

My paper today consists of 14 apodictic bullet points of varying length. They draw on and utilize the approach to antisemitism developed by, and in the tradition of, the critical theory of the Frankfurt School.

1. Antisemitism is a product of, not a fundamental aberration from, the values prevalent in Western and Muslim societies. Both Western culture, whether in its pagan or Christian inspiration, and Muslim culture have developed their self-understanding in no small measure by contrasting themselves to what they conceived of as being negative Jewish traits. In the West, both the Enlightenment's proponents and its opponents have contributed to the perpetuation of this tradition. In both cultures, the transformations required to put an end to antisemitism are so fundamental that they far outstrip what any of us could possibly imagine. If, hypothetically speaking, it were possible to erase all the products of Western and Muslim culture tainted by antisemitism at one stroke, both cultures would effectively have to start from scratch.

2. There is a reason why some of us dedicate our entire working lives, or at least a sizeable proportion of them, to the study of antisemitism—and I can assure you: it is not because the study of antisemitism lightens the mood. Antisemitism is a serious issue, it is a strong, complex, and resilient force whose causes and momentum require careful and sustained study. In short: the academic study of antisemitism is a discipline in its own right, and its practitioners are scholars with a specialization not easily emulated in passing.

3. The fact that you are a Jewish or Judaic Studies scholar, in and of itself, makes you no more qualified to speak in academic (as opposed to political or moral) terms about antisemitism than any of your colleagues, say, from the Physics or the Music department. To be sure, antisemitism has repeatedly affected Jews, in some cases in a dramatic fashion, and you should probably be in a position to offer an accurate account of that impact. Depending on your area of specialization, you may also need to be able to say something meaningful about the ways in which Jews have responded to antisemitism. There is, however, no

reason why you should need to be a scholar of antisemitism in order to be a consummate Jewish or Judaic studies scholar.

By way of an analogy: you do not need to be an engineer or a geologist to offer a sound account of the impact of an earthquake on the residents of a particular area struck by an earthquake and/or of the subsequent relief efforts. You do, however, need to be a geologist to offer a sound account of why earthquakes occur and how they might be more accurately anticipated—and an engineer to figure out how buildings might be rendered more secure and resilient in case an earthquake strikes.

If you are a Jewish or Judaic studies scholar who, for whatever reason, cannot claim a specialization in the study of antisemitism, then have the courage to say so—and own it.

It is one of our biggest problems that everybody thinks they ought to have something to say about antisemitism. That may be right in political and moral terms. In terms of the actual scholarly treatment of antisemitism and its productive application to the non-academic world, it is a disaster. Everyone may be entitled to their opinion, as the saying goes. But unless you are equally convinced that your own specialization renders your findings no more meaningful or insightful than those of any lay person interested in your topic, please pay the same respect to scholars of antisemitism as you would expect for your own specialization. By presenting yourself as a scholar of antisemitism when in fact you aren't one, you will invariably cause more confusion and do more harm than you possibly could by recusing yourself.

4. It should be clear from my initial remarks that antisemitism is not a whimsical orientation that can be switched on or off as ever one fancies. It fulfills, both for individuals and for social groups, important functions that help them make sense of the world and their position within it. For some, to quote Adorno, “charging the Jews with all existing evils seems to penetrate the darkness of reality like a searchlight and to allow for quick and all-comprising orientation” [619]. We therefore need to address the question Adorno formulated as follows: “What good ... accrue[s] to the actual adjustment of otherwise ‘sensible’ persons when

they subscribe to ideas which have no basis in reality and which we ordinarily associate with maladjustments?" [618].

5. Just as there will always be people who still think Father Christmas exists or who don't yet know how babies are made, there will always be people who don't yet know what the problem with antisemitism is. Where this is genuinely the case, conventional educational work may be effective. This is, however, the exception. Studied or feigned ignorance has long been one of the most popular devices deployed by antisemites who, for whatever reason, shy away from professing their antisemitism, at least for the time being. By taking that studied or feigned ignorance seriously and responding to it in a reasonable or didactical manner we already concede ground to the antisemites and veer into the territory of apologetics. It is true that historically Jews too accepted the notion that there was such a thing as a "Jewish Question". This does not, however, make it a valid concept. Any approach that incorporates the concept of a "Jewish Question" or "Jewish Problem" other than in order to critique it is, regardless of its proponents' intentions, highly likely to facilitate continued antisemitic stereotyping.

Let me quote Adorno again:

As soon as the existence of a "Jewish problem" is admitted, anti-Semitism has won its first surreptitious victory. ... the "problem" calls for a *solution*. As soon as the Jews themselves are stamped as this problem, they are transformed into objects ... To call for a "solution of the Jewish problem" results in their being reduced to "material" for manipulation. [620]

... the very use of the term may be partially indicative, even with unprejudiced persons, of a certain ambivalence or at least indifference. [620]

The man who speaks about the "problem" is easily tempted to say that there are two sides to every problem, with the comfortable consequence that the Jews must have done something wrong, if they were exterminated. [621]

6. Antisemitism is not primarily a matter of personal attitudes towards Jews but fundamentally a social (and socially mediated) phenomenon. Hence, it is rarely adopted and assimilated individually. To varying degrees, depending on one's political, social and cultural immediate, mediate and global background, context and orientation, it is likely to have become part and parcel of the package of basic assumptions about the world, which we generally tend to take for granted without actively reflecting upon them and often without even being aware of them.

This also means that Jews are perfectly capable of being antisemites and we need to stop pussyfooting around this fact and trying to make excuses for Jews who subscribe to antisemitic positions and engage in antisemitic activism. Nor do we need to resort to some fanciful construction of Jewish self-hatred to explain this. Identification with the oppressor is a common phenomenon prevalent in all walks of life. In fact, it is arguably the single most important cohesive force that ultimately holds our societies together. Jews' Jewishness is a hindrance to engaging in antisemitic activities only insofar as the non-Jews may not like it and intervene to stop them. Other than that there is no reason why Jews should not be able to subscribe to, propagate, and engage in, antisemitism just like non-Jews.

7. Where the mechanisms that generate antisemitism have become entrenched, neither educational or didactical approaches nor intergroup contact can effect change. Again I quote Adorno:

... the distortions which occur are not to be corrected merely by taking a *real* look. Rather, experience itself is predetermined by stereotypy. Since this tendency is by no means confined to people who are actually "cranky" (rather, the whole complex of the Jew is a kind of recognized red-light district of legitimized psychotic distortions), this inaccessibility to experience may well operate in much milder cases. ... One cannot "correct" stereotypy by experience; [one] has to reconstitute the capacity for having experiences ...

8. As difficult as this may be for scholars and dedicated university teachers to stomach, where this "reconstitution of the capacity to have experiences" cannot be achieved, outright repression can become the only possible alternative.

Would we much rather live in a society in which antisemitic ideas and activities genuinely no longer attract support? Absolutely. Barring that, it is, alas, still better to live in a society in which the existing antisemitism is, if need be, curtailed by means of repression than in a society in which it is allowed to go on the rampage unchecked.

9. Our discussions in university classrooms are never primarily about *what* we think but above all about *how* we think and how we arrive at particular inferences and conclusions. Unless his or her utterances give rise to serious concerns regarding the security of his or her peers or society at large, no student should feel that what he or she says in the context of a university course will have disciplinary or legal consequences for her. This does not mean, however, that we should not alert students, where applicable, to the fact that outside of university classrooms their views might well become subject to repression—and explain why this repression, though far from creating an ideal state of affairs, is, for pragmatic reasons, legitimate and necessary.

10. While antisemitism shares certain more generic formal features with racism, antisemitism is emphatically not a form of racism. All other things being even, this needs to be stressed because the claim that antisemitism is a form of racism all too often serves simply as an excuse not to deal seriously with antisemitism in its own right and to grant oneself a clean bill of health on the grounds that, as an upright anti-racist, one could not possibly be susceptible to antisemitic ideas.

11. As you will know, there has also existed, and continues to exist, an alternative school of thought. Its proponents contend that antisemitism results not from what Horkeimer and Adorno termed pathic projection but that a kernel of truth inheres in the antisemites' perceptions of the Jews. To be sure, the antisemites blow things out of proportion and they are prone to exaggerated and distorting generalizations, but their negative attitudes towards Jews are ultimately based on genuine Jewish characteristics and behaviour observed by the antisemites and/or genuine conflicts of interest between Jews and non-Jews. This approach is also known as the correspondence theory of antisemitism, i.e., it assumes a

genuine correspondence between the antisemitic image of the Jew and actual Jews.

Now, the notion of a direct reflection of reality in human perception is in any case nonsensical, not only when it comes to antisemitism. I'm taking it for granted that we always need to apply conceptual skills to make sense of what lies before us but that these conceptual skills cannot simply be derived from what lies before us. Otherwise we would have to assume that someone who meets only unpleasant Jews would be entirely justified in becoming an antisemite. Moreover, anyone who meets both pleasant and unpleasant Jews would have to develop multiple personality disorder and people who never meet a Jew would be incapable of subscribing to antisemitic ideas—which is patently untrue.

At a time when the primacy of Jewish agency in the writing of Jewish history still seemed contested and many scholars of Jewish history were firmly committed to asserting this primacy, the kernel-of-truth approach seemed, to some, to offer a way out of the dispiriting impasse created by the fact that antisemitism in general, and the Shoah in particular, had massively impacted the Jews *regardless* of what Jews had actually done or not done. For some scholars, then, acceptance of the kernel-of-truth approach was born of the understandable but misguided desire to assert Jewish agency even where to all intents and purposes there had been none. For some, this approach doubtless also resonated with the notion that European Jews who had failed to heed the call of Zionism ultimately had only themselves to blame for their fate at the hands of the Nazis.

This is all the more ironic, given that today the kernel-of-truth approach is particularly popular with *anti-Zionist* scholars. Steven Beller's *Very Short Introduction to Antisemitism*, published by Oxford University Press, stands paradigmatically for this trend. He not only dismisses but positively mocks the notion that antisemitism constitutes a form of pathetic projection. This is only possible because he offers a potted history of various conceptualizations of antisemitism that jumps straight from early positivistic ineptitude to postmodern whateverism and simply leaves out the Frankfurt School and Critical Theory altogether. This is the equivalent of writing a history of Western art

music that covers only Hildegard of Bingen and Dame Judith Weir but leaves out Bach, Mozart, Beethoven and Schoenberg.

12. “Criticism of Israel similar to that leveled against any other country cannot be regarded as antisemitic”. You will find this statement both in the so-called *Working* and now *International Definition of Antisemitism* and its adaptation by the US State Department. And yet the self-styled critics of Israel and anti-Zionists persistently claim that these definitions stifle legitimate criticism of Israel. What their claim indicates is that these critics of Israel think that legitimate criticism of Israel does in fact need to go beyond “that leveled against any other country”. Theirs is therefore quite obviously an inherently antisemitic claim. This is all the more evident from the fact that its proponents have long since moved on from claiming that they are prevented from criticizing specific Israeli policies or governments to insisting on the right to criticize the State of Israel, the Jewish state or Israel as a Jewish state. I have already pointed to Steven Beller’s *Very Short Introduction to Antisemitism*, which is a particularly shocking example of the extent to which this approach has infiltrated the academic mainstream. The same obviously holds true of the BDS-campaign.

13. I would be surprised if we are more than two years away from the point at which numerous established liberal and left-wing scholars, including a sizeable minority if not the majority of Jewish and Judaic Studies scholars, along with major mainstream political parties in the West, begin to call openly for the destruction—or, as they prefer to call it, the ‘dismantling’—of Israel. The endlessly futile phoney debates over whether Iran and organizations like Hezbollah, Hamas and Fatah really want Israel to disappear from the map or not will finally be over and what we have long known to be the truth about their sinister aspirations will be widely embraced as a good thing. The Left in the West has a long and well established tradition of finding everything it considers oddly tolerable about nationalisms elsewhere (not to mention their own) utterly intolerable in Zionism, and of wanting Jews to earn rights they themselves take for granted by jumping through hoops they would never dream (nor most likely be capable) of jumping through. The suggestion that the Shoah should have made

better people of the Jews is arguably the most perverse variation on this theme. In some ways it will be good to have all this out in the open. At least we will no longer have to spend so much of our time playing cat and mouse with our enemies.

14. There is no case to be made for the destruction (or even a boycott) of Israel that does not hinge crucially on the application of double standards to the Jewish state. Any such demand is therefore inherently antisemitic. Some of Israel's critics will presumably continue to argue that there have always been Jews opposed to Zionism and the State of Israel and that, consequently, this opposition cannot be antisemitic. Yet, as I have already pointed out, Jews are in any case perfectly capable of being antisemitic. More importantly, while one did not need to be an antisemite to voice opposition to the possible future establishment of a Jewish state in the first half of the twentieth century, opposing the existence of the State of Israel as a Jewish state today is obviously something altogether different. Our biggest problem, however, is going to be this: most of Israel's detractors are not going care one iota what scholars of antisemitism think of them. As yet, I have no idea what to do about this. One thing I do know, however: we had better think of something soon!

How not to facilitate or promote antisemitism: twelve practical recommendations

1. If you cannot in good conscience call yourself a scholar of antisemitism, recuse yourself and own it.
2. Do not portray antisemitism as an ultimately incomprehensible phenomenon totally alien to Western or Muslim values. Antisemitism is not from Mars but springs from the fact that our societies are organized in a way that renders antisemitism a way of making sense of life and seemingly taking control of it that can be more effective and comforting than many others.
3. Do not accept the suggestion that this releases individuals and/or groups from the responsibility for choosing this particular coping mechanism.
4. Never ever concede that a “Jewish Question” or a “Jewish Problem” exists.
5. Never engage in apologetics.
6. Never ever resort to or legitimize the kernel-of-truth approach to antisemitism.
7. Do not make excuses for the antisemitic utterances and activities of Jews. Their utterances and activities are no less antisemitic for their being Jews.
8. Don't be unduly squeamish about the role of repression in the struggle against antisemitism. Concede both the ultimately limited range of repression and its necessity and legitimacy.
9. Never ever succumb to or tolerate the assumption that Jews/Israelis should be better people because of the experience of the death camps.
10. Do not allow the specificity of antisemitism to be concealed by subsuming it under the category of racism.
11. Never ever tolerate the application of double standards to Israel.
12. In the later modern context, only refer to Jews and Christians, rather than Jews and non-Jews, if you are confident that the non-Jews in question would have identified themselves as Christians and their relevant attitudes and actions were motivated by their Christianity. If you are referring to the fact that Western culture is deeply shaped by Christianity, even though many are no longer aware of those Christian roots, make it clear that this is what you mean when you use the term ‘Christian/s’. Otherwise you risk turning antisemitism into a religious issue, which may be part of the problem but really is only part of the problem.