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Becoming non-Jewish

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1. Introduction

I love this joke:

A Jew converts and becomes a priest. He gives his first Mass in front of a number of high-ranking priests who came for the occasion. At the end of the new priest's sermon a cardinal goes to congratulate him. 'Father Goldberg,' he says, 'that was very well done, you were just perfect. Just one little thing. Next time, try not to start your sermon with 'My fellow goyim...' (Baum 2018, 28).

I am a white American cisgendered man. I have never substantially doubted these traits or any other aspects of my identity. Except for one. For years I have wondered: am I Jewish?

I grew up in Philadelphia, raised by two American-Jewish biological parents. My father has Ashkenazi ancestry, and my mother has both Ashkenazi and Sephardic ancestry. From as long as I can remember until I graduated college, I identified as Jewish. Like many American Jews, I was never very observant. But being Jewish was important to me. I celebrated my Bar Mitzvah and participated in some Jewish education afterward. In high school, I joined a Jewish youth group, an interfaith dialogue group for Jewish and Catholic students, and another dialogue

group for Jewish and African American students. In college I became less active in the Jewish community but still identified as Jewish.

Something changed in graduate school. I became disillusioned with religion. Not theology but religion as a social category. What once struck me as a source of community now seemed to be a source of division. We divide ourselves in so many ways: gender, race, class, sexual orientation, age, nationality, municipality, neighborhood, family, language, occupation, political party, our favorite sports teams. *Dayenu*. Do we need religion, too? I was no longer satisfied to self-identify, as many American Jews do, as “culturally” but not “religiously” Jewish. That way of identifying puzzled me. What does it mean to be “culturally” Jewish, other than to embody or embrace certain stereotypes, such as being neurotic and enjoying *Seinfeld* reruns? Even worse, this common way of identifying still seemed to indirectly support the divisiveness of religion as a social category. Why not go a step further and identify as non-Jewish?

I declared to some friends that I was no longer Jewish. I wasn’t converting to another religion. I wasn’t intending to conceal my Jewish upbringing. Nor did I plan to stop being neurotic or to stop enjoying *Seinfeld* reruns. I merely identified as non-Jewish. I immediately questioned whether such a change was possible. Can a Jewish person become non-Jewish? Or is a Jewish person always Jewish? The more I struggled with whether I was Jewish the more I felt like Father Goldberg, hopelessly Jewish, preaching to his “fellow Goyim.” After all, agonizing about what it means to be Jewish is one of the most Jewish things one can do.

After more agonizing, I now think the following. The question “Can a Jewish person become non-Jewish?” and the related question “What is Jewishness?” are both ambiguous, because the word “Jewish” is ambiguous. There are many different, albeit related, concepts of Jewishness.¹ I will outline five concepts of Jewishness: halachic, religious, ethnic, and cultural

Jewishness, as well as being Jewish in the sense of belonging to the Jewish community (Section 2). This is not intended to be an exhaustive list. In some of these senses of “Jewish” a Jewish person is always Jewish. In other senses a Jewish person can become non-Jewish. I will close with a normative question: *Should* a person who is Jewish, in the sense of belonging to the Jewish community, become non-Jewish? (Section 3). This question is, of course, deeply personal. I don’t wish to tell others how they should identify. I will explain reasons for and against staying in the Jewish community. In this way I highlight a tension rather than settle how anyone, including myself, should identify.

2. Five Kinds of Jewishness

One way of being Jewish is being halachically Jewish—that is, being Jewish according to Jewish law. It is commonly agreed that a person is halachically Jewish just in case either (a) that person has converted to Judaism, or (b) when that person was born their biological mother was halachically Jewish. These conditions are fairly straightforward, although there is disagreement over what counts as a legitimate conversion. Jewish law assigns obligations to halachic Jews, such as an obligation to fast on Yom Kippur.

Our questions “Can a Jewish person become non-Jewish?” and “What is Jewishness?” are straightforward if we disambiguate them so that they are about halachic Jewishness. The answer to “What is halachic Jewishness?” is that it is a status granted by Jewish law. Moreover, someone with this status cannot lose it (unless the law changes). As long as either your biological mother was Jewish when you were born or you once converted to Judaism, you are halachically Jewish. In this respect, once a Jew always a Jew. As Palle Yourgrau (2001: 631)

quips: “The only way to leave the mafia, it is sometimes said, is feet first. It is not so easy, however, to cease being a Jew.”

There are other kinds of Jewishness. In 1962 the Israeli Supreme Court grappled with this fact in a seminal case involving Oswald Rufeisen. Rufeisen’s biological parents were Polish Jews. He survived the holocaust and helped Jews during World War II.ⁱⁱ During the war, he also converted to Catholicism, became a monk, and gained the moniker “Brother Daniel.” In 1958 he moved from Poland to Israel. Although he was Catholic, he was still halachically Jewish. He claimed this made him eligible for Israeli citizenship under Israel’s Law of Return, which granted automatic Israeli citizenship to any Jew who moved to Israel. The court accepted that Rufeisen was halachically Jewish but denied that he was Jewish in the sense relevant for the Law of Return.

What is the relevant sense of Jewishness? Justice Silberg in his judicial opinion wrote that the term “Jew” in this context has “a secular meaning, as it is usually understood in common parlance [...] by the ordinary simple Jew” (Landau and Edelman, 1971: 10). Silberg considered Rufeisen, since he was Catholic, non-Jewish in the relevant sense. At first glance, one might think that Silberg had in mind a concept of Jewishness that involves *religious adherence*. Anyone who adheres to the religion of Judaism is Jewish in this sense. Political parties present an analogy. One way of being a Democrat in the United States is to register as a member of the Democratic party. Another way of being a Democrat is by adhering to the Democratic party—by supporting its candidates and political platform. One may adhere to the Democratic party without registering as a Democrat, and *vice versa*. Similarly, one may adhere to Judaism without being halachically Jewish. And, as was true of Rufeisen, one may be halachically Jewish without adhering to Judaism.

It is unclear what adherence to Judaism amounts to. Is it a matter of belief, practice, or some combination of both? Aaron Petty (2015) claims that Jews have traditionally taken adherence to Judaism to involve primarily practice. He argues that the court in Rufeisen's case focused instead on belief. He thinks the court's focus reflected a Christian conception of religion, which is ironic, given Silberg's stated intent to adopt a secular-Jewish notion of Jewishness. For this paper, I speak of adherence to Judaism without taking a stand on the roles of belief and practice.

In the end, Jewishness *qua* religious adherence, though an important kind of Jewishness, is not the kind that Silberg invoked in his judicial opinion. He described some Jews as being “non-religious” and “anti-religious” (Landau and Edelman, 1971: 11). Rufeisen stopped being Jewish in Silberg's sense not because he stopped adhering to Judaism but specifically because he converted to Catholicism. For this reason, I propose that Silberg invoked a concept of Jewishness that is different from both halachic Jewishness and adherence to Judaism.

In order to understand what kind of Jewishness Silberg had in mind, let us consider Katherine Ritchie's (2015, 2020) account of social groups. She discusses two main kinds: “organized” and “feature” groups. Organized social groups include teams, committees, and clubs. Feature groups include racial groups, gender groups, and sexual orientation groups. Here are four differences she mentions between these groups. First, membership in feature groups—but not organized ones—typically depends on features that are shared or perceived to be shared by their members. For instance, hair color, hair texture, skin color, and ancestry are commonly shared by members of racial groups. Second, organized social groups, unlike feature groups, are “structured entities” that commonly have members playing particular roles—for instance, the president and treasurer of a club, or the point guard and center of a basketball team. Third,

organized groups require shared or collective intentionality in order to form and persist. People intentionally form basketball teams and book clubs, neither of which can persist without engagement from their members. Conversely, racial, gender, and sexual orientation groups may form regardless of any shared or collective intentionality among their members. Fourth, organized groups grant their members greater freedom in whether they leave. It is more difficult—if at all possible—to leave racial, gender, and sexual orientation groups than it is to leave basketball teams and book clubs.

This brings us to two Jewish social groups. First, there is a Jewish ethnicity (or something like an ethnicity). It is broad. It includes sub-groups or sub-ethnicities: for instance, Ashkenazi Jews, Mizrahi Jews, Sephardic Jews, sub-Saharan African Jews, all of which in turn contain sub-groups. One way of being Jewish is to belong to this broad ethnicity in virtue of ancestry. This is a kind of Jewishness that people invoke when they claim that someone is *half*-Jewish. It is sensitive to discuss ethnic Jewishness, given the history of oppression of those with Jewish ancestry or, as in Nazi Germany, those who are perceived as having even limited Jewish ancestry.

The Jewish ethnicity fits into Ritchie’s category of feature groups.ⁱⁱⁱ A key feature that members of this group share is ancestry. This group is not structured in the way organized groups typically are. Nor did it form due to shared or collective intentionality, at least not in the way basketball teams and book clubs typically form. In Amie Thomasson’s (2009: 259) terminology, the Jewish ethnicity ostensibly was “generated” rather than “constructed.” And, although an ethnically Jewish person can choose the extent to which they celebrate their Jewish ethnicity, one cannot stop being Jewish in this sense.

We should distinguish the Jewish ethnicity from another social group, what I will call *the Jewish community*. Belonging to this community is the kind of Jewishness I think Silberg invoked in his judicial opinion. It might help to think of this community as resembling a massive club. It has diverse members. Some of its members religiously adhere to Judaism, but others are entirely secular. Some of its members are halachically Jewish, but many are not. Some members of the Jewish community are ethnically Jewish, but others are converts with no known Jewish ancestry. Clubs typically have membership rules. The Jewish community has membership rules, but they are informal. Informally—via beliefs, intentions, dispositions, and social practices—Jews have determined that agnostics and atheists can be in the community. Indeed, many members of the community are atheists. Hence the punchline of this joke:

One day Isaac comes home in great puzzlement about what he had been taught in school that day; so he goes to his father and asks him about it. “Father, I learned that God is a Trinity. But how can there be three Gods?” “Now get this straight, Son: We’re Jewish. So there is only one God... and we don’t believe in Him!” (Marks 2016, 7).

While Jews may be agnostics or atheists, it is against the rules to convert to Christianity. Any member of the Jewish community who converts to Christianity (including Catholicism) forfeits membership. Although there may be some disagreement within the Jewish community regarding this issue, there is at least a general consensus that Christians cannot be in the community.^{iv}

The Jewish community does not fit as neatly as the Jewish ethnicity into Ritchie’s categorization. In some respects, the community resembles organized groups. Given the ways in which members of the Jewish community differ (halachic status, ethnicity, religious adherence,

etc.), being a member of the Jewish community, unlike being a member of feature groups, does not depend on having or being perceived as having shared features. In other respects, however, the Jewish community resembles feature groups. For instance, it lacks the clearly defined organizational structure of paradigmatic organized groups. There aren't hierarchical roles of president or treasurer of the Jewish community, as there are in many clubs and committees. Unlike point guards or centers on basketball teams, most members of the Jewish community are not tasked with playing clearly defined roles.

Nonetheless, I think we may understand the Jewish community as being an organized group in Ritchie's sense, albeit a non-paradigmatic case. Some of its members do play roles: rabbis, Jewish camp directors, philanthropists, etc. Granted, many members of the Jewish community play no substantive role. But this lack of specialization is not unique to the Jewish community. Many organizations have members of whom little or nothing is required. One can be a mere member of a home and school association, and one can be a mere member of the Jewish community.

One might claim that the Jewish community resembles a feature group insofar as it was not formed by shared or collective intentionality. I disagree. I think the community was formed (informally) by shared or collective beliefs and social practices—such as a social practice of celebrating Shabbat and a shared belief in the unity of Jewish people. Moreover, the Jewish community, like organized groups, requires shared or collective intentionality in order to persist. The Jewish community would cease to exist were none of its members to believe in it or be disposed to act as though it is a real community. Analogously, imagine that all of the members of a book club permanently forget about the club. Plausibly, the club no longer exists.

What about Ritchie's view that members of organized groups have greater freedom in leaving the group than members of feature groups? In this respect, the Jewish community might seem to fall somewhere between an organized group and a feature group. It might seem harder to leave the Jewish community than it is to leave a basketball team but easier to leave it than it is to leave a racial group.^v The main way to leave the Jewish community is to convert to another religion. Even conversion might not suffice in some cases; perhaps, one may convert to Buddhism or Rastafarianism and remain a member of the Jewish community.^{vi} Sometimes, however, it is hard to leave organized groups. If someone wants to leave an alumni association, for example, it is insufficient to declare that they want to leave. They must communicate their intent to withdraw to the right party and have that request honored. Even if someone succeeds in communicating their request to leave, there's nothing in principle to stop an alumni association from considering them a member for life, albeit an inactive member. I even found it hard to unsubscribe from the New York Times! At the time, it couldn't be done online, and when I finally figured out how to contact the New York Times by phone the representative I spoke with wasn't eager to honor my request. All of this is to say that, even though it is harder to leave the Jewish community than a paradigmatic organized group, this does not show that it is not an organized group.

There are hard cases in which it is unclear whether someone has left the Jewish community. I have just mentioned cases in which a Jewish person converts to Buddhism or Rastafarianism. Of personal interest to me, of course, is a case in which someone has been a member of the Jewish community but simply wants to stop being a member, without converting to any other religion. Is such a person still a member of the Jewish community? Am *I* a member of the Jewish community?

I do not know. These are hard empirical questions. The answers depend, at least in part, on the intentions, beliefs, dispositions, and social practices of millions of members of the Jewish community. I can report merely that, among members of the Jewish community I have talked to, there is no consensus. Or, as the old saying goes: *two Jews, three opinions*. Some members of the Jewish community think that someone can leave the community by opting out. Leaving is up to the individual. Others report that one cannot leave the community this easily. On this line, someone like myself might be an inactive or bad member of the community but a member nonetheless. Others, like myself, do not know whether one can opt out of the community. A related possibility is that there is no fact of the matter—that this case is vague or indeterminate. On this line, it is neither true that I am a member of the community nor true that I am *not*. I am in a grey area. That is, perhaps the community's beliefs, dispositions, intentions, and social practices have not converged enough to settle whether someone like myself is a member.

Let us suppose for now that—despite my wishes—I am still a member of the community. The community (informally) makes up its own membership rules, and the rules don't require that members want to be members. We are left with a seemingly arbitrary state of affairs. It is ineffective for me to sincerely state that I want out of the Jewish community. Conversely, were I to convert to Christianity I would no longer be in the Jewish community. Why the asymmetry? Plausibly, the no-conversion-to-Christianity rule stems from a Jewish response to Christian anti-Semitism. Metaphysically speaking, the cause of the no-conversion-to-Christianity rule is the group's (informal) decision through shared dispositions, beliefs, actions, and social practices—for instance a shared disposition to treat those who have converted to Christianity as not being members of the Jewish community.

We can now see why Justice Silberg in his decision on the Rufeisen case might have had in mind what I am calling the Jewish community. Rufeisen, despite his conversion to Catholicism, remained halachically Jewish and ethnically Jewish. In converting to Catholicism, however, Rufeisen, given the informal rules set by the Jewish community, stopped being a member of the community. In this sense he became non-Jewish.

I have focused on what it takes to become non-Jewish. There are important questions about what it takes to join the Jewish community. Halachic Jewishness, ethnic Jewishness, and adherence to Judaism all seem like ways of getting into the club, so to speak. There are also problematic ways in which this kind of Jewishness is intersectional.^{vii} Lewis Gordon (2016: 112) notes that Russian Jews have in some contexts been more easily accepted as Jews than Caribbean, Latin American, and African Jews. Being white in certain contexts makes it easier for someone to be accepted as a member of the Jewish community.

This brings us to the fifth and final kind of Jewishness, one I alluded to earlier with puzzlement, namely cultural Jewishness. What does it mean to be culturally Jewish? For guidance, we may look to Tommie Shelby's (2002) discussion of cultural blackness. He doubts that there is a monolithic culture shared globally by all black people (Shelby 2002: 253). There are rather many black cultures, each of which involves an "ensemble of beliefs, values, behaviors, and practices" that black people created (Shelby 2002: 241).^{viii} Shelby thinks that anyone, in principle, can become culturally black or cultivate a black cultural identity, since anyone can adopt beliefs, values, behaviors, and practices. He mentions jazz as an aspect of American black culture that is open to all.

We may understand cultural Jewishness similarly. There is no monolithic Jewish culture. There are Jewish cultures.^{ix} Each Jewish culture involves an ensemble of beliefs, values,

behaviors, and practices that members of the Jewish community created. Anyone can become culturally Jewish, since anyone can adopt beliefs, values, behaviors, and practices. Just as anyone can listen to jazz music and read Toni Morrison, anyone can listen to klezmer music and read Philip Roth. Likewise, anyone who is culturally Jewish can, at least in principle, stop being culturally Jewish; however, this might be unrealistic for someone who is culturally Jewish in virtue of stable beliefs or values.

To summarize, here are five kinds of Jewishness I have outlined.

- (a) Jewishness in the sense of being halachically Jewish
- (b) Jewishness in the sense of religiously adhering to Judaism
- (c) Jewishness in the sense of belonging to a broad Jewish ethnicity
- (d) Jewishness in the sense of belonging to a broad Jewish community
- (e) Jewishness in the sense of being culturally Jewish

I reiterate that this is not intended to be an exhaustive list.

It is relatively clear, once we disambiguate “Jewish,” whether someone can stop being Jewish. Someone who is halachically Jewish cannot stop being halachically Jewish. Someone who adheres to Judaism can stop doing so. Someone who is ethnically Jewish cannot stop being ethnically Jewish. Someone who belongs to the Jewish community can leave the community by converting to Christianity. There are cases, however, in which it is unclear or perhaps even indeterminate whether someone leaves the community. Someone who is culturally Jewish can stop being culturally Jewish.

3. Should One Become non-Jewish?

Let us suppose, for now, that members of the Jewish community may leave the community, without converting to Christianity but merely by expressing a desire to stop being a member. This raises a normative question. *Should* people leave the community in this way? Note that, even if it turns out that people cannot leave in this way, we may still ask whether people should embrace their membership in the community. Although I will focus on whether someone should leave, my comments will apply equally to whether someone should embrace their membership. Note, further, that I will not address whether someone should stop being culturally Jewish or stop adhering to Judaism. My normative inquiry is limited to Jewishness in the sense of belonging to the Jewish community, not cultural or religious Jewishness. I will raise reasons both to leave the community and to stay. My goal in this section is to thereby raise a tension and highlight some relevant normative issues. I will not try to settle how anyone, including myself, should identify.

One reason to stay in the Jewish community is that it offers its members social benefits. Here are a couple examples. One of my Israeli-Jewish cousins has moved to Hong Kong. The Jewish community there (a sub-community of *the* Jewish community) gives her a network of supportive friends and acquaintances, a boon for any immigrant. To my surprise, when I visited her I heard more Hebrew than Cantonese. (She once joked that I must have wondered whether the former was the official language of Hong Kong.) I experienced similar benefits while living in Jamaica. I was welcomed to Shabbat services at a beautiful synagogue in downtown Kingston. Members of the Jewish community may quickly bond with other members anywhere in the world.

There are reasons to stay in the Jewish community that are less self-oriented. For some members of the community, staying in the community will please their family members and friends. My father, for instance, cares deeply about his Jewish identity. It would make him

happier if I were to remain a member of the Jewish community. I generally have a reason to do things that make my father happy. This reason becomes especially salient if we reflect on how easy it is to remain a member of the Jewish community. One can be a member of the community without doing much of anything. Moreover, many of the community's traditions, though optional for its members, are enjoyable and meaningful: lighting candles on Shabbat, attending Passover seders, eating latkes on Hanukkah, and so forth. Given how easy it is to stay in the community—and given how much it might please one's family members or friends—why not just remain?

Well, for one thing, I'm reminded of words from the Jewish sage Groucho Marx (1959: 321): "I don't want to belong to any club that will accept people like me as a member." More seriously, here's one reason that pulls me away from the community. Granted, as described above, there are advantages to having a "we" or an "us." But, as with almost every "us," there is a corresponding "them"—an othering that is morally and aesthetically problematic. A reason to leave the Jewish community is that it, like many social groups, promotes division. Distancing oneself from the community is a way of ceasing support for social division and lending support for social unity. There is also an expressive component. By leaving the community one may express a rejection of such divisiveness.

I should clarify that these reasons, as well as any other reasons I will mention, are *pro tanto* reasons. That is, they are genuine reasons but may be overridden by stronger considerations. Here is an example of a *pro tanto* reason from an entirely different context. We all have a *pro tanto* reason not to embarrass our friends. This reason may be overridden. I should encourage a friend to get help with her gambling addiction, even if I know the conversation will cause her some embarrassment. This is because the conversation will ultimately improve her overall well-being—a consideration that, in this context, outweighs my reason not to embarrass

her. Similarly, the reasons I am considering both to stay in and leave the Jewish community may be overridden by other considerations. Some people have a *pro tanto* reason to stay in the Jewish community, because doing so will make others happy. An individual, however, might have a stronger reason to leave the community, if, say, their local Jewish community is not accepting of their non-Jewish partner. Likewise, people have a *pro tanto* reason to leave the Jewish community, since this will enable them to withhold support for a particular kind of social division. But, for example, if your beloved partner will marry you only if you are a member of the Jewish community, you likely have a stronger reason to stay in the community. Likewise, if you passionately adhere to the Jewish religion, you have a strong reason to stay in the community—a reason that likely overwhelms the considerations I am suggesting in favor of leaving the community.

With this caveat about *pro tanto* reasons in mind, one might worry that the reasons I have raised regarding social division are too weak to be interesting. All social groups, insofar as they foster an “us” and a “them,” promote social division between members of the community and non-members. What special reason, if any, does one have for opting out of the Jewish community, as opposed to any other community? One answer has to do with norms in the Jewish community. Members are pressured to worship with, share meals with, and socialize with other members. Moreover, members are pressured to marry only members of the community. Granted, such norms are not unique to the Jewish community. They are present in other communities, including other religious communities, and serve to strengthen bonds of intimacy between group members.^x Moreover, many members of the Jewish community resist such norms. My point, however, is that, due to these norms and others, the Jewish community (along with other communities) is especially divisive. The Jewish community tends to promote social division

more than, for instance, communities that are based on shared hobbies or aesthetic interests, such as the community of Star Trek fans—i.e. *Trekkies*, the community of breakdancers, and the community of quilters.

Some members of the Jewish community might find that their local Jewish community is not problematic in the ways I have mentioned. Their local community might be welcoming of people of all faiths and ethnicities without any problematic othering of non-Jews. Still, their local community is a subcommunity of a larger, global community. As long as the overarching community is socially divisive this gives the individual a *pro tanto* reason to leave. The individual may have also a *pro tanto* reason to stay, given how accepting and wonderful their local community is. It is complicated how one ought to weigh these conflicting considerations. I will take no stand here on what is best, all things considered, for an individual to do in this case.

Sara Bernstein (forthcoming) offers a more general reason why one might wish to resist a social category. She writes:

...[T]he causal power of social categories constitutes a special sort of restriction on human agency. Since membership in most social categories is not something that can be chosen, and since the natures of social categories are extremely difficult to modify, social categories infuse our lives in ways we cannot choose or change.

Resisting social categories, for Bernstein, is thus a way to reclaim agency. Sometimes I feel as though my desire to leave the Jewish community is in part an attempt to reclaim my agency. I want to ensure that I—and not circumstances surrounding my birth, nor a religion I don't believe in—control how I identify. I want to be the author of my life.

Naomi Scheman (2018) suggests a reason why some people should want to remain in the Jewish community.^{xi} Many members of the Jewish community oppose the Israeli government's oppression of Palestinian people. Staying in the community allows these members to denounce the Israeli government's actions in a special way. They are able to say, in Scheman's words, *not in my name*. By its nature, this statement may be said only from within the community.

Scheman has touched on something profound and powerful. I wish, however, to suggest that in the same vicinity there is a reason to leave the community. Sometimes, we should denounce an organization's actions not by saying *not in my name* but rather by leaving. If I work at a tobacco company that advertises its products to children, I might choose to hold onto my job, in an attempt to improve the company from within. However, it might be better for me to leave the company. Leaving would allow me to both withhold support for an organization that is engaged in immoral practices and disassociate myself from such practices. Leaving would preserve my personal integrity.^{xii} Leaving would also express a rejection of the organization's practices. I propose that members of the Jewish community have a similar reason to leave the Jewish community, given the actions of the Israeli government. This reason holds even if (a) the actions of the Israeli government are antithetical to Jewish moral teachings, including the command from Leviticus 19:34 to love the stranger, and (b) there are many members of the Jewish community, inside and outside of Israel, who oppose the actions of the Israeli government. The Israeli government represents the Jewish community. Sometimes, if we are strongly enough opposed to something being done in our name, we have a better option than saying *not in my name*. We should change our name.

It is unlikely that an individual's decision to leave the Jewish community will have any significant effect on the actions of the Israeli government. We have reason, however, to cease

support for organizations doing bad things, even if our decision is unlikely to have any significant effect. Elizabeth Harman (2015: 219) notes that it is morally wrong to join a group of children bullying another child, even if joining the group will have no effect on the child who is being harmed. One should not support the bullies. More generally, we have non-consequentialist reasons to abstain from supporting groups doing bad things. Accordingly, the Israel-centered reasons I am proposing for leaving the Jewish community fit with a non-consequentialist framework.

We have non-consequentialist reasons, then, to leave the Jewish community; leaving may cease tacit support for, and express disapproval of, some of the Israeli government's immoral actions. One might object to this claim by saying something like the following: "The government of the United States has done a lot of awful things. But surely you don't think you should stop being American!" We may represent this objection as follows.

- (1) If bad actions committed by the Israeli government give members of the Jewish community a *pro tanto* reason to leave the community, then bad actions committed by the United States government give citizens of the United States a *pro tanto* reason to stop being citizens.
- (2) Bad actions committed by the United States government do not give citizens of the United States a *pro tanto* reason to stop being citizens.
- (3) Therefore, it is not the case that bad actions committed by the Israeli government give members of the Jewish community a *pro tanto* reason to leave the Jewish community.

My response to this objection is to reject premise (2). Some might think I'm thereby biting the bullet, but I wholeheartedly accept that bad actions committed by the United States government

give its citizens a *pro tanto* reason to stop being citizens. No American citizen should be comfortable with, for instance, the United States government conducting in our name—and with our tax dollars—the Iraq War and the war on drugs. Giving up my American citizenship would be a way of ceasing support for such atrocities and expressing disapproval. I derive many benefits, however, from being an American citizen. Most of my friends and family live there. Its economy is comparatively strong. And, it is hard to become a citizen elsewhere.^{xiii} All things considered, it is morally permissible for me to remain an American citizen, even though I have a *pro tanto* reason to stop being a citizen.

The reasons presently under discussion to stop being an American citizen or to leave the Jewish community are in connection to governments that might improve. Israel's government may, let us hope, one day respect the humanity of all Palestinian people. The United States government may, let us hope, one day have foreign and domestic policies that promote justice. Were such changes to happen, the reasons under discussion could become obsolete.

Analogously, some political conservatives in the United States are so strongly opposed to Donald Trump that they are leaving the Republican party. Presumably, some of them will rejoin the party if it ever distances itself from Trump. Someone who leaves the Jewish community due to the current Israeli government may decide to rejoin the community if the government improves.

My framing of this discussion in terms of *pro tanto* reasons might be limiting. It might make it seem as though it is hard for someone like myself to figure out how to identify merely because there are a bunch of competing considerations. If only I were more reflective or more rational, I could figure out which set of considerations outweighs the other and then move on with my life. I suspect the issue is deeper. Perhaps, the two options—staying in and leaving the Jewish community—are in some sense incomparable. Being in the Jewish community has many

points in its favor. It provides personal benefits and value, it brings joy and meaning to some of my loved ones, and it enables me to powerfully follow Scheman in saying *not in my name*. On the other hand, leaving enables me to cease support of a certain kind of divisiveness, reclaim my agency, and express disapproval of certain actions by the Israeli government. How can I possibly decide? Perhaps, in order to choose between two incomparable options, all that is left is an exercise of the will—a will that, in Joseph Raz’s (1997, 111) words, “is informed and constrained by reason but plays an autonomous role in action.” Alternatively, Ruth Chang’s (2002) account of hard choices might be a better framework for my dilemma. She construes hard choices as being between comparable options that are still neither better, nor worse, nor equal to each other. I won’t settle this matter here. Suffice it to say I think my choice is hard and not just because of my own ignorance or irrationality.

Let me address more direct worries one might have with my approach. First, one might worry: would leaving the Jewish community to distance oneself from the Israeli government involve adopting the anti-Semitic stereotype that American Jews are automatically loyal to Israel (and disloyal to the United States)? Does my argument problematically equate Jewishness with approval of the Israeli government? I think that the answer to both questions is “No.” My argument relies merely on the claim that the Israeli government represents the Jewish community. Being in the community may thus, in some contexts, provide tacit support for Israel’s government. I do not, however, rely on any generalization about beliefs, desires, or attitudes that members of the community have regarding Israel’s government. Still, my argument could be misinterpreted, especially by anti-Semites not acting in good faith. There is a related concern that identifying as non-Jewish in protest of the Israeli government, especially if not done carefully, might perversely reinforce anti-Semitic stereotypes. This is largely a matter of optics,

albeit an important one. Scheman's strategy--embracing her place in the Jewish community while saying *not in my name*--allows her to more clearly push against the anti-Semitic conflation of Jewishness with approval of the Israeli government. I should emphasize also that my criticism is only of the present Israeli government. I have cherished family ties to Israel. I enjoy visiting Israel and appreciate Israeli culture. My feelings about Israel--just as my feelings about the United States--are multidimensional.

One might worry, more broadly, that leaving the Jewish community for any reason at all would weaken Jewish solidarity and thereby support anti-Semitism. More boldly, one might accuse someone like myself of being a self-hating Jew. I do not find this last accusation serious. The character Harry in Woody Allen's movie *Deconstructing Harry* rebuts it best: "Hey, I may hate myself, but not because I'm Jewish." The other worry, however, is worth consideration. For guidance, I again look to Shelby's discussion of cultural blackness. He considers whether black people should cultivate their cultural black identity in order to build solidarity and combat antiblack racism. He thinks that one can combat antiblack racism without cultivating a cultural black identity. He thinks it would be more fruitful for people to combat antiblack racism by identifying as either victims of antiblack racism or as allies who are committed to combating antiblack racism (Shelby 2002: 259-265). We may apply this insight to anti-Semitism. One can identify as a victim (or potential victim) of anti-Semitism, without identifying as a member of the Jewish community. What is important is whether one is committed to combating anti-Semitism. We should build communities of people who are opposed to anti-Semitism, regardless of whether they are members of the Jewish community.

I will close by underscoring this last point with a personal anecdote. I have a family friend, Clayton. He is married to a Jewish woman, Ruth. They raised two children in

Philadelphia, both of whom identify as Jewish and in turn have their own children who identify as Jewish. Clayton attends Shabbat and High Holiday services with Ruth and their family. He is knowledgeable of Jewish practices and customs. Recently, when a friend passed away, Clayton was asked to lead the chanting of the Mourner's Kaddish, a Jewish prayer for the dead. "We need someone to sing the prayer. Clayton will know how!" was the general thought. Clayton, however, is not Jewish, at least not in any of the senses of the term I have discussed in this paper (except that he is perhaps culturally Jewish to some extent.) He is a devout Anglican. As such, he is not a member of the Jewish community. He is an ally. He is as committed to opposing anti-Semitism as is expected of most members of the community. It is hard to see how Clayton becoming Jewish could make him more effective in combating anti-Semitism. Those who are committed to combating anti-Semitism should recruit and work with like-minded people. Membership in the Jewish community is not required.

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ⁱ Aaron Tapper (2016) expresses the point similarly with talk of “Judaisms.”

ⁱⁱ See, for instance, Tec’s (2008) account of Rufeisen’s life.

ⁱⁱⁱ Ritchie (2015: 314) includes ethnicity in this category. A related social group is a Jewish nationality, if we take a nationality, as Shelby (2002: 240 *n* 14) does, to be an ethnic group with an associated homeland or place of origin—

in this case Israel. Many theorists think of ethnicity as also being at least partly (if not largely) a cultural concept. See, e.g., Hardimon (2017: 40).

^{iv} An important exception is the case of conversos, a group of Jews who converted to Christianity to avoid expulsion in fifteenth century Spain. It matters whether conversions are sincere and uncoerced.

^v See, for instance, Shelby (2002: 239-240) and Boxill (1992: 178) for discussion of the view that black people, in at least one sense of blackness, cannot stop being black. See Tuvel (2017) for a defense of the view that one's race can change.

^{vi} For discussion of Jewish Buddhists, see (Sigalow 2018).

^{vii} The claim that Jewishness is intersectional is, roughly, the claim that the very way in which one experiences Jewishness—and any related privileges or subjugation—is influenced by other aspects of their identity, such as race or gender. To understand, for instance, what it is like to be a black Jewish woman, one cannot simply analyze this experience as a conjunction of blackness, Jewishness, and womanhood. The way in which a black Jewish woman experiences her Jewishness differs from how a white Jewish man experiences his. For seminal discussion of intersectionality, see Crenshaw (1989). For discussion on the intersectionality of Jewishness and gender see, for instance, Gerson (2018) and Hyman (2002).

^{viii} More precisely, Shelby thinks cultural blackness is associated with people who are black in what he calls the “thin” sense. He explains thin blackness as follows: “On a thin conception of black identity, ‘black’ is a vague and socially imposed category of difference that serves to distinguish groups on the basis of their members having certain visible, inherited physical characteristics, and/or a particular biological ancestry.” (Shelby 2002: 239).

^{ix} See Auslander (2009) for an attempt to grapple with what it means to be culturally Jewish in the context of Germany before World War II.

^x For discussion of the role that intimacy plays in social groups, see Cohen (1978, 1999) and Nguyen and Strohl (2019).

^{xi} It is unclear whether Scheman has in mind Jewishness in the sense of belonging to the Jewish community or rather some other kind of Jewishness. Either way, her comments are sharply relevant to the current discussion.

^{xii} Williams (1973: 97-100) uses a similar case to discuss personal integrity.

^{xiii} I participated in *eight* fingerprint-based background checks in Canada in an attempt to become a permanent resident there, since my fingers don't leave solid fingerprints. And, despite being a native English speaker, I did not ace the English fluency exam for Canadian permanent residency. But those are stories for another day.