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Jonathan Judaken, *Sartre and the Jewish Question: Anti-antisemitism and the Politics of the French Intellectual*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2006. xi + 390 pp. [1] Index. \$29.95 U.S. (p. cl). ISBN 978-0-8032-2612-8; \$29.95 U.S. (p. pb). ISBN 978-0-8032-2489-6.

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Although Jonathan Judaken's *Jean-Paul Sartre and the Jewish Question* may appear from its title to be a narrowly focused monograph, it is nothing of the sort. Rather, it is an ambitious reinterpretation of Sartre's ideas and politics with broader claims to contribute to our understanding of twentieth-century France and its intellectuals. Judaken argues that the Jewish Question was central to Sartre's thought and politics: "every time he fundamentally rethought the underlying principles that defined his politics and his role as a public intellectual, Sartre did so by reflecting on 'the Jewish Question'" (p. 3). Further, "his response to the Jewish Question helped determine his approach to other concerns and was part of the reason that his ideas resonated so deeply in French political culture"(p. 3). Sartre's turn to the Jewish Question should, Judaken argues, be no surprise because the French public intellectual has from its Dreyfus Affair origins been "intrinsically enmeshed in the debate on the Jewish Question" (p. 3) to such an extent that Judaken can present his work as a case study in how the figure of "the Jew" helped define the intellectual in twentieth-century France (p. 7).

Judaken's book implements what he calls a "*cultural history of ideas*," (p. 19) an approach he describes as requiring "both understanding the conceptual matrix of Sartre's work and attention to the social, political, economic, and ideological contexts that shaped his projects" (p. 19). Also concerned with the history of reception, it seeks to shed light not only on the production of ideas, but also on their distribution and consumption. As such, it tries to account "for the political economy of meanings as well as the political unconscious of a system of thought"(p. 19). Thus, Judaken seeks not only to elucidate Sartre and his ideas, but also the field in which Sartre intervened. This ambitious and worthy agenda is difficult to implement, but Judaken, comfortable in both the complexities of Sartre's thought and the broader context, is largely successful.

After the introduction, Judaken's book opens with an excellent chapter on Sartre's work in the 1930s. Challenging the commonly held interpretation of Sartre as apolitical during these years, Judaken argues that Sartre addressed France's 1930s crisis through his novel *Nausea* and his story "The Childhood of a Leader," both of which enacted Sartre's developing philosophy through their treatment of their protagonists' crises of identity and their resolution of it in relation to the Jewish Question. Lucien Fleurier of "The Childhood of a Leader" finds escape from the absurdity of his existence—which he experiences through encounters with Jews—by embracing antisemitism and a "true French" identity that Sartre considers inauthentic. Antoine Roquentin, by contrast, rejects *enracinement* and instead finds a solution to his identity crisis in his discovery, while listening to a song written by a Jew, of redemption through writing. Thus, Sartre outlines two possible responses—both related to the Jewish Question—to the crisis of the 1930s. For Sartre's characters "the image of 'the Jew' is the foil that fashions the shift from passive reflection to active commitment" (p. 47).

During the war, Judaken argues, Sartre's reflections on the Jewish Question helped him develop the central categories of his thought as well as his conception of *engagement*. Judaken finds this in Sartre's *drôle de guerre* letters to Beauvoir in which he contrasts Heinrich Heine (the authentic Jew) with Pieterkowski (the inauthentic Jew), in his use of Jewish characters in his *The Roads to Freedom* novels, and in the Christmas play that Sartre wrote as a POW in 1940. Another thread of Judaken's discussion of these years is his argument that Sartre inhabited a "gray zone" during the war—an important point to make both to defend Sartre from charges of crass opportunism and to contrast Sartre's real wartime experiences with the *résistancialiste* myth of the war that he propagated at Liberation. Regarding the latter, Judaken convincingly argues that Sartre's texts such as "La République du silence" and "Qu'est-ce qu'un collaborateur?" engaged in "a double strategy of forgetting" (p. 110) whereby Sartre suggested that Resistance was ubiquitous and minimized collaboration by presenting collaborators as un-French deviants. Further, Sartre, by homogenizing the war experience, effectively erased the Jews and the specificity of their experience from the narrative of the war. In his postwar writings Sartre became, Judaken argues, paradoxically both "conscience for the nation" and the nation's master forgetter (p. 122).

Judaken's discussion of Sartre's *Réflexions sur la question juive* offers an excellent analysis of the insights and impasses of Sartre's text. Judaken shows how Sartre's book is a brilliant example of the application of his existentialist philosophy to a concrete problem. Its approach would be followed, as Judaken explains, by Sartre in his later analyses of colonialism and anti-Black racism as well as by other authors such as Simone de Beauvoir in *The Second Sex*. For Judaken, Sartre's main contribution to the study of antisemitism is to argue that it "is not caused by experience" (p. 131, citing Sartre). In terms of Sartre's philosophy it is "an inauthentic response to man's situation in the world and being-with-others," a flight from the human condition (p. 132). Judaken is particularly good at pointing out the ambiguities of Sartre's discussion of Jewish identity. Sartre, "haunted by the ghost of Abbé Grégoire" (p. 139), denies any positive Jewish identity, which is solely constituted by the antisemite's gaze. Since in Sartre's terms the authentic Jew is the Jew who accepts the scorn of the antisemite, Judaken concludes that for Sartre "the possibility of Jewish authenticity is thus Jewish martyrdom" (p. 138). Sartre often simply repeats stereotypes about Jews as he "capitulates to the lexicon of antisemitism by merely reversing the terms of the debate" (p. 146). No doubt this is due to Sartre's "strict dialectical logic" (p. 145) that limits possibilities and leaves him seeking resolution to the problem of antisemitism in a call for a mythical socialist revolution—which Judaken clearly sees as an inadequate response—to resolve the conflict and "overcome the antinomies of his own thought" (p. 144).

For Judaken, "the proper context for reading Sartre's *Réflexions* is as part of the Vichy syndrome and his own contribution to it through his double strategy of forgetting" (fn. p. 39, p. 333). Sartre, Judaken claims, "subtly sidelines the specific French responsibility for collaboration in the Final Solution" (p. 127). At one point in the text, Sartre appears to accept French responsibility with the statement that "There is not one of us [Frenchmen] who is not totally guilty and even criminal" (p. 142, citing Sartre), but then, Judaken argues, he immediately qualifies it by saying that "the Jewish blood that the Nazis shed falls on all our heads" (p. 138, citing Sartre). Further, Judaken quotes Sartre as writing: "We [Frenchmen] are *not guilty* and yet we run the risk *also* of being victims" (p. 142, citing Sartre). Judaken comments: "The 'Jewish blood,' like the guilt and responsibility for the Shoah, is ascribed to the Nazis, limiting French involvement. The French, like 'the Jews,' were also victims of Nazi atrocities. Sartre's gesture, which seemingly disseminates guilt to all Frenchmen, simultaneously and subtly exonerates French collaboration in the Final Solution" (p. 142).

There are several problems with this argument that demand a detailed response. First, the latter Sartre quote seems to read: "we are not guilty and yet run the risk of being its victims." Garbling a quote is an easy enough mistake to make—I freely admit to finding a garbled quote in my *French Intellectuals Against the Left* when I was working with the translator on the French edition—but Judaken's version of the quote nonetheless makes it seem emphatic and hence more important than Sartre's other statement on

guilt. Further, although Judaken interprets the antecedent of the pronoun “we” in both quotes to be simply “Frenchmen,” this seems inexact. The first quote is clearly about the past and appears in part three of the book in the context of a discussion of how “our anti-Semitism” and “our condescending liberalism” have created Jews “whose only reason for existing is to serve as scapegoat for a still prelogical community.” [2] The second quote, by contrast, is in the forward-looking last part of the book and appears in Sartre’s attempt to answer the question “What shall we do about anti-Semitism?” (p. 147). The “we” here is assumed to be the postwar Frenchmen who seek to do something about antisemitism. The statement appears not to be about the Shoah, but about the postwar present and future. It may be more reasonable to read it as saying “we [the postwar advocates of “concrete liberalism”] (p. 146) are not [now] guilty [of antisemitism] and yet run the risk of being its victims [in the future]” (p. 152).

To be sure, Sartre limits French involvement in the Shoah by ascribing primary responsibility to the Nazis. But, one might ask, is Sartre wrong to do so? If it is reasonable to distinguish between degrees of guilt for the Shoah, then the French—an aggregate within which there is, of course, massive amounts of variation—clearly are less guilty than the Germans. Leaving aside the question of the behavior of the population, the policies of the two regimes were substantially different. Vichy antisemitism, unlike Nazi anti-Semitism, was not exterminationist in intent; there would not have been a Shoah without the Nazis. Judaken fails to make this clear, and, on at least one occasion, [3] conflates German and French responsibility by describing the *Statut des juifs* as “the French Nuremberg Laws” (p. 77). Although the *Statut des juifs* and the Nuremberg Laws are similar insofar as they both defined in racial terms who was a Jew in the eyes of the law, the similarity stops there. The *Statut des juifs* removed Jews from positions of importance in French society, but that had already been largely done in Nazi Germany before the promulgation of the Nuremberg Laws in September 1935. Most importantly, the Nuremberg Laws went much further than Vichy’s statute in excluding the Jewish population. The “Reich Citizenship Law” stripped German Jews of their citizenship, making them subjects of the German state, while the “Law for the Protection of German Blood and German Honor” forbade marriage and sexual relations between Jews and German citizens. [4] Not only did the *Statut des juifs* not go this far, but Vichy would never strip all French Jews of citizenship or create a crime of “racial defilement.” None of this is to say that Vichy’s *Statut des juifs* was benevolent. Purely a product of Vichy and not German pressure, it did, after all, cast its net wider than the German ordinance in occupied France in defining Jews. [5] Returning to the question of Sartre, I do not think you can charge Sartre’s *Réflexions* with being “ambiguous about the issue of French complicity in the Final Solution to the Jewish Question”(p. 142). To be sure, Judaken might still argue that Sartre abetted French forgetting because he “collapsed the ontological and historical dimensions of his analysis, articulating anti-Semitism in transhistorical ontological terms” (p. 145), but in December 1945 when the first part of *Réflexions* appeared in *Les Temps modernes* the French did not need historical signposts to know that Sartre’s book spoke to a recent past in which they—or at least many of them—were complicit.

Judaken’s discussion of *What is Literature?*, in which Sartre defined his notion of *engagement*, is brimming with insights into Sartre’s conception of *engagement*. Particularly interesting is Judaken’s examination of the Resistance martyr as Sartre’s model for the engaged intellectual as well as his argument that Sartrean *engagement* is a secularization of Christ’s passion in which the writer is a “prophet-martyr who bears witness to the kingdom of man” (p. 155). While all of this is excellent, I believe that Judaken somewhat loses the thread of the Jewish Question in his analysis of this book. He tries to make a direct connection between *What is Literature?* and the Jewish Question by arguing that it presented *Réflexions* as “a paradigm of engaged writing” (p. 158), but I do not think the textual evidence supports this conclusion. [6]

This example raises a broader question of interpretation that is nearly inevitable in a work that seeks to examine the importance of a single issue or theme in the *oeuvre* of a figure as complicated as Sartre. *What is Literature?* as well as Sartre’s major philosophical works *Being and Nothingness* and *The Critique*

of *Dialectical Reason* all lack substantial references to the Jewish Question. Further, as Judaken recognizes, “Sartre wrote almost no nonfictional prose about the Jewish Question in the period from 1945 to 1962” (p. 159). What does this say about how central the Jewish Question was to Sartre? At least in the case of *Being and Nothingness* Judaken can (and does) offer the explanation that a lengthy discussion of Jews would have raised flags with the wartime censor, but we are still left with the question of why, outside of his essay *Réflexions*, Sartre’s discussion of Jews and anti-Semitism largely took the form of fiction. This is not directly addressed by Judaken, but perhaps we can venture an explanation by building on Judaken’s statement that “in a parallel fashion to how Sartre’s *Réflexions* applied the terms of *Being and Nothingness* to the concrete situation of the Jews, *The Condemned of Altona* applies Sartre’s existential Marxism to an analysis of World War II and the assault on the Jews” (p. 181). If Sartre uses the Jewish Question to concretize his philosophy or illustrate his thought, perhaps Sartre’s use of the Jewish Question says as much about the French audience he was trying to reach in his fiction as about his use of the Jewish Question to formulate his philosophy and conception of *engagement*. This is not to deny that the Jewish Question was “food for thought” for Sartre—I think Judaken has demonstrated that convincingly—but rather to ask whether Judaken might not have slightly overstated his thesis.

It is interesting in this regard to juxtapose Sartre’s reflections on antisemitism with those on anti-Black racism. Although Judaken presents the former as prior to the latter, the picture may be more complicated than this. Sartre himself said in 1948, “Replace the Jew with the Black, the antisemite with the supporter of slavery, and there would be nothing essential to be cut from my book [on the Jewish Question]” (p. 159). And, as Judaken notes following Robert J. C. Young, Richard Wright’s statement [which is cited in *Réflexions*] that “‘there is no Negro problem in the United States, there is only a white problem’ may very well have informed the central thesis of Sartre’s *Réflexions* that ‘it is the antisemite who creates the Jew’” (p. 160). A close look at Sartre’s use of Wright’s quote in *Réflexions* might also support the case that it informed Sartre’s conclusion that “Not one Frenchman will be secure so long as a single Jew—in France or *in the world at large*—can fear for his life.” [7] Richard Wright, one might add, figures prominently in *What is Literature?*, perhaps more so than the Jewish Question.

Evidence that Sartre’s use of the figure of the Jew in his fiction might be related to the audience of his fictional works can be seen in Judaken’s interesting account of the role of the Jew in Roquentin’s discovery that writing can be redemptive. This occurs while Roquentin is listening to the jazz song “Some of These Days,” which is said in the novel to be written by a Jew. But, as Judaken notes, it was actually written by a Black man, a fact that Sartre likely knew. Judaken comments that “this misrecognition of the identity of ‘the Jew’ suggests that the redemption through artistic creation that Roquentin seizes upon as the apparent denouement of the novel is ironic” (p. 44). But, could Sartre’s substitution of the Jew for the Black not also be read in light of Sartre’s 1948 statement that the Jew and the Black are interchangeable as figures of alterity, a barely perceptible comment that the Jew in France occupies a position homologous to the Black in America and is therefore a more effective foil for Roquentin and Sartre’s French readers? In short, Judaken’s book would probably have benefited from more reflection on why the Jewish Question appears more in certain genres of Sartre’s *oeuvre* than others. He might also have explored more fully the interplay between Sartre’s reflections on Jews and other “Others” such as Blacks.

These reservations aside, Judaken’s discussion of the role of the “Jewish Question” in Sartre’s rethinking of intellectual *engagement* from the late 1950s through the 1970s is excellent. He demonstrates how he enacted his evolving ideas in his film script on Freud and his play *The Condemned of Altona*. Absolutely fascinating is Judaken’s discussion of Sartre’s relationship with Israel and his navigation of the Arab-Israeli conflict. Seeing justice in both sides, Sartre moved away from the *engagement* he defined in *What is Literature?* towards an approach that Judaken sees as similar to Jean-François Lyotard’s later notion of “bearing witness to the differend” in which the role of the intellectual is “to reveal the inherent differences in each side’s positions and how their underlying presumptions are irreconcilable and lead to

strife” (p. 190). Judaken’s analysis of this history as well as his important examination of the Jewish dimension of 1968 suggest the necessity of bringing the French politics of the Six-Day War and its aftermath for French Jewish identity to the center of accounts of the French 1960s. Judaken ends his discussion of Sartre’s confrontation with the Jewish Question with a controversial claim that *Hope Now*—in which Sartre fundamentally reassesses important issues in his life and thought in his last days—is authentically the voice of Sartre or at least of “a thought created by two people [Sartre and Benny Lévy]” (p. 232). After Judaken’s lengthy examination of the Jewish Question in Sartre’s thought, this conclusion seems quite convincing.

Jean-Paul Sartre and the Jewish Question concludes with a chapter on the reception of Sartre’s *Réflexions sur la question juive* from its publication to the present. While it certainly serves a useful function, this chapter seems to this reviewer to be the least interesting in the book. Unlike the rest of the book in which Judaken’s “cultural history of ideas” approach gives his analysis depth and—for the most part—a rare sensitivity to subtleties in Sartre’s thought and its relationship to its context, this chapter relegates much of the context to the footnotes and rejoins a traditional synoptic history of ideas approach. To be sure, writing a deeply contextualized study of the reception of Sartre’s book would have required a book in itself, so one can hardly criticize Judaken for his approach.

In sum, Jonathan Judaken’s *Jean-Paul Sartre and the Jewish Question* is a rich reexamination of Sartre’s thought from the original perspective of his reflections on the Jewish Question. While in this reviewer’s mind Judaken slightly overstates his argument and is mistaken to charge Sartre with having minimized French responsibility in the Shoah, his book is an important contribution to the literature. Conceptually sophisticated and exhaustively researched, *Jean-Paul Sartre and the Jewish Question* is a book that scholars will want to read and reread for original insights on Sartre and twentieth-century France.

[1] According to the University of Nebraska Press’s website, the paperback, although apparently not a revised edition, has a different pagination. This reviewer read the hardcover edition; all page numbers in this review refer to it.

[2] Jean-Paul Sartre, *Anti-Semite and Jew: An Exploration of the Etiology of Hate*, trans. George J. Becker (New York: Schocken Books, 1995), 152. The edition I consulted appears simply to be a reprint of the edition consulted by Judaken. Judaken does not give a page number in Sartre’s text for this specific quote, but, as far as I can tell, this is the passage to which he is referring. The numbers in parentheses that follow in this paragraph refer to the page numbers in Sartre’s book and not Judaken’s.

[3] Also, because he fails to explain the nature of Vichy anti-Semitism in comparison with Nazi anti-Semitism, Judaken’s statement that in the spring of 1941 “carrying out the program of the Jewish statute had turned deadly” (p. 76) could give readers the impression that the Jewish statute’s program was exterminationist.

[4] For the texts of the laws see Dominique Rémy, *Les Lois de Vichy: Actes dits ‘lois’ de l’autorité de fait se prétendant ‘gouvernement de l’État français’* (Paris: Romillat, 1992), 87-89 and Jeremy Noakes and Geoffrey Pridham, *State, Economy and Society 1933-1939*, vol. 2 of *Nazis 1919-1945* (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2000), 341-43.

[5] Michael R. Marrus and Robert O. Paxton, *Vichy France and the Jews* (New York: Schocken Books, 1983), 5, 12.

[6] According to Judaken, Sartre explained that his *Réflexions* was paradigmatic with the words: “For there are qualities which come to us solely by means of the judgment of others.” Judaken comments: “His writing on the Jewish Question is an archetype because ‘the Jew’ constitutes a marginal position from which the social whole is revealed.” (p. 158) While this may be true, it does not appear to be what

Sartre was saying in the text. Sartre's words seem to refer not to his book as such, but rather to his statement within it that "The Jew is a man whom other men consider as a Jew." [Jean-Paul Sartre, *What is Literature?* and *Other Essays* (Cambridge Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1988), 77.] In other words, Sartre simply wished to say that the quality of "Jew" is a product of the judgment of others.

[7] Sartre, *Anti-Semite and Jew*, 152-53.

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