




2007

## Menorah Review (No. 66, Winter/Spring, 2007)

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarscompass.vcu.edu/menorah>

 Part of the [History of Religion Commons](#), and the [Religious Thought, Theology and Philosophy of Religion Commons](#)

© The Author(s)

---

### Recommended Citation

<https://scholarscompass.vcu.edu/menorah/64>

This Full Issue is brought to you for free and open access by the VCU University Archives at VCU Scholars Compass. It has been accepted for inclusion in Menorah Review by an authorized administrator of VCU Scholars Compass. For more information, please contact [libcompass@vcu.edu](mailto:libcompass@vcu.edu).



VCU Menorah Review

*For the Enrichment of Jewish Thought*

Winter/Spring 2007 no. 66

**A Collection by MR's Poet Laureate**

Richard E. Sherwin

**Examining Historiography**

A Review Essay by Matthew Schwartz.

**Revisiting Jewish Radicalism:**

Reviewed by Steven Windmueller, Ph.D.

**The World of Rabbi Nathan**

A Review Essay by Peter J. Haas

**Why a *Dictionary of Antisemitism***

By Robert Michael

Editor:

Jack D. Spiro

Editorial Consultant:

Cliff Edwards

Production:

VCU University Relations

Contributing Editors:

Paul R. Bartrop

Frank E. Eakin Jr.

Cliff Edwards

Esther Fuchs

Daniel Grossberg

Peter J. Haas

Herbert Hirsch

Brian Horowitz

Frederic Krome

Radael Medoff

Robert Michael

Rochelle L. Millen

Matthew B. Schwartz

Richard E. Sherwin

Jonathan T. Silverman

Kristin Swenson

Melvin I. Urofsky

Sarah B. Watstein

Leon J. Weinberger

Steven F. Windmueller

## A Collection by MR's Poet Laureate

Richard E. Sherwin

### I.

Finally it's done just as Gd wants  
and Moses said and now we leave it to  
the priests to sing their barbecues  
displace the price of sin and soul upon

the air the sizzling savor richly spiced  
tickling the holy nostrils out of anger  
sneezing up a whirlwind when Job likes  
but keeping us alive and out of danger

if only Gd would settle on the ark  
between the cherubim and speak the clouds  
that tell us when to move and when to park  
our tents our carcasses our goals our shrouds

instead of riding inside all our passions  
flooding us with conscience priestly fashioned  
1647

### II.

watching jesus doing his best to force  
authorities to hang him out to dry  
then playing hide and seek until he's got  
the crowd worked up enough to help him die

a pretty clumsy job and didnt do  
that well until his students rewrote the script to screw  
the Jews the Romans had already screwed--  
no one left to tell a different truth

besides by then the kingdom he preached had come  
satan and Constantine converted together  
in the cross they conquered the world the flesh  
and all else not nailed down or fun

it seems to me Im watching the same old game  
rebels and tyrants merely changing names

### III.

Well the Temple's built  
and I owe Gd and priests more  
herds at least by three  
than Argentina's got or  
getting given grim disease

and drought both here and  
there and anyway Ive not  
cash not now not then  
to cover even minor  
sins tho no one knows what's which

to reach for symbols  
when realities collapse  
and bankruptcy makes  
no more hope than walking out

a high rise window does -- it's

time past time to write  
the future histories that  
lie me out of debts  
and into credits even  
Gd must honor otherwise

to put Him bluntly  
what's He good for in this world  
He made and dumped us  
in imperfect calculus  
our inescapable sin

IV.

What's original  
at all in Adam's sin or  
Eve's or even the  
serpent's? We're made for hunger  
curiosity and lies

Who ever needed  
Christs or Jews to fix or tell  
such tales of Eden  
blaming everyone except  
oneself including Gd who

clothes us kicks us out  
to work the body into  
carcass earth into  
the grave precipitate that

Abel's sacrifice achieved

Better wander with  
Cain protected thru the world  
I'd say of wolves were  
not humanity enough  
Adam Jews and Christ enough

V.

Time to let Gd go  
back to sleep the hearing aid  
turned off creation's  
light bulb blown to smithereens  
the big pop fragments slicing

thru dark stars so bent  
no sound no silence escapes  
and like an empire's  
daymare's endless expansion  
ridicules all gravity

and we're let off all  
hooks of sin and virtue to  
hang free and meaning  
less as uncommanded love  
Let Gd be Love and Done With

*Richard E. Sherwin is a professor of English (retired) at Bar Ilan University, Israel.*

## Examining Historiography

***Sanctifying the Name of God: Jewish Martyrs and Jewish Memories of the First Crusade* by Jeremy Cohen. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.**

A Review Essay by Matthew Schwartz.

How reliable are the several twelfth century Hebrew chronicles that recount the story of the crusaders' massacres of Rhineland Jewish communities? Can we take them at face value, granting a certain leeway for human error or a few minor scribal inaccuracies? Most modern historians accept these stories as essentially factual primary sources. However, in a display of considerable erudition, Professor Jeremy Cohen of Tel-Aviv University alters the direction of the investigations.

Labeling himself a revisionist and not a denier, Professor Cohen argues that the chronicles of the massacres were written some years after the first crusade and reflect many influences beyond the simple recounting of the events as they actually happened. This must be the case, he argues, with all historical writing, so that in truth every historian or chronicler presents his own version of events and is by definition a revisionist. A history book teaches more about itself and its writer than about the events it describes. A later reader as well as the writer likewise carries some amount of baggage into his understanding of events.

It is naïve, writes Cohen, to expect historians to reconstruct accurately and objectively the events of the past, although this has been the usual aim of nineteenth and twentieth century historians. It is more useful to inquire how the twelfth century historians viewed these events – not history but historiography.

Why then did these chroniclers write? Cohen points out that, after all, clearly the writers were not themselves victims of the massacres. They were either survivors or children of survivors, maybe people who had accepted baptism under pressure or force and returned later to Juda-



ism. Indeed some of the stories in the chronicles describe people who did not die in the initial onslaught but only some days later. The writers may have suffered from survival guilt or a need to rationalize the baptisms of themselves or family members. The crusades were a deeply frightening experience which left people resentful and traumatized and ever fearful of tomorrow.

Cohen argues also that despite their mutual hostility, the Jewish writers were influenced by trends in Christianity of that time; e.g. both admired martyrdom – and the Jewish stories can display motifs similar to Christian accounts of the crucifixion, as though to say “our martyrs are better than yours.” Also twelfth century Jews were more involved in the general culture than is usually acknowledged. Jews were aware of the crusading ideology developing in that time and certain ideas of holiness and messianism seemed to be sprouting in both religions.

In George Bernard Shaw’s *The Devil’s Disciple*, when General Burgoyne is asked what history will say about the events leading up to the Battle of Saratoga, he replies: “History will tell lies as usual.” A burgeoning group of writers indeed holds that it is impossible to achieve a wholly accurate knowledge of historical events, and we must limit ourselves to studying the writers and why they wrote what they did in the way that they did. Focusing on the relationship between the historian and his data, Professor Cohen offers in the early chapters, a detailed study of both traditional and post-modern approaches to the Rhineland massacres.

The final chapter critiques several stories of Jewish martyrs: Rachel of Mainz, Isaac the Pious and others. Cohen interprets these stories almost as though he were studying novels, not historical texts. He finds analogies in biblical motifs, which indeed implies a high degree of both knowledge and literary sophistication on the chroniclers’ part. This is certainly in some measure valid, although the comparisons can seem stretched. Does the word *toran* (mast) really compare to the word *Torah*? (p. 100) Did the Jewish chronicler really intend to compare Rachel of Mainz to Mary at the crucifixion? (pp. 123-4)

A lengthy discussion goes on to explore the background of Rachel of Mainz in Jewish traditional sources, primarily in terms of the biblical Rachel. Professor Cohen sees the matriarch as a barren and bitter woman betrayed by her father-in-law (*sic*) and irrationally despondent. Giving her son the name Joseph was obsessive. "Rachel is a consummate tragic heroine, the Bible's equivalent of Antigone..."

This view is mind-boggling and shows a lack of understanding of the Greek ideas of heroism and tragedy and a failure to recognize the enmeshment of Antigone, daughter/sister of Oedipus, with her dysfunctional family. After all, the members of Antigone's family died miserably, she herself by suicide.

Professor Cohen offers a provocative view of the story of Judah of Cologne who performed what seems almost a ritual murder with sexual symbolism on his son and the son's fiancée as the crusading mob approached, although to suggest that this story borrows from legends of the antichrist seems excessive. In any case, it should not be surprising that people under terrible threat often responded with less than perfect clarity of mind and perhaps also with an inclination to the macabre. It is amazing that so many Jews indeed held to their basic life principles and accepted death rather than baptism.

This is a well researched and intellectually honest book. One can well accept Professor Cohen's argument that historians gain much from the historiographical approach. Yet, as he acknowledges, many scholars will not accept his views on the crusade chronicles. The book goes far in displaying an indecisiveness and unwillingness to accept the importance of textbook facts or even the ability to know them. Facts must remain an important part of historical study. There also seems to be certain determinism in Professor Cohen's way of understanding writers. People are indeed influenced by environments both societal and personal, but how they are influenced is not always predictable. We know that two people can grow up in the same household and one can become a fine citizen and the other a gangster. More important, people can overcome or alter factors in their background. Is a historian so

limited and biased by his ambience that he can never produce something original or different? Even historians change their minds. There is something Hellenic and fatalistic in such a deterministic approach. Is Professor Cohen pulled between tendencies toward the Jewish vs. Greek views of human history?

Although Jews did interact in some ways with the general society in the Middle Ages, the basic views of martyrdom remained very different. Rabbinic texts praise martyrs who gave their lives rather than violate the essential ways of the Torah. However, Judaism is deeply life oriented and a martyr's death is something to be accepted when necessary, not something to seek joyously. This contrasts to early Christian martyrs who deliberately glorified death, sometimes in the arena pulling a reluctant animal close to them. The early third century narrative of Perpetua in Carthage describes vividly that martyr's great longing for death. And is not the crucifixion a primal moment of Christianity. Typically, the Jews of 1096, did what they could, albeit not very successfully, to flee or find protection from the overwhelming force of the crusader hooligans, accepting martyrdom only as unavoidable. In some cases, Jews fought back, and the chronicler's record that in one community 500 armed young Jews joined the local noble's soldiers to drive away their enemies.

Professor Cohen assigns an Amos Oz novelette on the crusades to his classes to set the tone for his approach to the chronicles. Oz's story is a great read, yet it remains fiction while the chronicles are not. Nor indeed are the chronicles simply textbook histories or straightforward compilations of data. They are more dirge or lamentation, a genre that goes back many thousands of years and is well represented in Jewish literature. They are not merely recording or transmitting data but also feelings and ideas. The chronicles are closer in nature to the *piyyut* of those times. One writer, R. Eliezer of Mainz, was a prominent Talmudic scholar and liturgical poet as well, who recorded several commemorative poems in his brief crusade chronicle.

*Matthew Schwartz is a professor in the history department of Wayne*

*State University and a contributing editor.*

## Revisiting Jewish Radicalism:

### **An Examination of the Writings of Jack Nusan Porter**

Reviewed by Steven Windmueller, Ph.D.

*Jewish Radicalism* (Grove Press) and *The Jew as Outsider* (University Press of America) reflect the writings and intellectual interests of its principal writer and editor, Jack Nusan Porter. Both books address the question of Jewish marginality. Similarly, both volumes were previously published. This marks the 30th anniversary of the first book and the 20th anniversary for the second. While the materials from both texts are drawn from earlier periods, the core discussion about Jewish radicalism has a sustaining value. The publication, *Jewish Radicalism* was co-edited by Porter and Peter Dreier. This volume contains some thirty-five essays extracted from the writings of "Jewish radicals" covering materials from such elements as the Jewish left and right, the Zionist socialist camp, the Jewish feminist movement, and the Jewish counter-cultural world. This collection incorporates the most significant works of David Twersky, M.J. Rosenberg, Arthur Waskow, J.J. Goldberg, Mary Gendler, and Hillel Levine among others of that time period.

While *Jewish Radicalism* incorporates the core ideas and significant writers covering the period of the 1960s and 70s, to have included literature of the next generation of radical Jewish politics would have provided a major contribution in this edition. Had Porter and Dreier incorporated for example the thinking of Michael Lerner and other writers from *Tikkun Magazine*, the post-Zionist thought of Benny Morris and his circle, and the reflections of the Jewish neo-cons, including Richard Perle, William Kristol, Elliot Abrams, and Charles Krauthammer, this would have added immeasurably to this work allowed both the editors an opportunity to compare two generations of Jewish activists.

In the second volume, *The Jew as Outsider*, Porter has devoted his research to the study of marginality and its impact on Jewish intellectual and social activism. In the end for Porter, Jewish marginality

is tied to emancipation. While he concedes that this state of being may not be healthy, he states: "It can lead to a neurotic division of the soul and mind. Yet out of this neurosis can emerge a richly creative contribution to society." Clearly for some in the radical camp Judaism was a liberationist ideology that could be employed as a roadmap for social change, yet for others it was seen as yet another appendage of Western culture that had been co-opted by the political establishment for its own ends. As a result for Porter radicals came in various forms, those that he would describe as "insiders" whose politics were carried forward within a Jewish context, while others would be identified as "outsiders" rejecting Jewish ideas and institutions, and in the process seeking to revolutionize the larger society.

While some of the essays address specific subject-matter from a 1970s perspective, including his work on the Jewish single adult, the framework of this article offers some helpful insights into questions associated with Jewish identity formation and options for serving and meeting the needs of unaffiliated Jews. A second example rests with his essay entitled "The Jewish Upper Class" which is in part drawn from Porter's two year experience teaching at an exclusive school which he labels as "Parkhurst College." Here the reader is introduced to both the sociological literature on how the wealthiest Americans behave and in turn, how American Jews have constructed their own status levels based on their family's country of origin and socio-economic patterns.

Of particular interest within this volume is Porter's retracing of the emergence of Jewish contributions to the field of sociology, and more directly his literature review pertaining to research on Jews and anti-Semitism. Here, this volume moves from examining the narrower focus on radicalism to a broader understanding of the study of group social behavior.

While clearly times have changed and, more directly, the social and political standing of Jews has also undergone a significant transition. The "voices" of dissent which once forced the community to be particularly self-critical in examining its priorities and politics also seems

to have dissipated, leaving a vacuum in the quality of discourse that occupies the Jewish political center. The radical politics of the 60s and 70s that shaped the general dialogue around political choices within American society as well as the internal arguments over Jewish public policy concerns have not been replaced with a new brand of engagement. Jews who occupied the center stage of many of these key movements including feminism, the anti-war camp, and social activism are today for the most part absent from the political barricades, not that one can identify a culture of dissent that is significant within our society. In lieu of constructing movements of social dissent, one finds today pockets of social activism among Jews as the expression of their personal engagement with religious and social values. Mitzvah days, fundraising events, educational and cultural programs have seemingly replaced the barricades and picket lines.

*Stephen Windmueller is director of the School of Jewish Communal Service at Hebrew Union College in Los Angeles and is a contributing editor.*

## The World of Rabbi Nathan

***The Making of a Sage: A Study in Rabbinic Ethics* by Jonathan Wyn Schofer. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press.**

A Review Essay by Peter J. Haas

Nearly 30 years ago, William Scott Green published his study on the early rabbinic sage, *Persons and Institutions in Early Rabbinic Judaism*. His was the first substantial attempt to fix the character of the rabbinic sage on the basis of a literary-critical and historical-critical reading of the texts. In light of the developments that have taken place in the study of early Rabbinic Judaism—in literary theory and in our understanding of Roman and Persian civilization and culture in Late Antiquity—one would expect the book before us to build on and carry forward the work of Green. In this, Schofer's volume disappoints.

Although it is not clear from the title, *The Making Of A Sage: A Study In Rabbinic Ethics* is in fact not a study of the Rabbinic sage per se, but is rather a commentary on a single work, namely *The Fathers According To Rabbi Nathan* (to be referred to hereafter as ARN = *Avot d'Rabbi Natan*), albeit with an eye on what it says about the sage. In other words, the author's intention is to use ARN as a springboard for launching us into an examination of what it meant to be a rabbi and a sage in Roman Late Antiquity (and so, one suspects, what it means to be one today). To this end, Schofer tells the reader right at the outset that he intends to address three distinct but inter-related topics: what did it mean to be a rabbi in the classical period, what were the ethics of this rabbinic estate, and how do rabbis and their ethics fit into the culture and society of Roman Late Antiquity.

At first glance this agenda seems to be too broad and comprehensive to be satisfied through the reading of one book, particularly one as compositionally complex as ARN. As the author himself is careful to point out, we have no firm knowledge about the date, place or manner of the book's compilation. Given the uncertainties of ARN's prove-



nance, it is hard to see how it can be used as an historical source. For Schofer, however, this complexity and ambiguity is not a weakness but in fact a strength. It is precisely this indeterminacy that allows him to claim that the book is not the voice of a single person or perspective, but is in some way representative of the rabbinic community in general, in Palestine during the late Tannaitic/early Amoraic period. That is, Schofer claims that the very composite nature of ARN allows us to treat it as reflective of the mainstream rabbinic consensus of its time and place. It should be noted that Schofer does not go so far as to say that ARN represents all Jewish points of view at the time. He notes, for example, that the ethics of ARN seem to be tension with other voices, such as “the Hasidism”. But with this qualification acknowledged, the author does claim that through an examination of this text we can adduce a broad picture of what the normative rabbinic Jewish leadership of the time regarded as the quintessence of the sage.

I shall return to this foundational assumption in a moment, but for the time being let us grant the author’s claim, at least for argument’s sake, that ARN is roughly representative of classical rabbinic ethics in the Palestine of its time. We can then turn to the method by which information will be gleaned from the work. The first of Schofer’s three chapters is devoted to this task. We begin with what might loosely be called a form-critical analysis. The predominant literary form of the work, he notes, is the maxim; that is, the wise saying of the sage. This is opportune since such maxims are, of course, prime sources for adducing ethical perspectives. Further, the author notes that in ARN, as in rabbinic literature in general, the maxims are arranged not by ethical topic but by sage. This mode of compilation, Schofer claims, grows out of the rabbis’ valuation of genealogy and the chain of tradition over the creation of systematic, ahistorical, philosophical inquiry.

Besides maxims, two other literary forms are detectable in ARN: The commentary and the narrative. The commentary form grows out of the fact that ARN presents itself as a commentary on the earlier *Ethics (or Chapters) of the Fathers (Pirque Avot)*. Thus the specific message of a passage in ARN can be adduced by understanding the passage

on which it is commenting and the direction the comment takes in the generative passage. The narratives, on the other hand, through the stories they tell, provide us with exemplary illustrations of virtuous behavior. It is our task as readers to adduce the meaning of these various forms by placing ourselves in the cultural context out of which ARN grows and in which it assumes its readers to be situated. This context, we are told as though it were self-evident, is the rabbinic school with its teacher-disciple relationship and a mutually supporting peer group among the students (I assume Schofer has the Talmudic "hevruta" in mind here). Once we understand how it is we are to read ARN, we turn, in the second chapter, to an actual reading of ARN to identify the ethics of the sage that the book articulates and promotes.

The overall thesis in Part Bet, "Rabbinic Tradition," is articulated in the conclusion, wherein it is asserted that, "according to the prescriptions of *Rabbi Nathan*, a rabbinic student becomes a sage through a process of subordination to, and internalization of, the Torah" (p. 116). This conclusion is hardly surprising and, despite its placement in the conclusion, is in fact assumed from the outset. That is, rather than leading us through a reading of the text and discovering this vision of the sage in it, Schofer assumes this result at the outset and then illustrates it and fleshes it out by selective citations from the text. The method, then, is deductive rather than inductive.

In other words, Part Bet is devoted to spelling out in more detail the inner workings of this ethic. The vision of the sage operative in ARN assumes, according to Schofer, that all humans contain within themselves basic impulses ("lev," "yetser") and that shaping the ethical life is a process of delimiting ("fencing in"), cultivating or governing these impulses as appropriate. The tools for determining what is appropriate, and for how one is to carry out the proper cultivation or governance, are illustrated in the rabbinic traditions about the life and teachings of the ideal sages. With this fundamental anthropology in mind, Schofer proceeds to illustrate, nuance and develop this view through his series of commentaries on selected readings of ARN.

This literary strategy is important for understanding the mission of the book before us. It is not, as we noted above, a study of an early rabbinic text as an historical and social document. It is rather the use of an early rabbinic text to illustrate certain preconceived notions of what early rabbinic Judaism must have been. In other words, the real subject of the book is a certain reading of classical Rabbinic Judaism, not the particular compilation known to us as the *Fathers According to Rabbi Nathan*. The operative mindset out of which this method grows can be identified by looking at two great theoreticians of how rabbinic texts should be read: Max Kadushin and Jacob Neusner. By approaching ARN as he has, Schofer has taken a clear stance on a methodological issue that has divided the world of the modern academic study of rabbinic literature. Let me explain.

For Max Kadushin, there is such a thing as “the” rabbinic tradition. To be sure, this tradition is hardly monolithic and stable across time and space; it acts rather like a living, growing organism, adjusting to exterior influences yet maintaining its internal integrity. On this view, there is no such thing as a definitive and final statement of the “doctrines” or “dogmas” that make up the tradition. Rather the tradition receives expression through a multidimensional network of symbols that interact and combine with each other in complex arrays of semi-otic relationships. The governing idea is an organism as opposed to a system. One ramification of viewing the rabbinic tradition in this way is that one can see any major work as reflective, if only partially so, of the larger whole. In other words, in some ways every rabbinic book can be seen as a microcosm of the rabbinic macrocosm, containing in itself the essential patterns of thought that characterize the tradition at large. It is on the basis of this logic that Schofer can claim that ARN is representative of the rabbinic community in general.

Jacob Neusner, in contrast, began a series of studies nearly 40 years ago in which he stipulated that before one could make grand claims about “the” rabbinic tradition of Late Antiquity” (or any other era), one had to read the actual texts one by one, each on its own terms. Thus there is a bounded and distinct Judaism of the Mishnah, for example,

that is different from the Judaism articulated in the Jerusalem Talmud on the one hand and the Babylonian Talmud on the other. This is not to say that these various "Judaisms" are totally distinct and unrelated, but it is to say that they are not entirely interchangeable. The job of the modern scholar is to be sensitive to the differences that animate each text. This is possible only if the scholar reads the texts as each authorship presents it, not by chopping the text up according to categories brought in from beyond the borders of the text. ARN, in this view, should not be seen as a microcosm of some macrocosm, but as its own statement of Judaism, built as a commentary on (and so a re-statement of) an earlier, received tradition, in this case, Pirque Avot. This is not to deny outright that ARN is not representative of a broader community of rabbinic Judaism, it simply means this last claim has to be shown, not assumed. Put in another way, the ethics of the sage in ARN needs to be adduced from this document alone, and then compared to the results of conclusions reached from the reading of other texts. Only with all this comparative data on the table can the scholar begin the synthetic work of seeing what commonalities exist as to what constitutes a "sage" in classical Judaic culture.

The methodological disagreement between Kadushin and Neusner sketched above is not merely a matter of strategy but in fact reflect two radically different epistemologies. For Kadushin, there is an essence, or "Geist" that gives shape to the macrocosm and so animates all of its particular textual expressions. Such an abstract essence can be accessed through any and all of its expressions, be this literary, artistic or linguistic. This is a view that was very much bound up with the *Wissenschaft des Judenthums*. Neusner's break with this scholarly tradition was founded on the text- and form-critical analysis that had been developed in modern biblical studies. What was of interest was not so much the commonalities, but the individual and particular. In a sense for him there was no "rabbinic Judaism" per se, but only a range of "Judaisms" and their texts, reading and commenting on each other so as to create a certain cultural and religious continuity (which then could be labeled, loosely to be sure, "rabbinic Judaism"). What

this approach loses in global understanding is made up by insight into the multidimensional texture of the Jewish religious tradition as it was lived out in its various communities.

That Schofer indeed adopts the Kadushin model and not that of Neuser can be shown by his treatment of the two different versions of ARN (conventionally labeled "A" and "B" following the first scientific publication of the work, by Solomon Schechter in 1887). For the Neuserian approach, one would need to select one version as the basis of the study because it is the text as we have it that is our primary datum. Schofer, in contrast, feels free to pick and choose among the two versions as the need to illustrate his thesis dictates, although he relies mostly on "A". Where Schofer does note differences between the versions, these are treated as essentially of little weight or meaning. There is no systematic attempt to see if some theological, literary or other principle underlies these divergences. Instead, both versions are treated as composing a single coherent textual corpus.

The third part of the book deals with rabbinic theology. The central theme here is, as expected at this point, drawn from the outside. It is "divine reward and punishments." The author comes to the obvious, really inevitable, conclusion, namely, that God rewards obedience and good behavior and punishes disobedience and bad behavior. What of course makes this conclusion "new" here is that it is asserted to be the governing trope of ARN. But the relationship of this theological theme and the content of the actual document Schofer is claiming to explicate are far from clear. Consider the following sentence that opens the conclusion of this chapter: "The rabbinic theology of reward and punishment consists of interrelated concepts and tropes through which the compilers of Rabbi Nathan frame the totality of their practice and set it in relation to normative ideals" (p. 145). In other words, the trope "divine reward and punishment" already exists out there in rabbinic theology and provides the framework within which the compilers of ARN crafted his text. The problem with this view and its formulation is that it is tautological. The existence of the trope is posited, examples are then carefully teased out and examined, and the results are then

used to demonstrate that the trope indeed exists.

As in Part Bet, Schofer does go into some greater detail as to the content of this trope. The text sets up a series of values by which the sage is to instruct his disciples. The values to be inculcated uphold the value of scholarship and obedience to Torah, God's word. In particular, the sage is to train disciples to be careful with speech and to nurture a certain character by controlling the heart, or yetser. By so doing, one earns God's reward. These are the values, embedded in rabbinic Jewish thought in general, that are found to be characteristic of ARN as well.

At the end, Schofer turns to one of his three governing questions, namely, how this ethic relates to the Greco-Roman world and its culture in Late Antiquity. To this basic question Schofer turns out to have no answer. He concedes that on this point his answer is "heuristic rather than historical" (p. 165). The rabbinic world, he notes at the end, was after all a distinct community which in its literature rarely references the outside world. Once again, the premise of the book turns out to be self-fulfilling. *The Making of a Sage* proceeds from the assumption that it represents a closed community internally consistent and externally distinct from its surrounding.

In the end, then, the book is less a scholarly study of the ARN text, despite its 100 pages of endnotes (for a text of roughly 170 pages), than it is a scholarly commentary on the ARN literature as a microcosm of classical rabbinic literature more generally. To be sure, the discussion is rich and nuanced, and the author's passion for the rabbinic values he sees at the heart of ARN is clear. But this is really a rabbinic discourse on a rabbinic textual tradition about a putative rabbinic ethic. It should not be approached as an academic book that uses modern methods to socially locate and critically analyze from a neutral standpoint a text from Late Antiquity.

*Peter J. Haas, the Abba Hillel Silver Professor of Jewish Studies, chairs the Department of Religion at Case Western Reserve University, and is*

*a contributing editor.*

## Why a *Dictionary of Antisemitism*

**(This essay is adapted from the Introduction to Robert Michael and Philip Rosen, *Dictionary of Antisemitism from the Earliest Times to the Present*, Lanham, MD.: Scarecrow Press [<http://www.scarecrowpress.com>], 2006.)**

By Robert Michael

To attempt to define and trace the permutations and combinations of antisemitism, the world's longest and most pervasive hatred is a daunting task. In 1879 Wilhelm Marr created the word *Antisemitismus*, and it swiftly found its way into Europe's languages. (Moshe Zimmermann, *Wilhelm Marr: The Patriarch of Antisemitism*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986) Antisemitism in the broadest sense means hostility toward Jews and everything Jews—not "Semites"—stand for. (Shmuel Almog, "What's in a Hyphen?" SICSA Report: Newsletter of the Vidal Sassoon International Center for the Study of Antisemitism, Summer 1989) Indeed, there are no Semites; there are only peoples who speak Semitic languages. More specifically, antisemitism refers to the irrational dislike or hatred of Jews, the attempt to demoralize or satanize them, the rejection of the validity of the Jewish religion, the Jewish way of life, the Jewish character, the Jewish spirit, and, ultimately, the Jewish right to live. In his *Nature of Prejudice*, Gordon Allport has indicated that antisemitism and anti-Jewishness, like other ethnic prejudices, express themselves as antilocution, avoidance, discrimination, physical attack, and extermination. Assault, expropriation, expulsion, torture, and murder could be added to his list. The German scholar Josef Joffe analyzed these psychosocial aspects of antisemitism: stereotyping, denigration, demonization, obsession and elimination. (Josef Joffe, "Nations We Love to Hate: Israel, America and the New Antisemitism," *Posen Papers in Contemporary Antisemitism*, No. 1 Vidal Sassoon International Center for the Study of Antisemitism, Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 2005, 1–16)

Three analogies from the chemical, medical and biological sciences



may clarify antisemitism's ideological functions. First, although they exist within different historical contexts, anti-Jewish ideas, emotions, and behaviors are reactive elements easily combining with other ideologies, such as nationalism, racism, social Darwinism, conservatism, fascism and socialism to form an explosive compound. Second, like a virus, anti-Jewishness rests dormant at different levels of the societal and individual psyche, surfacing especially during the throes of social or personal crisis. Third, although Jews have often been compared to parasites in both medieval and modern antisemitic imagery, antisemitism itself is a parasitic idea, growing more powerful by feeding on the human emotions of fear, anger, anxiety and guilt.

In "Know Thyself," Richard Wagner argued that the Jews represented the multifaceted power of evil, the "plastic demon" responsible for the decadence of all human society. (*Richard Wagner's Prose Works*, trans. William Ashton Ellis. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1892-99, 6:264 -65, 271) But this phrase of Wagner's is better used to describe antisemitism itself, which takes on such variegated forms as to render the concept almost indefinable. In March 2005, the European Union Monitoring Center on Racism and Xenophobia gave it a try. They formulated a Working Definition of Antisemitism. They observed that antisemitism, beyond the obvious hatred toward Jews, has rhetorical and physical manifestations directed toward Jewish or non-Jewish individuals and/or their property, toward Jewish community institutions and religious facilities, toward the state of Israel conceived as a Jewish collectivity. Antisemitism frequently charges Jews with conspiring to harm humanity, and it is often used to blame Jews for "why things go wrong." It is expressed in speech, writing, visual forms and action, and employs sinister stereotypes and negative character traits. (European Union Monitoring Center on Racism and Xenophobia, "Working Definition of Antisemitism," March 16, 2005)

It is evident that antisemitism is comprised of constituent elements. Although racial, cultural, literary, economic, ethnic, psychosocial, and political antisemitism exist and are usually interwoven, the most basic, vigorous, and longest-lived cause of antisemitism is religious. Gordon

Allport wrote that religion stood as the focus of prejudice because "it is the pivot of the cultural tradition of a group." (Allport, *Nature of Prejudice*, 446) Even the aforesaid Wilhelm Marr's "secular" racism existed alongside his religious antisemitism. He associated the "Germanness" he admired with Christianity and contrasted them both to Jewishness. Called "the new Luther" and defending Christian hostility to Jews, Marr believed that Germany was a Christian country, and his goal was to rid Christianity of Judaism's alleged sway. His Antisemites' League used a German oak leaf and a Christian cross as its symbols. (Paul Rose, *Revolutionary Antisemitism in Germany*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1990, 14; Uriel Tal, *Christians and Jews in Germany*, Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1975, 264) In an 1891 article, Marr referred to his movement as composed of "Christians and Aryans." (Zimmermann, *Wilhelm Marr*, 83, 88-94, 105, 107, 112)

Christian scholars have recognized a dark side to Christian theology and practice in regard to the Jews. Alan Davies has asked whether "centuries of religious anti-Judaism... so poisoned the conscience of the ordinary Christian as to blunt his capacity to recognize simple cruelty." (Alan Davies, *Antisemitism and the Christian Mind*, New York: Herder and Herder, 1969, 39) John Gager wondered "not simply whether individual Christians had added fuel to modern European antisemitism, but whether Christianity itself was, in its essence and from its beginnings, the primary source of antisemitism in Western culture." (John Gager, *The Origins of Antisemitism*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1983, 13) Robert Willis concluded that "theological antisemitism [established] a social and moral climate that allowed the 'final solution' to become a reality." (Robert Willis, "Christian Theology after Auschwitz," *Journal of Ecumenical Studies*, Fall 1975: 495)

American antisemitism is often seen as an exception to the "religious rule" because on the surface it seems so secular. (Robert Michael summarizes the argument in his introduction "The United States Is Above All Things a Christian Nation" for his *Concise History of American Antisemitism* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2005) After a careful study of American opinion in the 1960s, Charles Glock and Rodney

Stark concluded that “the heart and soul of antisemitism rested on Christianity” and that 95 percent of Americans got their secular stereotypes of Jews from the Christian religion. (Charles Glock and Rodney Stark, *Christian Beliefs and Antisemitism*. (New York: Harper & Row, 1966, xvi, 50–65, 73–74, 105, 185–87)

Western society for the last 1,700 years has been a *societas christiana*. The Church Fathers set the tone by effectively using sacred scripture as a warehouse for material against Jews. (Irving Zeitlin, *Jesus and the Judaism of His Time*, Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 1988, 184 –201) Jews were no longer merely those annoying people whom a minority of pagans disdained for their “laziness” on the Sabbath or refusal to eat pork. (Menachem Stern, *Greek and Latin Authors on Jews and Judaism*, 3 vols. Jerusalem: Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities, 1984) With the establishment of Christianity, Jews became deicides, Christ-killers, God murderers, and more. (Rationally, even Christian antisemites recognized that Jews could not have murdered God; but antisemitism is not rational.) Besides, Christianity established its own identity in large part by distancing itself from Judaism. Every Father of the Church attacked the Jews. St. Jerome called all Jews “Judases;” St. Augustine called Jews “Cains;” St. John Chrysostom called Jews “useless animals who should be slaughtered.”(Jerome, *De Antichristo in Daniele* 4, 11:21–30; Augustine, “Reply to Faustus, the Manichae-an;” John Chrysostom, *Homilies against Judaizing Christians*, 1.2.4 – 6) In the 4th century, St. Ambrose asked, “Isn't it in the synagogue where the Jews are possessed by the unclean spirit of demons and pollute their pretended bodily purity by the inner shit (filth) of their souls?” (Ambrose, “Exposito Evangelii Secundum Lucam,” *Libris X*) In the 16th century, Martin Luther, trained as a priest but founding Protestantism, answered that the Jews are a “base, whoring people, that is, no people of God, and their boast of lineage, circumcision, and law must be accounted as filth.” (Martin Luther, *The Jews and Their Lies*, in *Luther's Works*, tr. by Franklin Sherman, Philadelphia 1971, 47:167)

History awaited the right leader, movement, crisis, and context to actualize this antisemitic religious ideology into reality. These leaders

were found from the Middle Ages onward. Based on antisemitic myths and fantasies of ritual murder, blood libel, desecration of the Host, worship of the *Judensau*, and poisoning of the wells, Christian Crusaders, townsmen, and authorities defamed, ghettoized, assaulted, expropriated, expelled, physically attacked, tortured, and murdered tens, perhaps hundreds, of thousands of Jews or more, centuries before the Holocaust. The papacy's verbal abuse, ghettos, and hesitant and inconsistent protection of Jews made it indirectly complicit in many of these physical attacks on Jews. (Shlomo Simonsohn, *The Apostolic See and the Jews*, 8 vols. Toronto, Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1988-1991; see also the forthcoming Robert Michael, *Dark Side of the Church: A History of Catholic Antisemitism*, Lexington Books, 2007) Although in every generation some Christians treated the people of Moses with respect, all too many regarded Jews as threats to their very lives--as demons, monsters, and plague-rats that had to be killed. (Frederick Schweitzer, "The Tap-Root of Antisemitism: The Demonization of the Jews," in *Remembering for the Future*. Oxford, UK: Pergamon Press, 1988, 879-90)

Ignoring the salvific power of the sacrament of baptism, several Church Fathers argued in a racist fashion that a Jew could no more become a Christian than a leopard change its spots. (St. Isidore of Seville, *Contra Judaeos*, 1, 18) Spain integrated religious and racist antisemitism to establish history's first institutionalized racism from the 15th through the 19th centuries; i.e., during the Inquisition. (Yosef Yerushalmi, *Assimilation and Racial Antisemitism*, New York: Leo Baeck Institute, 1982; Léon Poliakov, *The Aryan Myth*, New York: Grosset and Dunlap, 1974; Albert Sicroff, *Les controverses des statuts de "pureté de sang,"* Paris: Didier, 1960) In the latter century, racial antisemitism strengthened all across Europe. (Johann Gottlieb Fichte, *Reden an die deutsche Nation*, 1808, Sixth Address, Point 81; Eleonore Sterling, *Judenhass*, Frankfurt: Europäische Verlag, 1969, 128-29) Nationalism and racism mixed with religious antisemitism into the potentially explosive brew that would fully erupt during the Holocaust. (Peter Pulzer, *The Rise of Political Antisemitism in Germany and Austria*, rev. ed.

Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988, 312)

To many modern writers, no matter how assimilated the Jews became, they were considered unchristian aliens. Mark Twain (whose Austrian critics accused him of being a Jew!) wrote that "by his make and ways [the Jew] is substantially a foreigner wherever he may be, and even the angels dislike a foreigner." (Mark Twain, "Concerning the Jews," *Harper's New Monthly Magazine*, September 1899) The term Jew itself became a curse word. Mark Gelber has observed that "without a truly significant counterbalance to a negative Jewish character or to pejorative references to Jews, such depictions or references must be considered as examples of literary antisemitism." (Mark Gelber, "What Is Literary Antisemitism?" *Jewish Social Studies* 42, no. 1, Winter 1985) Christian antisemitism corrupted the work of Balzac, Trollope, Hawthorne, and hundreds of other important authors who were taught their antisemitism at their mother's knee, their father's table, their teacher's bench, and their priest's or minister's pulpit. Their work is also cited in the *Dictionary of Antisemitism* and speaks for itself.

What offers hope is the case of the physician, professor, and poet Oliver Wendell Holmes Sr. An advocate of religious toleration, Holmes observed that it is right that "the stately synagogue should lift its walls by the side of the aspiring cathedral, a perpetual reminder that there are many mansions in

the Father's earthly house as well as in the heavenly one." (Oliver Wendell Holmes, *Over the Teacups*, Boston: Houghton-Mifflin, 1891, 197) But Holmes confessed that, as a young man, "I shared more or less the prevailing prejudices against the persecuted race," which he traced to Christian teaching and Puritan exclusiveness.

In a remarkable poem originally entitled "A Hebrew Tale," Holmes demonstrates how he overcame his early antisemitism. This poem provides us as well with an important insight into the process of how antisemitism works: how one event can trigger a sequence of hostile thoughts and feelings about Jews. Holmes recounts how he

was hemmed in by Jews attending a play. He found their appearance distasteful, reminding him of their deicide, of their perfidy, of their usury, of their murder of Christian children. In this one poem, Holmes captures the two millennia of Jewish history in Christian lands, and the promise of a better future. Holmes mentions the

hooked-nosed kite of carrion clothes,  
The sneaky usurer, him that crawls  
And cheats...  
Spawn of the race that slew its Lord.  
Up came their murderous deeds of old,  
... Of children caught and crucified;  
... of Judas and his bribe...

But when Holmes looked more closely into the faces of the Jews surrounding him, he thought Jesus must have resembled these same Jews.

The shadow floated from my soul,  
And to my lips a whisper stole,...  
From thee the son of Mary came,  
With thee the Father deigned to dwell,—  
Peace be upon thee, Israel. (Holmes,  
*The Complete Poetical Works of Oliver Wendell  
Holmes*, Boston: Houghton-Mifflin, 1895, 189)

During the Holocaust, the U.S. Treasury Department's report entitled "The Acquiescence of This Government in the Murder of the Jews" summarized the relationship between the Western Allies and the Germans and many other Europeans and their governments in discrimination against, and mass murder of, Jews. The "Final Solution of the Jewish Problem" combined religious, nationalist, racist, sociocultural, and economic antisemitism. As Raul Hilberg put it: "The missionaries of Christianity had said in effect: You have no right to live among us as Jews. The secular rulers who followed had proclaimed: You have no right to live among us. The German Nazis at last decreed: You have no right to live." (Raul Hilberg, *Destruction of the European Jews*, rev. ed., New York: Holmes & Meier, 1985, 1:8 -9)

The ferocious outbreak of twenty-first-century homicide bombings and war makes the *Dictionary's* entries on Islamic antisemitism essential reading. Many contemporary Muslims fear and hate Jews and believe that Jews, who are imagined to dominate the West, are an evil religious community who deserve no homeland and ought to be annihilated. (Robert S. Wistrich, *Muslim Antisemitism*, New York: American Jewish Committee, 2002)

Despite the tragic history of antisemitism reflected in the entries of this dictionary, antisemitism is not one unending continuum. Just as there have always been Righteous Gentiles who have treated Jews with respect, so there were periods in Jewish history of relative tolerance and peaceful coexistence. During whole decades of the post-Holocaust period, antisemitism has remained relatively dormant. Yet the virus of antisemitism has once again erupted, and the need to catalogue its manifestations and identify its etiology--as the *Dictionary of Antisemitism* attempts to do--has never been more vital.

*Besides being a co-author (with Philip Rosen) of Dictionary of Antisemitism (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2006), Professor Michael is the author of Holy Hatred: Christianity, Antisemitism, and the Holocaust (New York: Palgrave-Macmillan, 2006) nominated for a National Jewish Book Award; Dark Side of the Church: A History of Catholic Antisemitism (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2007); A Concise History of American Antisemitism (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2005); Nazi-Deutsch/Nazi-German: An English Lexicon of the Language of the Third Reich (with Karin Doerr) (New York: Greenwood Press, 2001).*