

DS145
.S2713
1995

P R E F A C E

Gift of Michael Walzer: May 25, 1995 ss. 2-23491

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Schocken Books Inc., New York. Distributed by Pantheon
Books, a division of Random House, Inc., New York.
Originally published in France as *Réflexions sur la
Question Juive*, by Éditions Morihien, Copyright 1946 by
Paul Morihien, Paris.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Sartre, Jean Paul, 1905-
[Réflexions sur la question juive. English]
Anti-Semite and Jew / Jean-Paul Sartre ; translated by George J.
Becker ; with a new preface by Michael Walzer.
p. cm.
Previously published: New York : Schocken Books, 1948.
ISBN 0-8052-1047-4
1. Antisemitism. I. Title.
DS145.S2713 1995
305.892'4—dc20 95-1929
CIP

Manufactured in the United States of America
First Schocken paperback edition published in 1965
[95] 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Sometime in the second half of 1944, as the war in Europe drew to a close, Jean-Paul Sartre noticed that in discussions about postwar France, the imminent return of French Jews deported by the Nazis was never mentioned. Some of the speakers, he guessed, were not pleased by the prospect; others, friends of the Jews, thought it best to be silent. (Neither they nor Sartre knew how many of the deported Jews would never return.) Thinking about these discussions, Sartre decided to write a critique of anti-Semitism. Both the occasion and the subject of the critique were French. Having lived through the occupation, writing a year or so before the great celebration of the resistance began, Sartre addressed the complicity of the French in the Nazi project. He did so, however, at a level of abstraction that only few of the French found disturbing. The critique, as it turned out, was more disturbing to the

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Jews, with whom Sartre meant to declare his solidarity.

Sartre provides no account of the writing of *Anti-Semite and Jew*. The book must have been composed at breakneck speed, for it was ready to be excerpted in one of the first issues of *Temps Modernes*, founded in 1945. Though Sartre reports on a number of conversations with friends and acquaintances, he says that he did no research. He had read, of course, the most influential anti-Semitic writers—Charles Maurras and Maurice Barrès; and he had encountered anti-Semitism in his own family and among schoolmates at the Lycée. But he did not stop now to read about Jewish history or religion, and the only Jews that he knew were highly assimilated, with little more understanding than he had of either one. Among committed Jews he had no connections of any kind. So he wrote what he thought, describing a world that he knew only in part, reconstructing it in conformity with existentialist psychology and enlightenment skepticism and the version of Marxist class analysis that he had made his own. (In the 1940s, he regularly denied that he was a Marxist, but his commitment-to-come is evident in this book.) He produced a philosophical speculation variously supported by anecdotes and personal observations.

The result, however, is a powerfully coherent argument that demonstrates how theoretical sophistication and practical ignorance can, sometimes, usefully combine.

There is much to criticize in the essay: reading it again fifty years after it was written, one sees immediately how much it was shaped by a specific (and no longer entirely persuasive) political orientation. Its ignorance of Judaism was willful and programmatic—for this parochial religious doctrine, and the community it shaped, and all such doctrines and communities, had no place in the world to come as Sartre conceived it, after the liberation of France and the future liberation of humankind. But the world as it is, France in 1944, is also Sartre's subject. He saw clearly that the defeat of the Nazis was not yet the end of the European catastrophe, and he set out, like many other intellectuals in the 1940s and '50s, to understand the rootedness of prejudice, hatred, and genocide in his own society. *Anti-Semite and Jew*, in its best passages, stands with Theodor Adorno's study of the authoritarian personality, Talcott Parsons' essays on the sociology of Nazism, Erich Fromm's *Escape from Freedom*, and Hannah Arendt's account of totalitarian politics.

But Sartre's book should not be read as a piece of social science or even (as I have described it) as a philosophical speculation. His best work in the 1940s was in drama (*No Exit* was first performed in 1944; *The Respectful Prostitute* in 1946; *Dirty Hands* in 1948), and *Anti-Semite and Jew* is a Marxist/existentialist morality play,

whose characters are produced by their dramatic interactions. The interactions are never actually enacted by people with proper names; the dialogue is never rendered in the first person. Everything remains abstract, impersonal, and yet the "situations" and the "choices" are highly dramatic. As in *No Exit*, the cast of characters is small. It consists of four actors: the anti-Semite, the democrat, the inauthentic Jew, the authentic Jew. The first and third of these play the leads; the second and fourth have only minor parts—hence the drama is grim, not tragic finally, but savagely critical of the world it describes. Waiting offstage to redeem the criticism is the revolutionary worker.

This is the structure of the Sartrean drama: each character creates the others and chooses himself—and does both from the inside of a "situation" that Sartre commonly describes in a manner, at least partly learned from Marx, that suggests its determinist character. The drama arises from the interplay of social forces and individual decisions. It is virtually impossible to judge the relative weight of these two. While Sartre always insists that individuals are responsible not only for what they do but also for what they are, it is nonetheless clear that they make their choices under duress.

The tension is most apparent in the portrait of the anti-Semite, which is commonly and rightly taken to be the

strongest part of the book. The anti-Semite is first of all a social-psychological type, shaped by the narrowness and vulnerability of the world he inhabits (Sartre writes about all four of his characters as if they were men, so I will use masculine pronouns in discussing them). The description is familiar today, though Sartre is one of the first writers to provide it. The anti-Semite comes from the lower middle class of the provincial towns: he is a functionary, office worker, small businessman—a "white collar proletarian." Member of a declining social class, he is threatened by social change, endlessly fearful and resentful. He "possesses nothing," but by identifying the Jew as an alien, he lays claim to all of France. He is moved by a "nostalgia for . . . the primitive community" in which he can claim ascriptive membership: French by birth, language, and history, here he doesn't need to prove either his identity or his worth. The diversity and complexity of "modern social organization" are beyond his understanding; social mobility frightens him; the modern forms of property (abstractions like money and securities) are wholly mysterious to him. He sees the Jew as the initiate in these mysteries, the representative of modernity, the enemy of real Frenchmen, real property, the land, tradition, social order, sentimental attachment—capitalist, communist, atheist, traitor. And he aims, finally, to destroy this sinister threat: "What [the

anti-Semite] wishes, what he prepares, is the *death* of the Jew.”

The rich, Sartre says, exploit anti-Semitism “rather than abandon themselves to it.” And among workers, he confidently claims, “we find scarcely any anti-Semitism.” This very precise class analysis, which locates the anti-Semite in a fairly narrow segment of French society, poses a problem for Sartre’s argument: if only a part of the society is anti-Semitic, why is the situation of the Jew so radically determined by anti-Semitism? In fact, Sartre is not wholly committed to his class analysis. He starts indeed, from his own circle of family and friends, who came, mostly, out of the provincial petty bourgeoisie, but he moves on to a more abstract characterization. Anti-Semitism is also “a free and total choice of oneself,” and this choice, it seems, is made at every level of French society. Sartre gives his readers a sense of pervasive anti-Semitism, motivated by a general fear, not only of specifically modern uncertainties but also of “the human condition,” which is to say, of liberty, responsibility, solitude, and truth (“that thing of indefinite approximation”—Sartre’s argument about the fear of truth is very much like Adorno’s “intolerance of ambiguity”). Some people, the lower middle class especially, are more threatened than others, but no one is entirely unafraid or

incapable of choosing the Jew as his enemy and himself as an anti-Semite.

The anti-Semite creates the Jew, but before that he creates himself within his situation. (But isn’t this situation in part the creation of the Jew as the anti-Semite has created him? Sartre’s argument is necessarily circular. The inauthentic Jew, who appears later on in the drama, is in fact an agent—though not the only or the most important agent—of the modernity to which anti-Semites react.) Sartre sometimes writes as if anti-Semitism is a sociological reflex, but it is also, again, a choice. Indeed, it is the very model of an inauthentic choice, for the anti-Semite cannot or will not acknowledge his actual class situation or the fear it produces. He responds willfully to a world that he willfully misrepresents. Though Sartre never quite says this, it is strictly in line with his argument: anti-Semitism is the inauthenticity of the lower middle class (and of any one else who adopts it). But he never suggests what authentic lower middle class men or women would look like or how they would act—perhaps he doubted that authenticity was a likely, even if it was a possible, choice for members of a declining social class.

Authenticity is clearly not represented by the democrat, another bourgeois figure and the second of Sartre’s *dramatis personae*. The democrat embodies the virtues of

the French revolution. A good liberal, political centrist, defender of decency, friend—so he would certainly claim—of the Jews, he believes in the universal rights of man, and he wants those rights to be recognized and exercised *right now*. But his is a false universalism for he is blind to the realities of the world he actually inhabits. He cannot acknowledge the strength of anti-Semitism or the concrete conditions of Jewish life, and so he fears and rejects any authentic Jewish response. In an exactly similar fashion, he cannot acknowledge the actual condition of the working class, and so he fears and rejects authentic class consciousness.

The democrat defends the Jew as a man but “annihilates him as a Jew” (compare the argument of Clermont-Tonnerre in the Constituent Assembly’s 1791 debate on Jewish citizenship: “One must refuse everything to the Jews as a nation, and give everything to the Jews as individuals. . .”). But it is as a Jew (and a member of the Jewish nation) that the Jew is perceived by the others, and this is an identity that he cannot escape—more accurately, that he is not allowed to escape. So the democrat’s advocacy of assimilation for the Jews and classlessness for the workers, though no doubt well-intentioned, is also cruelly premature. And timing is crucial for Sartre; his drama is historical as well as

sociological; it moves in stages. The anti-Semite lives fearfully in the past; the democrat lives naively, sentimentally, inauthentically in the future.

By contrast, the inauthentic Jew lives in what is for him a desperate present. He seeks “avenues of escape,” but the more he flees, the more he is trapped: the quintessential modern man. Exactly what is he fleeing from? Sartre’s answer to this question is the most problematic part of his argument—first, because it is far less clear than the smooth surface of his essay suggests; and second, because its most insistent claims are radically implausible. Sartre starts with an absence: Jewishness in the modern world, he announces, is an empty category. As a result of “twenty-five centuries” of dispersion, dissolution, and political impotence (Sartre dates the Jewish collapse from the Babylonian exile, not the destruction of the Temple), the Jews are an ancient but also an “unhistorical people.” This last term, borrowed from Hegel and Marx, suggests a political/cultural backwater, cut off from all progressive currents. Contemporary Jews have, on this view, no civilization of their own; they cannot take pride in any specifically Jewish collective achievements; they have nothing to remember but a “long martyrdom [and] a long passivity.” More than any other minority group, then, they are “perfectly assimil-

able" into the surrounding culture. Only anti-Semitism, with its construction of the Jew as alien, unpatriotic, cosmopolitan, bars the way.

But then one would expect the inauthentic or escapist Jew to do everything he can to deny the construction and to make himself, in France, more French than the French. He should hide, pass, intermarry, convert, buy land, move to the provinces, adopt conservative or at least conventional political views. Indeed, there have always been Jews who acted in this way, more or less successfully. Other Jews have named them with some functional equivalent of inauthenticity—more obviously morally laden, which Sartre insists his own term is not: unfaithful, false, disloyal. But Sartre's inauthentic Jews are driven in the opposite direction; they are evermore critical, cosmopolitan, ironic, rationalist, and so on. No doubt, this is a portrait (and in its psychosocial detail often a shrewd and insightful portrait) of the assimilated Jewish intellectuals whom Sartre knew in the 1930s and '40s, many of them refugees from the East. But these people were not only trying to escape anti-Semitism and the anti-Semite's construction of Jewishness, they were also escaping the closed communities and orthodox traditionalism of their own Jewish past—a presence, not an absence. Sartre's analysis requires an account of this substantive Judaism, for without it he cannot explain why

the Jew in flight conforms so closely to the conception he is supposedly fleeing.

If he were to provide this account, he would also be able to acknowledge that the "avenues of escape" described in his book are chosen in part because of an elective affinity between classical Jewish learning and modernist intellectualism. I don't mean to suggest an identity here, only an affinity—and one that is more a matter of style than of content. The content of Jewish learning is often, obviously, anti-modernist. Nonetheless, one can recognize the interpretative freedom, the pursuit of complexity for its own sake, and the argumentative zeal of the classical yeshiva in the literary and political work of Sartre's Jewish contemporaries. No doubt, the cosmopolitan and leftist politics of (many) of these people served their interests vis-à-vis both Jewish orthodoxy and French anti-Semitism. Many communist Jews, to take the easiest example, were hiding from their Jewishness in the Party, while seeking a world—to which Sartre also aspired, presumably for different reasons—in which Jewishness would not matter. Nonetheless, Jewish leftism was not simply an invention of inauthentic Jews; its cast of mind, intellectual tenor, and modes of analysis resonated clearly with an older culture whose very existence Sartre denies.

Most of the features of Jewish intellectual success in

the modern world are attributed by Sartre to the flight from anti-Semitic constructions of Jewishness. Self-analysis, reflectiveness, skepticism, irony, rationalism, objectivity, abstraction, the "critical turn"—aren't these the marks of the greatest Jewish figures of the modern age: Spinoza, Marx, Freud, Kafka, Proust, Einstein? But aren't these also the very figures that the anti-Semite invokes in order to prove that the Jews are endlessly subversive, acid eating away at the social fabric, corroding all traditional values? Even as they flee their Jewishness, supposedly an anti-Semitic creation, they act out their designated role and confirm the anti-Semite in his fear and hatred. Perhaps the avenue of escape is not well chosen. Or perhaps Jewish modernism isn't merely reactive—so that our understanding of it requires also a deeper understanding of the Jewish past.

Even the authentic Jew, however, has no such understanding. He, too, as Sartre describes him, is a creature of the present. He affirms his Jewish identity, but this affirmation has nothing to do with religious faith, or nostalgia for the old community, or a search for value in the tradition. It is simply an acceptance of the "situation" that the anti-Semite has created and a spirited defense of the physical life of the Jews within it (remember that they have, according to Sartre, no cultural life). Political Zionism is one example of this defense; the American

Anti-Defamation League would be another; Sartre praises a "Jewish league against anti-Semitism" then in formation in France. Just as authentic workers—his constant analogy—reject the myth of social harmony, recognize the reality of class conflict, and make themselves into militant defenders of working class interests, so authentic Jews give up the universalist false consciousness of the democrat, recognize social pluralism, and make themselves into militant defenders of Jewish interests. But there is no real equivalence here. Jewish authenticity is only a way of living well within the Jewish situation; it has no transformative force. (Years later, when he visited Israel in 1967, Sartre revised this judgement: Zionism had created a "new Israeli Jew [who]; if he can develop in peace and understand all his contradictions and go beyond them in his actions . . . will be one of the most superior men to be found in history." Neither in 1944 nor in 1967 did Sartre display any gift for understatement.) That is why the authentic Jew is only a minor character in the Sartrean drama. But the authentic worker is a revolutionary and, therefore, a key figure in what we might think of as the next play. Sadly, the anti-Semite and the inauthentic Jew are the key figures in this play, each of them creating and confirming the other's existence, locked together in a world from which there is, until the revolution, no exit.

The working class militant waits in the wings. One day, not quite yet, he will appear dramatically in history, creating a classless society, which represents for Sartre the end of every form of social division. The Jews will assimilate into this society, leaving nothing behind, without regret, giving up their Jewishness just as the worker gives up class consciousness for the sake of universality. Exactly what happens to the lower middle class provincial anti-Semite in the course of the revolution is unclear. Defeated, he presumably disappears from the Sartrean stage, along with the Jew he created.

But this is an ending to be wished for only on the (false) assumption that there really is no Jewish history, culture, or community. Nor are the Jews the only people about whom this assumption would have to be made. The anti-Semite "chooses" the Jew only because he is available; any dispossessed, stigmatized minority, any "unhistorical people" could as easily be chosen. The Jew in Europe is the exposed face of modern life. But the same role can be played, with the same degree of authenticity and inauthenticity, by other groups in other times and places. None of these groups have, in Sartre's eyes, any claim on our moral attention beyond the claim they make as persecuted men and women. We should defend the group's existence only so long as its members are persecuted *as a group*; after that, we defend only their indi-

vidual rights. Sartre calls this position, which is his own; "concrete liberalism." Indeed, he is a liberal, for all his Marxizing sociology.

But he is not a pluralist liberal. The disappearance of historical peoples, like the French, is obviously not on his agenda, and so he must imagine a future international society of distinct nations (he would, of course, and in the years to come he did, oppose every version of imperial and chauvinist politics, including the French version). With regard to a future France, however, he adopts a radically antipluralist position. This position is always described in social and economic rather than cultural terms: Sartre looks forward to a France "whose members feel mutual bonds of solidarity, because they are all engaged in the same enterprise." But he doesn't want to repeat the error of the democrat: solidarity and mutual engagement do not exist and cannot exist in contemporary France, where class conflict creates and intensifies cultural difference. Here and now, difference must be accepted; there is no honest alternative. So the Jew has to be granted his double identity, welcomed as a "French Jew . . . with his character, his customs, his tastes, his religion if he has one." *Multi-culturalism now*: so we might describe the Sartrean program. But this is, for him, only a temporary and second-best solution to the problem of anti-Semitism. In no sense does it represent a

recognition that there might be any value in Jewish character, customs, tastes, or religion.

This historically divided politics—difference now, unity later—is, Sartre believes, what authenticity requires. Even if anti-Semitism “is a mythical . . . representation of the class struggle,” it is nonetheless a genuine affliction for the Jews. It reflects the reality of a divided society, “the conflict of interests and the cross-currents of passions . . . *it is a phenomenon of social pluralism* (emphasis added).” Living authentically within this situation means acknowledging the conflict and then fighting for the rights of oppressed and marginalized groups. This is the point of Sartre’s book, which he probably thought of, whatever else he thought of it, as a political manifesto. But his longterm goal is a society where groups no longer exist to be oppressed and marginalized. Once again, Sartre assumes that this is what their members also want. Jewish authenticity is second-best even for the Jew, who longs to be what Sartre already is, French without qualification or addition.

But why is this such an attractive goal? It is attractive to Sartre because of his conviction that social pluralism necessarily leads to conflict, and conflict necessarily produces hatred and oppression. The mythic representation of the “other,” the projection of resentment and fear onto some helpless minority—these are for Sartre inevitable

consequences of pluralism. He is prepared to fight these consequences, but he is sure that the fight will never be won until pluralism, indeed, groupness itself, is definitively transcended. The revolution will bring a new solidarity, which will have no specific historical or cultural character, the ethnic or national or religious equivalent of classlessness.

This is little more than the conventional left doctrine of Sartre’s own time—and before and after, too. Obviously, the strength of *Anti-Semite and Jew* does not lie here; it is the portraits of the main characters that carry the book. Still, it seems worthwhile to suggest an alternative to Sartre’s revolutionary transcendence, for his position is likely to look, today, as mythical as the anti-Semite’s Jew—and as inauthentic. After all, what would men and women be like after the end of social pluralism? Perhaps Sartre believes that they will be simply and universally human. In fact, as the whole argument of his book suggests, they will surely be French. And this will represent a universal identity only in the sense that it will be universally available to the Jews and to all other non-French minorities. In every other sense, it will be a historically particular identity, culturally rich, no doubt, but not obviously richer or better than the identities it supercedes. Sartre’s conviction that minorities like the Jews were eager to assimilate (in his very strong sense of

this word) has turned out to be wrong; indeed, it was wrong at the time, in 1944, even if many individuals recognized themselves in his descriptions. *Anti-Semite and Jew* provoked an angrily defensive response from committed Jewish intellectuals, despite Sartre's sympathy not only for their cause but for them, as authentic Jews. They could not accept his insistence that they were, should be, and could only be, heroic defenders of an empty Jewishness.

Even intellectuals heavily influenced by Sartre, like Albert Memmi, who wrote several books analyzing the "concrete negativity" of Jewish life in the diaspora, could not themselves enact a Sartrean authenticity: "To affirm my Jewishness without giving it a specific content," Memmi argued, "would have been an empty proposition and in the final analysis contradictory" (*The Liberation of the Jew*, 1966). And where could that content come from except from "a cultural and religious tradition . . . collective habits of thought and behavior"? Memmi's engagement with the tradition and the habits was in large part oppositional, but it still represented a denial of Sartre's argument about Jewish absence.

Nor could these Jewish intellectuals agree that their role was historically circumscribed and of only temporary use. Memmi was a Zionist, arguing that even after the revolution Jews would need a place of their own: Jewish authenticity—self-affirmation and self-determination

—was possible only in a Jewish state. Other writers, determined to find a place in France as well as in Israel, argued for a pluralist society—the source, Sartre thought, of all their troubles. They envisaged a *permanent* multiculturalism, an idea that was fully articulated only in the much more radically pluralist United States, where the co-existence of cultural (most importantly religious) difference and common citizenship was figuratively represented by the "hyphenated" American. Characteristically, Sartre, who visited the United States in 1945 and wrote *The Respectful Prostitute* immediately after, saw in American pluralism only oppression and hatred: racism was the anti-Semitism of the new world. He was not entirely wrong, not then, not now. The (relative) success of religious toleration in breaking the link between pluralism and conflict has not yet been repeated for race and ethnicity. But there seems no good reason not to try to repeat it, given the value that people attach to their identity and culture.

Much can be learned, nonetheless, from Sartre's Marxist/existentialist psychology. Identity and culture are not timeless essences; they develop and change within historical situations; and the self-perception of individuals and groups is radically influenced by the (often hostile) perceptions of the "others." All this is true. Sartre is very good at alerting us to the interpersonal construction of

personal identities—a process even more in evidence today than when he wrote. At the same time, however, this constructive activity draws on and reinforces the different historical cultures. These have an inner strength that Sartre never acknowledges, and the people they sustain, who also sustain them, are not yet candidates for disappearance.

Nor, indeed, has anti-Semitism disappeared. If its new forms are not accessible to Sartre's particular version of class analysis, they nonetheless require an analysis along roughly similar lines: a search for people in trouble, incapable of understanding or coping with the actual sources of their difficulties, looking for someone to blame. Sometimes these people inhabit the lower middle class milieu that Sartre evoked, but they are also (in contemporary Eastern Europe, for example) workers and peasants and (in the United States) members of the new underclass.

Jews are more likely today than they were in 1944 to respond "authentically" to their encounter with anti-Semitism—that is, to affirm the value of their history and culture. But one contemporary response provides an interesting example of what many Jews today would call inauthenticity, though it is not clear that Sartre would recognize it as such: that is, the effort to base Jewish identity on the Holocaust experience. This is purely reactive to the most terrible work of twentieth century

anti-Semites, but the insistence on remembering this work and identifying with its victims hardly represents an "avenue of escape." Sartrean authenticity has taken on new meanings, a sign simultaneously that his argument is persuasive and that it is in need of revision.

Now that the revolution Sartre foresaw has been indefinitely postponed, it is time to imagine a new drama in which the actors live a little more comfortably in each other's eyes . . . and in their own. The aim of a concrete liberalism, one would think, is to design situations from which an honorable escape is possible—but where it is also possible to feel at home, to live with friends and relatives, chosen and inherited, not only in traditional but also in innovative ways, in peace. Rising rates of intermarriage and assimilation, which Sartre predicted would follow naturally from any lifting of anti-Semitic pressure, now stand in tension with developments he neither predicted nor could have understood: the institutional strength of diaspora Jewish communities, the rise of Jewish studies in universities throughout the Western world, the revival of religious interest (if not of religious faith), and a transnational solidarity that extends across the diaspora as well as binding diaspora Jews to Israel.

Sartre's revolutionary transcendence looks today very much like the long-imagined messianic age, around which Jews over the centuries have constructed a set of

arguments whose thickness and complexity hardly fit his version of their story. The arguments combine faith, skepticism, worldly wit, and prudence. And at least some of the commentators suggest a position that might fit a chastened Sartreanism: while we wait for the unitary world to come, since the wait is likely to be long, it is urgently necessary and entirely possible to repair and improve the fragmented world, which is the only world we have.*

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January 1995

* I am grateful to Menachem Brinker and Mitchell Cohen for their critical reading of an early draft of this preface.

If a man attributes all or part of his own misfortunes and those of his country to the presence of Jewish elements in the community, if he proposes to remedy this state of affairs by depriving the Jews of certain of their rights, by keeping them out of certain economic and social activities, by expelling them from the country, by exterminating all of them, we say that he has anti-Semitic *opinions*.

This word *opinion* makes us stop and think. It is the word a hostess uses to bring to an end a discussion that threatens to become acrimonious. It suggests that all points of view are equal; it reassures us, for it gives an inoffensive appearance to ideas by reducing them to the level of tastes. All tastes are natural; all opinions are permitted. Tastes, colors, and opinions are not open to discussion. In the name of democratic institutions, in the name of freedom of opinion, the anti-