, will prove to be what it deserves to be: the beginning of a conversation about the past that is vital to the present and future of the West.

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I am very grateful to Maurice Samuels, architect of this intellectual encounter, and to Hindy Najman, Ivan Marcus, Francesca Trivellato, and Paul Franks for the gift of engagement they offer. That engagement stages, it seems to me, some of the most basic and difficult questions imaginable for a historian. How can we grasp another person's thought world? With what interpretive practices should we approach the words, whether spoken or written, that mediate and communicate that world? How do we determine the degree of continuity or discontinuity in those thoughts, since even at the level of the individual states of consciousness are so unstable across time? Moving from individual to group, how do the thoughts and ideas of one person interact with and affect those of another?

Even when we remain within the narrowest chronological and sociological frame—such as, for instance, a family debate about contemporary local politics around the dinner table—these questions are difficult to answer. They are still more difficult when we attempt to ask them about thoughts and ideas from more distant cultures and temporalities. But those are precisely the questions we must ask if we wish to write history, and all the more so if that desire is animated by the conviction (as it so often is) that being in time and in the world is not radically discontinuous, that some relations, at least, must exist between pasts and futures, even if we can never know precisely what those relations are.

In *Anti-Judaism* I attempted to confront some of these questions head-on through what seemed like a particularly challenging test case, one that is too often treated, on the one hand, as stable and eternal—"antisemitism, the longest hatred"—and, on the other, as so radically mutable and discontinuous that, to exaggerate slightly the position of Hannah Arendt, the present owes nothing to the past. I proposed instead an approach that requires movement from context to context across space and time—we might call this approach transcontextual—in order to recognize both some of the particularities of any given moment in space and time and some of the potential interactions of any moment with multiple pasts and futures. How thoughts past might affect thoughts future, and vice versa: this was my most basic question.

What makes the case of *Anti-Judaism* so challenging is not only that the history involved is so long but also that the stakes are so high. For example, three major religions derive from that history. (My inclusion of Judaism here may surprise some, but it too developed, like Christianity and Islam, through a constant critique of a false Israel: a critical discourse modeled in the Hebrew Bible as much as in the New Testament and in early Islamic texts.) As

a result, many of the values we hold most dear have been constituted, or at least frequently expressed, in terms that have the potential to resonate with an anti-Judaism we have learned to condemn. Moreover, that history also contains many episodes of considerable violence, including one so massive that it ranks among the constitutive traumas of modernity, reorienting (among many other things) our historical sensibilities and narratives. Whether to embrace or resist the teleological attraction of that tragedy: these sometimes seem the only options available to the historian. I hoped to suggest that other choices exist, even on a topic as difficult as this.

From the responses in this forum I see that I have not entirely succeeded in making my own choices convincingly clear. The fault is surely often my own, but it is also sometimes due (or so I wish to plead) to the particular interests and interpretive commitments of my readers. Hindy Najman, for example, writes:

Much of the book's discussion involves highly nuanced contextualization in specific historical periods. The contribution of the antiquity section of this volume, however, should be understood in an importantly different manner.

Thus, for example, the apostle Paul is presented as anti-Jewish. Yet in current scholarship it is widely acknowledged that Paul's relationship to Judaism was far too complex to allow for such a formulation. Anti-Judaism emerged long after Paul's time, in a "parting of the ways" that was considerably later than used to be assumed. The intimate connectedness between Judaism and Christianity continued long after the destruction of 70 CE. To speak of anti-Judaism in Paul is thus anachronistic. But it is less problematic if we understand that Nirenberg's interest is in the Middle Ages and in modernity.

Insufficient contextualization and anachronism: the reproach is only softened by the gracious suggestion that these faults are due not to ignorance but to a lack of interest, because the sharper points of my engagements lie in some distant future.

My gratitude for the gentleness is as real as my surprise at the characterization of my argument. Where in my pages devoted to Paul (53–66, 85) is he "presented as anti-Jewish"? On the contrary, those pages repeatedly point out precisely what Najman insists we bear in mind, as where I cite some of the very views she is championing, and write: "In other words, Paul did not intend his letter as an attack on Judaism, though that is precisely how many later Christians would read it. He sought only to explain to the gentile Galatians, in scriptural terms, why their justification did not require them to observe these aspects of the Law" (59). Repeatedly I stress "complexity,"

though it is a word we historians too often hide behind, as if every historical argument were not inevitably a radical and theory-laden reduction of complexity. And I try to insist on the interplay between Paul's possible intentions as an author, the many interpretations of those intentions that could have been generated by readers in his own period and community, and those of the much more numerous readers of Paul's texts in other times and places. But I also insist that we take seriously the terms Paul himself chose for his pedagogy, his creation of hierarchically ordered oppositions (such as flesh, Law, letter, slavery, Hagar, and terrestrial Jerusalem versus spirit, freedom, Sarah, and the heavenly Jerusalem), and his use of the word "to Judaize" to designate the slippage from the spiritual to the fleshly side of these pairings. My goal was to demonstrate some of the stigmatizing aspects of the labor Paul assigned to "Judaism" in his pedagogy, a pedagogy I take to have been influential. Nowhere did I claim he advocated a parting of the ways, and nowhere did I call him anti-Jewish. I simply attempted to demonstrate that there is some relation, neither simple nor necessary, between the forms and terms that Paul chose in order to teach his followers to distinguish critically between the claims of body and soul and those that would appear in later Christian pedagogies and critical discourses.

Professor Najman is not alone in her critique of my treatment of early Christian texts. And there is certainly a flourishing post-Holocaust school (and it is a school, rather than a general consensus) that separates these early Christian texts from anything meaningfully akin to the anti-Judaisms that were later built upon them. Sympathy with this school, which I myself share, may encourage a tendency to minimize stigmatizing aspects of the critical work done with "Judaism" in the early Christian community, as I think Najman herself does when she characterizes the Marcionites as "celebrating" Judaism's positive contributions to Christianity. More significantly, such sympathy sometimes puts scholars in the odd position of claiming, like modern-day Luthers, that through their own hermeneutics they can not only determine Paul's, or Jesus's, or the gospels' original intent but also meaningfully isolate that intent from all the interpretations to which these words were subject from the very moment of their utterance—that is, from the beginning of their existence in time.

The continuities and discontinuities of our objects of thought within the flux of time: since Heraclitus and Parmenides there have been few topics more disputed or more basic. I raise them again here only to stress the difficulties of the problem with which I think we are wrestling, as I attempt to clarify what I took to be my arguments and my method. But earlier I mentioned two reasons why the stakes concerning the specific topic of anti-Judaism are so high, of which scripture was only one. The other was the Holocaust.

According to Ivan Marcus I am “engaged by . . . ‘Holocaust anxiety,’ ” in my new book as in my previous one. He offers as evidence of this anxiety in the earlier book my argument that medieval violence should not be made to point to the Holocaust: a claim that seems to me unfalsifiable, since it takes my argument for antianxiety as proof of anxiety. Concerning *Anti-Judaism*, his evidence that the “Holocaust hovers over the analysis” is one sentence plucked from a long line of statements in the introduction:

We will ask how the work done by all these figures of Judaism in the history of ideas contributed to what remains one of the darkest questions of modernity: how, in the middle of the twentieth century, an astonishing number of the world’s most educated citizens were willing and able to believe that Jews and Judaism posed so grave a threat to civilization that they needed to be exterminated. (6)

Certainly that is a question I pose in chapter 13, on modernity—the chapter being described in the sentence Marcus quotes, and a period in which, I hope, it is appropriate to inquire into the Holocaust. But it is not a question I pose of my other chapters, nor does it receive much more attention in an introduction of twelve pages. In fact, as Jonathan Decter pointed out in a review, the rather recondite term “Ebionite” receives about as many index entries as “Holocaust” in the book.¹⁹ Perhaps paucity of reference is also evidence of anxiety. But I prefer to think that my treatment of the Holocaust was appropriate to the problem that interests me. In every chapter I am asking how the past history of ideas and concepts affected the possibilities of thought in the present (by present here I mean the period covered by the relevant chapter, not our own present, though that is vitally important as well, since historians are rarely absent from their own world). I do the same in the chapter on modernity, attempting to demonstrate how the Holocaust was potentiated (not necessitated!) by the habits of thought I call anti-Judaism.

As for “binary analysis,” I hope to learn more about what Marcus might mean. For now I take it to reflect the fact that in *Communities of Violence*, as in *Anti-Judaism*, I was interested in the conceptual categories with which past peoples made sense of their world and in the relationship these categories have to our own analytic categories as historians, anthropologists, linguists, and so on, attempting to make sense of societies present and past. Polarities and oppositions (binaries?) are indeed an important part of how people have structured their world: “So look upon all the works of the Most High, and

¹⁹Jonathan P. Decter, “Like a Jew: Anti-Judaism in Early Islam and Medieval Iberia,” review of *Anti-Judaism*, by David Nirenberg, *Marginalia Review of Books*, December 11, 2013, <http://themarginaliareview.com/archives/5023>.

these are two and two, one against another” (Sirach 33.14). One need not adopt these systems of thought in order to think that they are worth studying and to suspect that they have played an important role in the history of our own critical concepts. My goal in studying them is neither to embrace nor to reject them, but rather to show how an awareness of the ways in which they influence our thought can itself open newly critical perspectives on both the past and the present. Perhaps that is what is meant here by “binary analysis”? If so, I happily accept the description.

But some of the binaries Marcus finds in *Anti-Judaism* I am less willing to acknowledge as mine. His characterization of my argument in terms of the “binary” of “flesh” and “spirit” is highly reductive, since this is only one of the myriad hierarchies at work in my analysis. But even if I were to accept that reduction, his use of it to critique my Islamic and medieval chapters would remain odd. After all, in Islam excessive materialism and attachment to the flesh is a common critique of the Jews (“greediest of mankind for life,” Qur’an 2:96). I confess I am puzzled by Marcus’s treatment of these chapters. But I think his more important concern lies elsewhere.

Much of Marcus’s critique revolves around the distinction between “real Jews” and figures of Judaism. In my book I am trying to insist on a point I think too often forgotten: thinking about “Judaism” is not only thinking about “real Jews,” and thinking about Judaism affects the possibilities of existence not only for Jews but for many others as well. In order to make that point I often highlight the power of figures of Judaism. But I certainly do not understand the figural and the real as a binary (that would make little epistemological sense), nor do I seek to sever the interaction between them. This should be evident even in the words Marcus quotes from the introduction:

“Judaism,” then, is *not only* the religion of specific people with specific beliefs, *but also* a category, a set of ideas and attributes with which non-Jews can make sense of and criticize their world. Nor is “anti-Judaism” simply an attitude toward Jews and their religion, but a way of critically engaging the world.” (3, emphasis added)

In nearly all of the chapters—and certainly in the ones he singles out for criticism, such as the one on medieval monarchies—I try to make clear just how dense the interactions are between figures of Judaism and Jews in the flesh, between “thought” and “reality.” I do not suggest—even in chapters on places with few or no “real” Jews living in them, such as Shakespeare’s England—that this interaction can be severed, even if at times, for certain analytical purposes and in the interest of pursuing specific questions, we can choose to emphasize one of its aspects more than another. Here it seems to me to be Marcus who is anxiously insisting on a binary in order to split it,

in order to dismiss the importance of anything other than those Jews of flesh and blood whom he does not want “decentered.”

Marcus is concerned with fundamental aspects of my methodology in *Anti-Judaism*, and he is not alone in those concerns. Francesca Trivellato perceives a very similar problem when she writes:

The ultimate challenge that Nirenberg set for himself in this book, as I understand it, was to show that scholars could unlock both the constant interplay and the disjunction between the material and the symbolic in different historical circumstances. The result is a learned exposé that combines close readings and contextualization. But does it require that we define anti-Judaism in opposition to antisemitism or, rather, that we think of the two together?

I could not ask for a better description of the challenge. The criticism is of an opposition Trivellato perceives to be posed within a definition of anti-Judaism, and here too I am in complete agreement with her criticism of that opposition. But the definition she criticizes is nowhere in my book. It is not even in the quotation from the story she references in *The Jewish Chronicle*, where the relation is one of synecdoche, not opposition. In fact, there is no stipulation of a difference between anti-Judaism and antisemitism in the book that I know of, except the one she quotes, and that one is, again, devoid of opposition: “I do not use *anti-Semitism*, a word that captures a small portion, historically and conceptually, of what this book is about” (3).

My refusal to define the relation between the two concepts was conscious, but perhaps mistaken. It might have been better to answer explicitly in the book the question that a Holocaust survivor movingly put to me at a book party after publication: “Was I a victim of anti-Judaism or of antisemitism?” The answer I tried to put forward on that occasion was “both” (no opposition!). Antisemitism is our name for a particular form of anti-Judaism, one that emerged under specific political, economic, demographic, and other conditions we associate with modernity. Anti-Judaisms in other times and places need not have the particular forms we associate with antisemitism. (Some might argue, for example, that race is a constitutive element of modern antisemitism, but not of other forms of anti-Judaism.) But all share the ability to project Judaism into the world, to make sense of the world through Jewish figures of thought. The distinction Trivellato offers—“antisemitism is a discourse of gentile projections onto and fantasies about real Jews, but anti-Judaism deploys those projections and fantasies in relation to non-Jews as well”—is not mine.

Perhaps this is already the beginning of a response to Trivellato’s second important point, about “other constellations” of pejoratives. Islam is the constellation she focuses her question on, and I remain as struck by that question

as I was when she voiced it in the lecture hall in New Haven. Why did I choose to approach Islam the way I did? The difficulty I was trying to address is already clear in the one passage Trivellato cites from the chapter: "In Islam the Jews' . . . peculiar position in Muslim societies *did not often* combine in such a way as to generate politically useful general theories capable of explaining the world's struggles in 'Jewish' terms—*not often, that is, until modernity*" (182, her emphasis). I do take it to be the case that today we can easily find in parts of the Muslim world "politically useful general theories capable of explaining the world's struggles in 'Jewish' terms." What relation do these theories in the present have to the past? The topic is itself a very polemical one, with some arguing that "Islamic antisemitism" is eternal and others suggesting that "antisemitism" is entirely a European import into Islam, a product of European colonialism and especially of the Zionist colonization of Palestine. I hoped to show that the choice is a false one.

It is true that many of the forms of thought and the concepts and figures of Judaism that we find in late antique Christian culture were indeed present in early Islam. This should not be surprising given the close connections between early Islam and late antique Christian and Jewish communities. Those concepts did important work in early Islam, and they remained available in foundational texts, ready to be put to new kinds of work in different times and places. I drew on a medieval example to demonstrate what new kinds of work some of these transformations and adaptations could produce. But I hesitated to provide a chapter on such questions in the twentieth century because I feared it might draw my entire historical project into too fierce a contemporary polemic, creating unnecessary resistance to my arguments about more distant pasts. For the same reason, the book stops with the Second World War and provides no chapter meditating on possible relationships between anti-Zionism and anti-Judaism. It was not my intention to "generate, inadvertently," an "ahistorical continuity" or to suggest that Islam has not had (multiple) modernities. If I did not carry my history beyond the medieval, it was not because I believed history had come to an end.

The ends of history are very much at issue in Trivellato's own concluding questions. Her point seems to be—albeit the point is made through citation of others—that more of my historical inquiry should be oriented toward the Islamophobia of the present, or perhaps toward any of the many other discourses of hatred present in the world today. I am not sure why writing the history of any one influential system of thought need require writing the history of (all?) the others, no matter how important they may be. But I agree that the possible analogies between contemporary Islamophobia and anti-Judaism are an important topic indeed, as is the study of the historical processes by which adherents of all three religious traditions learned to understand their worlds in terms of each other. My own exploration of some of these topics

will appear in my forthcoming book, *Neighboring Faiths: Christianity, Islam, and Judaism, Medieval and Modern*.²⁰

Trivellato's last question is as fascinating as her previous ones: "Is economic liberalism more open to commerce and thus less tainted by anti-Judaism?" It is a question I did not explicitly ask in the book, and it is an important one; the political theorist Jennifer Pitts asked me a similar question, based in part on her sense of the paucity of references to Judaism in Adam Smith's work. In *Anti-Judaism* I cited some research on aspects of this question; I did not take it up myself.²¹ But neither, in my treatment of the *Boston Patriot* editorial or anywhere else, did I suggest, claim, or "conclude that the specter of anti-Judaism haunted all modern critiques of speculation to the same extent and in the same fashion."

"Sameness," "similarity," "difference": these are the basic terms of every historian's (indeed, every human being's) cognitive tool kit, and they cannot be handled with enough care. In part my book was meant as an attempt at self-conscious experimentation with those tools. In it I do suggest that there is something to be learned from the formal similarities between, for example, the editorial in the *Boston Patriot* and Karl Marx's "On the Jewish Question," just as I suggest that there is something to be learned from the formal resemblances between certain Gospel terms and those deployed by Goebbels. But just what that something is—that is far from clear. Since nowhere in the book do I ever argue that anything is the same as anything else, I have to assume that Trivellato's characterization of my argument stems in part from her own interpretive commitments, one of which seems to be that "the specificities of material struggles" are more meaningful than whatever relations can be found in "the realm of ideas" and that approaching those specificities requires density of evidence that cannot be achieved in a history like mine that spans broad swaths of time and space.

Of course, other readers may not share that conviction. Paul Franks, for example, provides so lucid a description of the techniques and traditions of thought that I attempted to describe across my chapters on German Idealism that I can only wish he had written those chapters himself. I would, however, defend myself against his suggestion of one particular "slip" or "misstep" about Kantianism. Franks writes:

And, where Kant does use anti-Judaic terms, we must be careful not to read his rhetoric, even at its most horrific, as a

²⁰*Neighboring Faiths: Christianity, Islam, and Judaism, Medieval and Modern* (Chicago, 2014).

²¹See, e.g., the comparison of English and German antifinancial discourses in Mark Loeffler, "Producers and Parasites: The Critique of Finance in Germany and Britain, 1873–1944" (PhD diss., University of Chicago, 2011).

prefiguration—to use Augustine’s term—of the Nazi final solution. At this most challenging moment, Nirenberg slips. It is hard enough, after the Holocaust, to read Kant’s statement in *The Conflict of the Faculties* (1798) that “the euthanasia of Judaism is pure moral religion, freed from all the ancient statutory teachings, some of which were bound to be retained in Christianity (as a messianic faith). But this division of sects, too, must disappear in time, leading, at least in spirit, to what we call the conclusion of the great drama of religious change on earth (the restoration of all things), when there will be only one shepherd and one flock.” But Nirenberg misreads the passage, making it worse: “Kant envisions the ‘euthanasia of Jews and Judaism’ in messianic terms. The Jews, he says, will convert . . . to a purely moral religion, which will then itself disappear” (360). In fact, Kant does not speak of the euthanasia of Jews at all, and the future he envisions is one without the conflation of politics with religion that he considers not only characteristic of Judaism but also a problematic feature of Christianity.

Of course, I entirely agree that Kant considers this conflation a problematic (and “Jewish”) feature of Christianity, a point I made as well. And I am convinced that my characterization of Kant’s religious drama of the Jewish conversion to moral religion as “messianic” did obscure an important part of Kant’s point. But the charge of orienting all this toward the Holocaust by misreading “Die Euthanasie des Judenthums” is, I think, unwarranted. It is not only that I do not express any “Holocaust anxiety” here. (A glance at pages 358–60 confirms that I nowhere hint that this “euthanasia” should be understood in terms of a future: that choice is Franks’s.) It is also that Franks’s choice of translation is, I believe, more partial than mine. “Judenthum” in German means both Judaism and Jewry, the Jewish people. I attempted to retain some of the ambivalence in my translation, “euthanasia of Jews and Judaism.” Franks prefers to leave the people out of the picture.

Defensiveness aside, Franks is absolutely right about the many beautiful books that are absent from my own. To “bring out the complex, dialectical interaction between Jewish contributions to Western thought and anti-Judaic thought—not to mention philo-Judaic thought”: this would be a great project; indeed, many great projects. So would Trivellato’s parallel histories of Islamo- and Judeophobia and of liberal and nonliberal anti-Judaisms, Marcus’s Jew-centered history of medieval monarchy, and Najman’s history of a Paul innocent of any intentions other than his own. I wish that I had thought to or had been able to incorporate these questions into *Anti-Judaism*. I console myself with the comfort that St. Augustine offered a fellow bishop: one cannot say everything in one sermon.

“The Moving Finger writes; and, having writ, / Moves on.”²² But if the finger is fortunate, its words will be rewritten—which is to say interpreted, given new meaning—by great readers. Too seldom is an author ever vouchsafed the great good fortune these pages from such admired colleagues have offered me. Thank you.

²²Edward FitzGerald, *Rubáiyát of Omar Khayyám: A Critical Edition*, ed. Christopher Decker (Charlottesville, VA, 1997), 194.