

28 Which Past for Which Present?

A Reply to Carlo Ginzburg's "Postface" on *Anti-Judaism*

David Nirenberg

Under the printed pages of any volume such as this there murmurs that subterranean flow of intellectual engagements from which there occasionally wells up in the collective intellect the shared sense of a question worth asking. So although I could not be in Stockholm in 2015 for the wintry conventicle of scholars whose conversations animate *The Medieval Roots of Antisemitism*, reading these pages now (even the many that are by authors I have never met), I feel as if I am among familiar interlocutors. All of us share a common concern with the persistent power of prejudice across time: in this case, of prejudices (in the sense of pre-judgments, of transmitted ideas that shape our possibilities of thought) about Judaism.

In some cases, the feeling of familiarity is not only metaphorical, for with a number of the authors in this volume I have been in conversation, whether in person or on paper, for almost thirty years. Among those authors is Carlo Ginzburg, whose Postface the editors have asked me to respond to, and whose ideas I have encountered not only in print but also at table. Indeed, it was over lunch two years ago that he first expressed to me the general arguments he advances here with more "polemical edge." Hence I take in the chivalric sense his opening declaration that he comes with sword drawn and sharpened, and hear in it the collegial as well as the martial: with every joust a banquet.

Still, it must be granted that if Ginzburg is engaged in conversation here, it is a lopsided one. His "Postface" scarcely alludes to any of the pages of the volume in which it appears, focusing instead on an absent interlocutor with which those pages are imagined to be in "dialogue," namely, my book *Anti-Judaism: The Western Tradition*. Here too the engagement is distinctive, in the sense that Ginzburg chooses once more to focus on what he calls an absence—on what he claims that book is *not* about (ambivalence)—and ignore what he recognises the book *is* concerned with (anti-Judaism). His argument at its most general: because Christianity includes the Hebrew Bible in its sacred book, Christianity is ambivalent about Judaism, and therefore we cannot speak of Christian anti-Judaism, much less study it as a phenomenon across time, as some of the authors of this volume and I have each in our own ways tried to do.

To keep that "therefore" from seeming arbitrary or dogmatic he chooses a past, a historical example: the "ambivalent" biblical hermeneutics of Solomon ha-Levi/Pablo de Santa María (1351–1435), a rabbi who converted and became bishop of Burgos, in the lands we now call Spain. And to give this logic the urgency of contemporary morality he chooses a present as well. Thus, he concludes his essay with a passion in Palestine, attempts to balance the burdens of the past with those of the present, and finds that "in that wail of protest the child victims of the Israeli bombings had a much greater weight."

These moves may surprise connoisseurs of Carlo Ginzburg's work, but they will be familiar to anyone who has tilled the fields of our particular subject. We are often told, for example, that because there exists Christian Philo- as well as Anti-Semitism we cannot focus on the latter. Over and over again in studies of relations between Christianity, Islam, and Judaism, examples from their long and rich history of coexistence and cultural exchange are trotted out as if the mere fact of that coexistence and exchange were enough to negate the possibility of powerful and enduring prejudices. And many discussions of history are today cut off with allusion to the Palestinian present, with any attempt to study anti-Judaism in the past or posit some form of its persistence in the present cast as a form of special pleading, an apologetics for abuses of Israeli power.

It is because these moves are so familiar that a response to Ginzburg's "Postface" may (I hope) still be considered a form of tribute to the collective efforts of this volume's authors, even if that response too often articulates or defends my own arguments, rather than theirs. My response will focus on a basic question that confronts all historians. *How do we decide which of the uncountable potentials of the past—potentials so massively plural that the concept of ambivalence does not begin to do them justice—is most relevant to the questions we are interested in asking in the present?* (By relevant, I mean both in helping us answer our questions, and in helping us become self-conscious of why it is that we are interested in asking these particular questions, rather than any of infinitely many possible other ones we might have asked.) Ginzburg does not so much ask this question as simply assert through a historical example that those of us who would write a history of anti-Judaism have got the answer wrong. So by way of a response, let us ask this question of his arguments as well as of ours.

1. Ginzburg begins by creating a straw man, so we must first wrestle with straw. Every author represented in this volume, and presumably every reader of Christian scripture, knows full well that already in their earliest texts the followers of Jesus "nourished a deep ambivalence towards the Jews." We might say with the Apostle Paul that the Jews are simultaneously hated and loved. "As far as the gospel is concerned they are enemies for your sake," he wrote to the Romans, "but [. . .] they are loved on account of the patriarchs" (11:28). This ambivalence is certainly noted in *Anti-Judaism: The Western Tradition*. Looking now I see that in quoting this very passage

I wrote "both sides of this doubly ambivalent formulation would receive much attention across the ages, and both remain mysterious" (65).¹

"Loved on account of the patriarchs": Ginzburg is right to put "the inclusion of the Hebrew Bible in the sacred Christian book" at the heart of our question, as did *Anti-Judaism*. Far from referring to this fact only once, "in a ten-word simile," that book devotes entire chapters to the question of how many different types of Christians (from Paul to the twentieth century), Muslims, and even atheists, thought and re-thought the implications of the relationship between the Hebrew Bible and later prophecies.² Not only Luther but Paul and the gospel authors, Augustine and many other Church Fathers, even Shakespeare, Hegel, and Marx, all emerge as ambivalent exegetes in my reading. Indeed, I could just as easily be charged with being too much engaged with the relationship between Old Testament and New, rather than too little. For one way of understanding my account is that it puts at the centre of Western thought the constant efforts by which Christianity and Islam sought to understand their relationships to the ostensible tradents and rival claimants of the Hebrew Bible and tries to show some few of the ways in which those efforts channelled the possibilities for Christian and Muslim (and later secular) thinking about Judaism in certain powerful directions.

I could have made other choices. The point is simultaneously crucial and banal: crucial because it means we must become critically aware of how and why we choose to attend as we do; and banal because barring some Borgesian historian, it will always be the case that our choices produce radical simplifications of the cosmos' complexity. One way to convert such a point into critique would be to claim that the strands of thought and life that I chose to focus on are not as historically important as some other, for example, "love" of Jews or "ambivalence." But even that would not in itself be sufficient critique. Such a judgment remains dogmatic unless it also interrogates its own perspective and asks, as Collingwood might have exhorted: important for understanding what question?

Ginzburg seems to be taking the first step in this type of critique when he reminds us that "Marcion was defeated," implying that with this defeat certain potentials of anti-Judaism ceased to be important. But what he chooses to ignore is that this defeat was achieved by deploying powerful new figures of Judaism to contain the tension between letter and spirit, "Old" Testament and "New," the world and its transcendence, that Marcion had tried to address. These figures themselves generated new tensions and new figures of Judaism and anti-Judaism along the course of history, and each new tension and new figure itself changed the way in which people at any place and point in time could make sense of their past and their future, as well as their present.³

In short, the questions Paul, the gospel authors, Marcion, and many others asked about the relationship between the material world and the transcendent, between slavery and freedom, the literal and the spiritual, Jews

and followers of Jesus, did not disappear with Marcion. Nor did "Judaism" cease to be a powerful tool for exploring those questions, and for discovering new answers to them. Those answers often represented the passage between these antinomies as a movement toward or away from "Judaism," with figures of Judaism representing what should be overcome in the name of freedom, transcendence, and the good (it is in this sense that I use the word anti-Judaism). The question that interested me in *Anti-Judaism* was: as these tools and answers developed and changed over historical time and space, how (if at all) did they shape the ideas with which people could understand the world at any given place or moment?

2. This is, in Ginzburg's terms, a question of continuity/discontinuity. "It may be noted that discontinuities are not mentioned in the title of [. . .] *Anti-Judaism: The Western Tradition*," he writes. Books can rarely be meaningfully encapsulated by their titles, and mine did not telegraph the full contents of the pages it was stamped upon. But those pages are often and explicitly engaged with the question of how and why we as historians choose between continuity and discontinuity, between similarity and difference. This engagement begins in the Introduction, which details the book's methodological commitments and warns that the 3,000-year sweep of my history "may wrongly suggest to some readers either that I take ideas to be eternal and unchanging or that I am engaged in a genealogy, an evolutionary history, a quest for the origin of the species" (7).

Ginzburg seems to be one of those readers, and this despite the fact that every chapter of the book re-explores the question of how each new text, event, or period of history transformed the possibilities of interpretation and of life, which is also to say, transformed the continuities and discontinuities that can be perceived between past, present, and future. Or as I put it, again in my Introduction,

the teachings of a Goebbels are not necessarily implied in the gospels (nor those of a Bin Laden in the Qur'an). Nor is the relation causal, clear, evolutionary, or unidirectional. "The past," as T.S. Eliot put it, may be "altered by the present as much as the present is directed by the past." But if there is *any* relation, we need to be able to recognise it in order to understand ourselves as well as the past.⁴

"Past and present are intertwined," writes Ginzburg. Indeed. And the question before us, the question that I and all the authors of this volume explicitly pose, is: what historical method can best reveal to us the density of the fibres that weave together past and present, while at the same time increasing our resistance to the fevered delirium (the image is Walter Benjamin's) with which the "present age seizes on the manifestations of past or distant spiritual worlds, in order to take possession of them and unfeelingly incorporate them into its own self-absorbed fantasizing"? What method enables us to choose—as we must!—between emphasising the sameness or the

difference of one moment, idea, or thing with another, while also making us critically self-conscious about the commitments that drove us to make one choice when we could also have made another? What method—to return to Ginzburg's example—can help us simultaneously imagine the possible imbrications of the past with protests about Palestine today, while at the same time protecting us from the powerful tendency to reduce the past to the needs of our particular political imperatives?

Ginzburg does not ask these questions, perhaps because he is so convinced of the political imperative with which he concludes.⁵ Instead, he explores at length a specific historical example that does not appear in *The Medieval Roots of Antisemitism* or in *Anti-Judaism*, suggesting that this example demonstrates why a focus on anti-Judaism cannot make sense of the complexity of the world in the way that attention to what he is calling ambivalence can.

We may assume that he is offering this particular historical argument to us as a heuristic example of a methodology he takes to be appropriate to the task. So let us focus, for a moment, on the example provided and the method applied. Does Ginzburg's focus on ambivalence as he pursues it through this example help us to become more critically aware of the central question we confront as historians: how and why we choose to perceive similarities or differences between our words and worlds and those of our sources and subjects from the past? Or does it itself depend on and deepen un-declared dogma?

3. In Solomon/Pablo of Burgos, Carlo Ginzburg has found, as he so often does, a figure through whom we can dive into any number of worlds. It is therefore all the more remarkable that his approach to that figure's thought shuts down our access to so many of those worlds. For the sake of brevity, I will reduce Ginzburg's steps to two inter-related moves: the choice of one future as meaningful when there are in fact many, and the repression of possibilities in the past in order to make the past point toward one future. Since this is more or less precisely the misleading oversimplification with which Ginzburg charges my *Anti-Judaism*, it may illuminate our debate to spend a little more time seeing how his argument produces it, before returning to mine, and to that of this volume, to see whether ours does so as well.

First, the repression of possibilities in the past: Ginzburg's approach is animated by what he perceives to be differences (which become "contradiction" at note 22) between a few passages (primarily comments on Psalm 2) plucked from Pablo's two extremely lengthy commentaries and interpretations of the scriptures, his *Additiones* to Nicholas of Lyra's *Postilla super Bibliam*, and his *Scrutinium Scripturarum*. In the differences between these passages, Ginzburg finds "clear" evidence that the "Christian" is made to speak in the "Jewish" voice. The *Scrutinium*, "an anti-Judaic work, turns out to be a subtle apology for Judaism, written by a Marrano (Pablo de Burgos) who addressed himself to Marrano readers."

I do not myself see the differences that Ginzburg finds between these two texts, but let us accept them as stipulated for the purposes of examining instead the structure of the general argument.⁶ And here, more context and a few facts will be helpful. To begin with, it is not the case that the *Additiones* were written at one time, in the margins of one six-volume manuscript, during Pablo's student days in Paris during the early 1390s. Some of the circa 1,090 comments were probably written then, others as much as 40 years later (one comment on the Apocalypse refers to events that took place in 1431). We know that Pablo worked to gather, edit, and add to his comments on Lyra across the 1420s. The Prologue he wrote in 1429 dedicating the project to his son informs us that even in his old age, he was still struggling to complete it.⁷

Why do such details matter? Ginzburg's reading discovers insincerity in contradiction. That method is old indeed: Aristotle, for example, applied it to Heraclitus: "for it is impossible for anyone to believe that the same thing is and is not, as some think that Heraclitus says: for it is not necessary that what someone says is the same as what he believes." But Aristotle had made (in the preceding lines) the detection of such contradictions dependent upon constraints of time and context ("at the same time," "in the same respect," etc.), constraints that Ginzburg here ignores.⁸ As readers we are entitled to interrogate the coherence of our sources, but if we impose upon them historically (or psychologically or logically) inappropriate rules of consistency, the contradictions we find within them are more likely to be the products of our logics than theirs.

4. The *Scrutinium*'s composition was more compressed in time than that of the *Additiones*, but it too is a massive work, roughly 500 pages in the incunabula editions. Nor is it a project separate from or opposed to the *Additiones*. Rather, it is intimately related to them, and to the debate they had set off as they circulated in earlier versions. This inter-dependence is evident in the title *Scrutinium Scripturarum* itself: the phrase is drawn from Jesus' exhortation to the Jews at John 5:39 to "search the scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life." The passage had been invoked in a letter from an anonymous Franciscan friar who accused the *Additiones* of over-emphasising the literal reading of scripture, and Pablo of mounting a "Jewish" attack on Lyra.⁹ Pablo published that letter and his response to it in the edition of the *Additiones* that he dedicated in 1429 and continued the defence in the *Scrutinium* he wrote in the years following (1431–34). In this sense, the project can itself be understood as a response to "anti-Judaism."

Yet one more note: the *Scrutinium*'s defence against the charge that Pablo's hermeneutics was Judaising does not take bi-partite form. It cannot be reduced to either Anti-Jewish tract or Apology for Judaism. Jew and Christian were crucial categories for Pablo, but just as important was the category that had developed so explosively in his own lifetime, that of convert, or *converso*. This importance is reflected in the very structure of the *Scrutinium*, which is explicitly presented not as one dialogue (of a Christian with

a Jew) but as two: the first that of Pablo with a Jew, the second, of Pablo with a convert. The *Scrutinium* makes clear that with conversion comes a monumental shift in the foundations of truth. In the first part of the work arguments with the Jew must be restricted to those stemming either from natural reason, or from scriptures the Jews accept (leaving the key Christian mysteries such as the divinity of Jesus, the Trinity, etc. unprovable to Jews, since they cannot be reached by reason alone without the aid of faith). In the second, the convert is committed to accepting with faith as well as with reason, that is: accepting through faith the authority not only the New Testament, but also the saints, whose teachings are "proven in the fire of love" (*charitatis*).¹⁰

And here is what is perhaps most important in Pablo's thought: he insists that the very mysteries of faith that the Jews so strenuously reject in his day had themselves been understood through faith not only by the Hebrew prophets (a position with which many Christians both early and late would have agreed), but also by the great rabbis who composed the Talmud and other foundational rabbinic texts. Pablo maintained that the Talmud had contained and taught these mysteries.¹¹ The problem was that the vast majority of its Jewish readers across history, misled by their intellects, had proved incapable of recognising them. Now, thanks to conversions like his, these texts could provide an additional resource, not only for Christians converted from Judaism, but for any Christian who wished to better understand the meaning of the scriptures, Old and New. Hence the importance for Christianity of projects like the *Additiones*, that would put this learning, concealed for centuries by the faithlessness of the Jews and the ignorance (of Hebrew and Aramaic) of the Christians, to salvific use for all humanity.

We could then, choose to see Pablo de Burgos' *Additiones* and *Scrutinium* together not as an anti-Judaic treatise nor as an apology for Judaism, but as the foundations of a "*converso* theology," as other historians have done. We could suggest that, within Pauline floodplains of faith re-shaped and transformed by the rushing baptismal waters that had hurtled so many Iberian Jews to Christianity beginning in 1391, Pablo discovered a topography in which converts from Judaism could play new (albeit quite Pauline) roles in revealing to Christianity the fulfilment of its mysteries.

In such a context, Pablo's ever more intensive efforts to convert Jews from their anti-Christian errors should be seen as entirely consonant with his efforts to convert his fellow Christians from anti-Jewish prejudices (such as their demonisation of the Talmud and their suspicious interpretations of scripture such as the *Additiones*). From this perspective, we should see both "sides" of Pablo's activities as in the service of a new vision of Pauline plenitude catalysed by the re-grafting of so many Jews onto the stock of Christ.¹² We could, if we wished, within this particular place and time, discover an exhilarating world of emergent possibilities for Christian and Jew, old convert and new: possibilities entirely missing from Ginzburg's reading of Pablo's words.

5. Why spend so much time thickening the dossier that Ginzburg opened on Pablo? First, to remind us that his deployment of Pablo is quite partial, eliminating from Pablo's world and moment many potential subjectivities and possibilities of thought. And second, to convince you that it is not only partial but polarising, reducing those possibilities of thought that it does recognise to polemically poised anti-thesis held together only by Straussian dissimulation. In other words, this thickening of detail was necessary in order to demonstrate what I meant when I suggested that one step of Ginzburg's method is the repression of possibilities in the past.

Now I should (more briefly) explain my suggestion that this repression of the past is furthered and enabled by the choice of future. Perhaps the most obvious way to do so is simply to point to the one bit of evidence Ginzburg offers in support of his own interpretation of Pablo's *Scrutinium*, namely the interpretations of another reader, one situated some two centuries later than Pablo in historical time, and indeed in a "New World" unknown to our medieval author. Francisco de Maldonado was executed as a relapsed Judaizer in Lima, Peru, in 1639, convinced that Jesus' divinity "is impossible and completely absurd from the point of view of rational reason." Ginzburg first hypothesises that Maldonado may have read the *Scrutinium* and extracted this idea from it, and then slides from hypothesis to certainty, using Maldonado's (presumed) reading *c.* 1639 as proof of Pablo's authorial intentions in the 1430s. "This belated reception helps us to identify the *Scrutinium* as an example of the devious strategies described in Leo Strauss's famous essay 'Persecution and the Art of Writing.'" ¹³

One (possible) reading in some far future reveals an author's intention in a distant past. This is an odd method to find a historian deploying, and above all Carlo Ginzburg, who has taught so many of us to think about the distinction between the "emic" and the "etic." It is all the odder given that Pablo's books found *so many* readers, futures, and fates. As Yossi Yisraeli puts it in his invaluable dissertation, "Marsilio Ficino, Denis the Carthusian, Johannes Reuchlin, Erasmus of Rotterdam, Thomas More, Martin Luther, Jacques Lefèvre, Konrad Pelikan, Jean Bodin, Luis de Leon and many others all referred at certain points to the works of the converted bishop from Burgos. Even a Jewish commentator of the stature of Isaac Abarbanel consulted his work."¹⁴

A few more facts: when Pablo's son and successor Alonso de Cartagena took his father's freshly finished autographs of the *Additiones* and the *Scrutinium* with him to the ecumenical Council of Basel (1431-37), they found immediate favour and were widely copied on site. This was at least in part because they were understood by the assembled prelates as highly relevant to the increasingly heated debates taking place in the Iberian Peninsula over the civil and religious status of Christian converts from Judaism, a controversy to which the Council dedicated an important ruling.¹⁵ The resulting manuscripts not only serve us as our earliest witnesses to the work (any autographs have been lost), but were rapidly disseminated across the

continent, with the result that we have something like a hundred surviving fifteenth-century manuscripts of the *Scrutinium*, with nine (not five) printed editions, six of them published between 1470 and 1478. Johannes Mantelin's precocious marketing campaign for the Strasbourg editions of the 1470s may in fact make the *Scrutinium* the first publicly advertised book in the history of printing.¹⁶

Given this astoundingly wide reception, it is obviously true that "only a deeper and broader analysis could tell how countless readers reacted to the cacophonous voices embodied" in Pablo's work. But no deep analysis is required in order to recognise that, unlike Maldonado or Ginzburg, many of these voices celebrated the "anti-Jewish" potential of the *Scrutinium* and understood it as a primer in the truths of Christianity. For this, one need read no further than the introductory epistle to the 1591 edition used by Ginzburg, where the work is said to have been celebrated at the Council of Trent (1545-63) as a powerful weapon in the combat against "Judaising converts" (*evangelicos iudaizantes*). In this at least the Tridentine princes of the Church agreed with their arch-enemy Martin Luther, who cited Pablo on various occasions in his writings, but with most frequency in his own most explicitly anti-Jewish writings, above all in *On the Jews and Their Lies*. In short, on all sides of sectarian divides, we can find extremely influential future readers who had no difficulty understanding the *Scrutinium* as an anti-Jewish text.¹⁷

6. God may know the fate of every sparrow, the future of every thought, but humans can attend to only a few personages and posterities at once. With every act of attention and every narrative gesture, historians ignore many more worlds than they know. For this, we cannot be faulted. But we should demand of ourselves that we make an effort to explain why we chose to direct our attention as we did, so that others may judge the appropriateness of that choice. I take this self-consciousness to be an important part of whatever it means to be a critical historian.

In *Anti-Judaism*, I tried to be explicit about the principles of my choices (insofar as I was conscious of them) as I made them. Thus, for example, after a discussion of some of the many different attitudes toward Judaism in a text (the *Didache*) produced by the early followers of Jesus, I wrote:

On the subject of Judaism (as on every other) early Christianity had many possible futures, and there is real relief in knowing that there was nothing inevitable about the paths it eventually trod. But this book does not seek such relief. It is written, as it were, with an eye on the rearview mirror: a history of roads heavily traveled, not of might-have-beens. Over the next three centuries Christianity rose to become the religion of emperors, and the *Didache* fell along with many other "teachings" to the cutting-room floor.

Ginzburg sees in the mirror metaphor a "teleological approach" that projects the future into the past. "Teleological" is not a compliment in the modern historian's dictionary, and the choice of word is here presumably meant to short-circuit our attention to the critical question actually at stake. The passage is not a teleological manifesto. It is rather a public confession as historian that my choice of attention to the many possibilities on offer at any given moment in the long history I am studying will not be innocent of my knowledge of the vast differences in influence that would accrue to these possibilities across their many futures.

If some of the potentials available at any given historical moment become more compelling than others over the course of time, if some come to exert greater pressure than others upon future possibilities of thought and existence, then we as historians may want to take those differences into account, depending on the questions we are interested in asking. The example of the *Didache* was meant to stress the importance of being open to the multiple possibilities available at each point in history (here at the origins of Christianity) and of at the same time recognising that these possibilities had vastly varying fates, some with rich futures, some with (as of yet) virtually none at all. It is not teleology but a form of interpretive responsibility I was advocating: namely, that we should pay attention to vast differences in power.

7. It is presumably not the influence of Maldonado's thought or its power to move others that justifies Ginzburg's choice of his martyrdom as Pablo's most meaningful future, rather than, say Luther or Reuchlin. So what does? So far as I can see, only the suggestion that Francisco's reading reveals and is true to Pablo's authorial intent as Ginzburg has determined it from his detection of contradictions. The claim asserts some identity, some sort of sameness, between the writer and a reader, the future and the past, the historian's interpretation of the one confirming the same historian's interpretation of the other. What in this circle holds future and past together except the will of the historian, and what methodology can protect that will from charges of caprice, dogma, or un-falsifiability?

Consider, for example, a final detail. Ginzburg has Francisco confirming a view in Pablo—"there is nothing like this in the Scriptures; moreover, this kind of generation is impossible and completely absurd from the point of view of rational reason"—that goes explicitly against one of the most consistent and fascinating strands of Pablo's thought. From his very earliest surviving writings as a convert (in Hebrew) to the (Latin) *Scrutinium* produced at the very end of his long life, Pablo maintained the highly original idea (so beautifully excavated by Yosi Yisraeli) that the Jews had failed to recognise the many mysteries of faith contained in the Hebrew Bible and the Talmud—mysteries then generalised and perfected in Christianity—precisely because they had mistakenly learned to prefer intellect and reason over faith.

This conviction is already fully in evidence in the famous exchange of letters that the newly converted Pablo had in the early 1390s with a young Jewish physician named Joshua ha-Lorki. Joshua would later (c. 1412) convert, assume the name of Gerónimo de Santa Fe, and become one of the principal protagonists (probably in close collaboration with Pablo) at the Disputation at Tortosa that would produce the conversion of so many more Iberian Jews to Christianity in 1413–14. But for now, in the 1390s, ha-Lorki is a Jew and a defender of Judaism, and chief among his defences (judging from the length he devotes to it in the letter he sent to Pablo) is the irrationality of Christian accounts of Jesus' conception and divinity. Pablo responds as he will in the *Scrutinium* some forty years later, with the argument that this insistence on intellect and reason is precisely the basic error that has over the ages misled the Jews from the truths of their faith, an error that Pablo felt was especially acute in his own times. In his insistence on intellectual reason, writes Pablo provocatively, ha-Lorki is betraying his allegiance to the (Muslim) philosopher Ibn Rushd (Averroes). Contra Ginzburg, I suspect that had Pablo foreseen Francisco de Maldonado, he would have diagnosed him with the same Averroistic hyper-rationalist disease that he believed had led so many Jews across history to perdition. How should you judge which of these interpretations is truer to Pablo's intentions?¹⁸

8. I am not demanding an answer to that question. I pose it only to make clear that Ginzburg's heuristic example has not addressed the key questions at stake. In writing of "rear-view mirrors," I was admitting to the partiality of my attention to particular possibilities in the past and justifying that partiality in terms of the differential power of those possibilities in the future. This methodological and ethical commitment (if we may call it that) allows one to note a plurality of possible futures in the past, while at the same time to recognise that some of those futures became powerful and others unimaginable. We can thus (switching now to the example of Pablo) discover a plurality of potential worlds in Pablo's writing, such as his vision of a Pauline pleroma of Christian hermeneutics achieved through the conversion of the Jews. But we can also notice how, for example, this particular vision became quickly less and less thinkable (witness the Castilian civil war of 1449 with its attendant "purity of blood" statutes issued against the *conversos*), so that Pablo's work came to serve many as a powerful anti-Jewish treatise, and a few Marranos as a source of information about a Judaism they yearned to recover.

We can choose to reduce the rich possibilities of Pablo's thought to polarity, repressing the "anti-Jewish" futures of that thought in order to favour "pro-Jewish" apologetic ones. We can choose to ignore the massive asymmetries of power that were accruing to these possibilities already in Pablo's own lifetime. We might want to make such choices if our eyes are set on a different asymmetry of power, such as the comparative power of children and bombs in Gaza. In that case it would be concern with Israel's power over Palestine in the present that governs our reading of Pablo and that of

Pablo's future readers, rather than concern for the complexity of Pablo's ideas, or attention to the relative power of those ideas in their own context, or in any of the many future contexts through which they were encountered across time.

Such choices can—indeed must—be argued, even legitimated. But that legitimation needs to be in terms of the questions they are meant to answer. Carlo Ginzburg's critique of *Anti-Judaism* is posed as a defence of the past's ambivalence and complexity, when, as I have tried to demonstrate, it achieves quite the opposite. If in fact his critique is motivated less by a concern with the past and more by what he perceives to be massive asymmetries of power in the present, then we should expect him to justify both his evaluation of those asymmetries in the present, and his decision to have them dictate terms to the past.

In both cases, that justification will not be trivial, if it is to remain critical. Certainly the bombs that fell on Gaza were more powerful than any child who fell before them, and there may be some questions for which this horrific asymmetry is all that matters. But for other questions—for example, questions about the contemporary fields of force in which both the child victims and their bombers gain broader meaning, mobilising geopolitical power; or questions about how the history of thought has shaped the possibilities of existence for a Jewish state and its Muslim and Christian neighbours—we cannot rest there. Which is merely to say: the present is not simpler than the past. We too, like all of our ancestors, live in a pathless hour, uncertain of which of the many potentials with which our age is pregnant will quicken into the futures we yearn for or dread. If we do not strive to hear the polyphony of powers composing the present, how can we hope to nourish those futures or claim to preserve the complexity of the past?

A historian is a prophet facing backwards, in that visions of the future often animate attention to the past.¹⁹ Time therefore judges historians not only as antiquarians, but also as visionaries. It is not only the quality of their philology, the cleverness of their causalities, or the depth of their archives that produces a historian's posterity (if we dare dream of such a thing), but also the acuity, as seen "in the rear view mirror," of their fears for the future, and of their attempts to address those fears by marrying their vision of the present to their version of a past. My pages on Eric Auerbach's "Figura" of 1938 in the concluding pages of *Anti-Judaism* were an engagement of this sort, and not, as Ginzburg suggests, the result of my "bewildered" realisation, at the end of a very long book, that I had wasted so many years and so much ink over-simplifying the world.²⁰

Auerbach provided me with an example of a thinker searching (as we know he was doing from his correspondence) for a past to put to the purpose of averting the evil he saw unfolding about him. In "Figura," he focused upon one of the many ways in which early Christians came to think of their relationship to the Jewish past and scripture (*figura* being the Latin name for this interpretive device), one that preserved an important role for

both in the Christian interpretation of the world. Auerbach offered this history of thought to his contemporaries, with the goal of recalling them to its forgotten potentials. At the same time, he overlooked other more "anti-Jewish" ways in which early Christians had learned to think about their relationship to that past and scripture, ways whose power had never disappeared, and was in fact everywhere exploding around him. Auerbach chose to combat the anti-Judaism he feared in his present in part by silencing the anti-Judaism of the past. I invoked his example by way of contrast with my own approach, which was to combat the possibilities of anti-Judaism that concern me in my present by illuminating a past that might animate them.

Ginzburg seems to have a very different sense than I of what the future might hold, and a very different sense of how that future might relate to the past. Who is right? In some sense it is always too early to tell. Historians, like prophets, are hostage to what will be. Interpretive decisions that might appear to be critical, prescient, and true at one point in the flow of time may come to seem wrong or even disastrously short-sighted at another. As I put it in the concluding lines of *Anti-Judaism*:

I may be wrong about the risk, wrong in my sense of where the greater danger lies, and therefore wrong in how I have chosen to approach the past [. . .] My sense of the future's dangers, like every other historian's, may well turn out to be untrue. But in such matters of prophecy, as God explained to Jonah, we should take joy in being proved wrong.²¹

9. It is always too early to tell, but in the meantime we can cultivate methodology and argument as criteria for judgment. And here I think that this collection, *The Medieval Roots of Antisemitism*, is exemplary in ways that its "Postface" does not adequately celebrate. For over and over again this collection addresses our problem of sameness and difference, continuity and change in prejudices about Judaism. It does so from multiple perspectives, across diverse genres, and in pursuit of varied questions, thereby performing the kinds of comparisons and arguments out of which any critical approach to our problem must emerge.

There are, to be sure, a few absolute declarations of difference between the medieval and the modern (such as Wyrwa's) that fail to ask "same or different in regard to what?" But much more common are explorations of specific strands of similarity, such as Singer's study of the "Wandering Jew." Or pages dedicated to innovations that seem discontinuous with what came before, but powerfully influence what comes later. I think here of Rubin's study of the first ritual murder accusations, or the line drawn by Lipton from Bertrand Russell's epistolary caricatures of Semitic noses to the iconographic inventiveness of the twelfth century. There are even illuminating meditations—such as Klug's and Seidler's Wittgensteinian investigations—on why comparison and analogy are necessary for the historian, which is also to say, on the necessity of evaluating claims of sameness or difference

in terms of their adequacy to different questions. "It comes to this," Klug tells us:

In a given historical or political context, the question to ask is [. . .] "What is the analogy worth?" Is it worth asserting or better to deny it? The value of the analogy lies in the light it sheds on the empirical context within which we consider it. If it illuminates more than it obscures, embrace it. If the opposite, reject it. These things are a matter of judgment.²²

Almost every essay in this collection asks that question of the relationship between anti-Judaism's past and present. Frankel's comparison of American and European antisemitism; Tokarska-Bakir on "The Present Causes of Past Effects"; Adams and Heß's comparisons of blood libels across the ages; Svartvik's Twainian sense that "History does not repeat itself, but it does rhyme"; Webman's reading of modern Islamist "recycling" of early Islamic motifs: these voices and others take seriously the task of asking aloud, so to speak, whether and how a particular past is illuminating for a particular present and vice-versa.

In their willingness to ask these questions, and in the varied, often fascinating, "sometimes contradictory" answers they produce to them, we have a powerful antidote to that widespread and potentially deadly dogmatism which would forbid us to inquire, on this one topic of antisemitism, into the relevance of the past to the present. We should all be grateful for the gift.

Notes

Note: My thanks to Ryan Szpiech and Yosi Yisraeli for sharing with me their thoughts and writings, and to Daniel Watling for his comments and editorial assistance.

1. Since Ginzburg found it meaningful to provide a note listing the number of times I use the word "ambivalent," I should note that it occurs more than double the times he lists, indeed in virtually every chapter, in formulations like "it is important to insist on this ambivalence." Some of the "few" occurrences Ginzburg overlooks: pp. 98, 162, 347, 351, 352, 363, 407, 408, and 511.
2. Or, as I put it in an article that served as a preparation for the book, "the Jewish question" became the key issue in Christian hermeneutics and in the elaboration of Jewish theology, ontology, and sociology," because Christianity endorsed the Jewish Scripture as its own. "The Birth of the Pariah: Jews, Christian Dualism, and Social Science," *Social Research* 70, no. 1 (2003): 201–36 (here 211).
3. One might even understand the Church's inclusion of the Hebrew Bible as generating a greater potential for violence than Marcionism, in that orthodox Christian appropriation of these scriptures allows for, perhaps even demands, a never-ending indictment of Jewish exegesis and Jewish life. Had Marcion been victorious, perhaps Judaism would simply have become irrelevant for the Christian.
4. Nirenberg, *Anti-Judaism*, 10.
5. Ginzburg has, however, often engaged explicitly with the question, always as a powerful advocate for *not* reducing the past to the will of the present. See,

- among his many works touching on this subject, "Our Words, and Theirs: A Reflection on the Historian's Craft, Today," in *Historical Knowledge: In Quest of Theory, Method and Evidence*, ed. Susanna Fellman and Marjatta Rahikainen (Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2012), 97–119.
6. For example, in the *Additiones* Pablo criticises Lyra's explanation of *hodie* in the Hebrew of Psalm 2, but then provides his own even more extensive explanation for why the Psalm is entirely Christological in its literal sense. The Jewish Saul of the *Scrutinium* (book I, dist. 9 cap. 9) does echo the *Additiones'* critique of Lyra (namely, that grammatically the Psalm verse could refer to the birth of David), but the Christian Paulus then responds by repeating the more extensive Christological reading that Pablo had given in the *Additiones*. I see no repudiation or contradiction here, nor in the treatment of the plurality of the Hebrew word *Elohim*.
 7. Scholars have long suggested that Pablo may have begun the project as a student in Paris. For an early example, see Luciano Serrano, *Los conversos D. Pablo de Santa María y D. Alfonso de Cartagena: Obispos de Burgos, gobernantes, diplomáticos y escritores* (Madrid: Bermejo, 1942), 110. But it is clear from Pablo's own prologue, from stylistic evidence, and from reception history that the project was a long and sporadic one. On Pablo's Prologue, see most recently Ryan Szpiech, "A Father's Bequest: Augustinian Typology and Personal Testimony in the Conversion Narrative of Solomon HaLevi/Pablo De Santa María," in *The Hebrew Bible in Fifteenth-Century Spain: Exegesis, Literature, Philosophy, and the Arts*, ed. Jonathan Decker and Arturo Prats (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 177–98, and idem, *Conversion and Narrative: Reading and Religious Authority in Medieval Polemic* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013), 41–51. For any discussion of the *Additiones* or the *Scrutinium* the point of reference must now be Yosi Yisraeli's masterful work, "Between Jewish and Christian Scholarship in the Fifteenth Century: The Consolidation of a 'Converso Doctrine' in the Theological Writings of Pablo de Santa María," PhD Dissertation (Tel Aviv University, 2014). Yisraeli discusses the composition of the *Additiones* at pp. 70–75.
 8. Aristotle, *Metaphysics* IV 3 1005b, 23–26; and 1005b, 19–20: "It is impossible for the same thing to belong and not to belong at the same time to the same thing and in the same respect."
 9. John 5:39 had been invoked by an anonymous Franciscan critic of early versions of Pablo's *Additiones* that circulated before the edited 1429 manuscript was compiled. The friar used the phrase to denounce as false (and Judaising) what he characterised as Pablo's privileging of the literal sense of scripture in his commentaries on Lyra. The friar's letter, along with Pablo's initial response, was included in the Prologue to the 1429 manuscript of the *Additiones* that Pablo dedicated to his son Alonso de Cartagena. Pablo and the anonymous friar were, in other words, engaged in a debate like ours, about "ambivalence," that is, about the proper place of "Judaism" in "Christianity." The *Scrutinium* is in this sense explicitly presented as an expansion of that debate.
 10. Saul accepts Christianity at the end of the first book. Paul then explains to him how his conversion has shifted the terms of the debate: henceforth, the New Testament will serve along with the Old as authoritative ground for their discussion, as will the example of the Christian saints: "*quod in sequentibus auctoritates novi testamenti accipias, sicut & antiquas accipiebas. Utrumque enim est a deo datum seu revelatum. Similiter & auctoritates sanctorum nostrorum quorum eloquia sunt igne charitatis examinata recipias, qui primo talmudica dicta quae in multis igne infernali succensa, ut forte in sequentibus apparebit temerarie recipiebas. Et sic ad vota tua implenda Deo duce procedemus*" (*Scrutinium*,

- 1.10.9, p. 358). In the *Additiones*, Pablo had characterised Thomas Aquinas as "*igne charitatis examinata et naturalis rationis dictamine multipliciter purgata*" (*Additiones*, prol. ii, p. 1:6). (Compare the use of the phrase in Psalm 11:7.) Throughout the *Scrutinium* Pablo often marks certain Christian mysteries as beyond proof by reason. See, for example, his treatment of the sacrament of the Eucharist at 2.3.6, p. 413: "*quod manifeste contingit in hoc sacramento, in quo per nullum sensum, nec etiam intellectum naturalem humanum cognosci possunt ea quae miraculose in eo continentur, nisi solum per cognitionem supernaturalem a Deo infusam, scilicet per fidem.*"
11. In this, his position is similar to that of late thirteenth-century Dominicans such as Raymond Martini (Ramon Marti), whose *Pugio fidei* (1287) frequently cited rabbinic literature to establish articles of Christian faith. See Chen Merchavia, "Pugio Fidei—an Index of Citations," [Hebrew] in *Exile and Diaspora: Studies in the History of the People of Israel Presented to Professor Haim Beinart on the Occasion of His Seventieth Birthday*, ed. Aharon Mirsky, Avraham Grossman and Yosef Kaplan (Jerusalem: Ben Zvi Institute, 1988), 203–34. See in general Jeremy Cohen, *The Friars and the Jews* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1984), 122–70.
 12. There is plenty of evidence for such a contextual interpretation of Pablo's thought, not only in his own voluminous writings, but also in those of his son Alonso de Cartagena, and in the works of other influential theologians (such as Cardinal Juan de Torquemada). "Converso theology" is the formulation of Bruce Rosenstock, who argued strongly for a position like this one in his *New Men: Conversos, Christian Theology, and Society in Fifteenth-Century Castile* (London: Queen Mary, University of London, 2002). (For my reservations, see my review in *Speculum* 80, no. 1 [2005]: 315–17.) Yisraeli makes the most powerful case for interpreting Pablo in this light.
 13. I should point out that we have famous cases of "Marrano re-conversion" to Judaism in which the converts testify to more or less the opposite: that the arguments of the *Scrutinium* were perhaps the greatest obstacle to their accepting the truth of Judaism. See Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi, *From Spanish Court to Italian Ghetto. Isaac Cardoso: A Study in Seventeenth Century Marranism and Jewish Apologetics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1971), 288; and especially Yosef Kaplan, *From Christianity to Judaism: The Study of Isaac Orobio de Castro* [Hebrew] (Jerusalem, 1982), English trans. Raphael Loewe (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), with page references here to the Hebrew original: 77, 98 n. 2, 102–4, 112 n. 55, 215, 310 n. 98. Orobio makes clear that in his own case, Pablo's *Scrutinium* was the key work whose arguments he had to overcome in order to turn toward Judaism, not the other way around. His testimony to the Inquisition to that effect is at p. 77 (86 of the English), and his writings frequently take up the problem posed by Pablo's work.
 14. Yisraeli, "Between Jewish and Christian Scholarship," 95. Though the dissertation remains unpublished, see by the same author: "Constructing and Undermining Converso Jewishness: Profiat Duran and Pablo de Santa María," in *Religious Conversion: History, Experience, and Meaning*, ed. Ira Katznelson and Miri Rubin (London: Routledge, 2016), 185–215; and "A Christianized Sephardic Critique of Rashi's *Peshat* in Pablo de Santa María's *Additiones ad Postillam Nicolai de Lyra*," in *Medieval Exegesis and Religious Difference: Commentary, Conflict, and Community in the Premodern Mediterranean*, ed. Ryan Szpiech (New York: Fordham University Press, 2015), 128–41. Ryan Szpiech takes the contrasting ways in which Pablo's work was deployed in the early sixteenth-century Reuchlin–Pfefferkorn debate as a starting point for an important study on multiple late medieval and early modern attitudes toward