

Scholars Circle Resource Guide

Double-sided

That Thin Line: Why Anti-Zionism is Antisemitism

SCHOLARS CIRCLE



About Dr. Andrew Pessin

Andrew Pessin is Professor of Philosophy and Jewish Studies at Connecticut College and Campus Bureau Editor of the *Algemeiner*. His many books include *Anti-Zionism on Campus*, *Poisoning the Wells: Antisemitism in Contemporary America*, and *The Jewish God Question*, as well as several novels. One recent novel is *Bright College Years*, published 2024 by Open Books. Long ago he enjoyed some moments of fame portraying “The Genius” on the David Letterman Show.

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“*Bright College Years* is a wistful trip in a time machine...travel there with Pessin to a Yale of the early 80s, when a handful of friends thought ever-so-briefly they owned the world.”—**Scott Johnston, Yale '82**
author of Amazon bestseller, *Campusland*



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Common Q&A's

What exactly is anti-Zionism?

“Zionism” is the belief that Jews have the right to a sovereign state in their ancestral homeland, so “anti-Zionism” negates that. So understood, it isn't “anti-Zionism” to criticize particular policies or behaviors of Israel (though it may amount to anti-Zionism to do so dishonestly or obsessively criticize every policy or behavior of Israel). Nor is it “anti-Zionism” to advocate for a Palestinian state in the context of a two-state solution, nor to advocate for Palestinian rights more generally. Prior to 1948 “anti-Zionism” referred to the opposition to establishing the Jewish state; post-1948 it now includes the aim of dismantling the Jewish state, which involves far more than merely “criticizing” this or that policy or policies.

In what ways can anti-Zionism not be antisemitic?

Sometimes “criticism of Israel” is mistaken for anti-Zionism, and since, generally, criticizing Israel is not antisemitic, that form of anti-Zionism isn't antisemitic. Anti-Zionism prior to 1948 was often not antisemitic, because being opposed to founding a state is much less directly harmful to millions of Jews than dismantling the currently existing state is likely to be. Anti-Zionism derived from genuine Jewish principles (such as Orthodox Jewish anti-Zionism) is not antisemitic. Finally anti-Zionism derived from genuinely universally applied principles need not be antisemitic: if one is opposed to a Jewish state because one is opposed to all ethnic states or all national borders, then that is not antisemitic.

So why then is anti-Zionism generally antisemitic?

The typical foundation, motivations, methods, and consequences of anti-Zionism, in the actual context in which the movement exists and operates, reveal antisemitism everywhere. The “foundation” is their basic narrative about the establishment of Israel, which is filled with antisemitic lies and misrepresentations. The motivations: there are many who are anti-Zionist precisely because they are antisemitic. The methods include the Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions (BDS) movement, which singles out and discriminates against Jews. Finally, the consequences of anti-Zionism, the dismantling of Israel, would likely entail the ethnic cleansing and mass murder of millions of Jews, an antisemitic result on a par with the Nazi Final Solution.

Key Takeaways

- ✓ The question whether “anti-Zionism is antisemitism” is both complex, with many layers, but also quite simple, once you break it down into parts. One will find that antisemitism is not necessarily in the superficial statements and proclamations of the anti-Zionist movement, but in the foundation, motivations, methods, and consequences.
- ✓ I identify ten points or factors which suggest that, at least prima facie, anti-Zionism is antisemitic; that, in other words, our default value should be that it is unless it can be shown, in some concrete instance, that it isn't. These include recognizing how deeply embedded Zionism is in the Jewish identity of many of its proponents, making it quite hard to “hate Israel” (as an anti-Zionist) without “hating Judaism and Jews” (as an antisemite).
- ✓ The arguments against identifying anti-Zionism as antisemitic are generally quite awful. For example, the fact that anti-Zionism targets a state and antisemitism targets a religion or a people does not mean that anti-Zionism is not a form of antisemitism. More importantly, the fact that some Jews are themselves anti-Zionist will not absolve them, or non-Jewish anti-Zionists, of antisemitism.

The views expressed by the speaker don't necessarily reflect Chai Mitzvah's official position.

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