

Hacker, P. M. S. (2025). *The Hamas Massacre and the Transmutation of Antisemitism* (1st ed.). London: Routledge. 182 pp. ISBN: 978-1-032-71195-7. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003711957>

It is an undeniable fact that the philosophical output of P. M. S. Hacker, Emeritus Fellow at St John's College, Oxford, is both substantial in volume and of excellent quality. Moreover, I am personally convinced that his book, co-authored with M. R. Bennett, *Philosophical Foundations of Neuroscience*, is the finest text in the philosophy of mind so far in the 21st century. It should be noted, however, that whilst the critical examinations of the various philosophical theories of J. Searle and D. Dennett at the end of the book are original and undoubtedly forceful, the bulk of the text is, more than anything else, a very apt and highly accomplished presentation of various aspects of Ludwig Wittgenstein's mature thought, a presentation made in the language tailored for standard philosophers, in the language they understand. At any rate, with this book there are no longer any excuses for failing to grasp the Wittgensteinian message. Therefore, even accepting that his work is primarily aimed at disseminating Wittgenstein's many ideas, one cannot detract from the merits of such a magnificent work. We can therefore confidently assert that in the realm of philosophical exegesis and discussion—forms of reflection that are entirely impersonal—Professor Hacker is undoubtedly a leader. However, when we move from philosophical analysis to political debate, we realise that a startling and radical shift in his intellectual persona takes place. Thus, in his latest and still recent book, *The Hamas Attack and the Transmutation of Antisemitism*, the level-headed and objective professor of philosophy is transformed into a champion of injustice, an extraordinary purveyor of lies and a person indifferent to the unjust suffering of those who do not belong to his community. Indeed, what Hacker reveals with this latest book is the incredible fact that rationality and objectivity are perfectly compatible with fanaticism and hatred. And it is the content of this latest book by Hacker—a book that in some way tarnishes his otherwise impeccable academic output—that I shall address very shortly in these pages.

Perhaps the first thing to say is that the book's title is inappropriate. It is true, of course, that the subject of the attack on Israel on 7 October 2023 by Hamas guerrillas occupies the author's attention throughout the text, and it is equally true that Hacker offers ideas in an attempt to impose his thesis that anti-Zionism is, as Zionists in general would have us believe, the new form of anti-Semitism. However, the content of the text covers much more than that, for in reality it is nothing more than an unqualified glorification of Israeli policy and a defence—which at times borders on the absurd—of Israeli barbarism *vis-à-vis* the Palestinian people. In reality, Hacker's book is neither a work of history nor of political theory, but a propagandistic

diatribe from start to finish. Of all the well-known criticisms that people of the most varied backgrounds and ideological contexts have levelled against Israeli expansionism – and which he himself, in a display of self-confidence and faith in his political convictions, lists – such as the accusations that the Zionist State is an apartheid regime, racist, guilty of manifestly inhumane treatment of the Palestinian people (and of Arabs in general), of having committed crimes against humanity, etc., Hacker **does not accept a single one!** From his perspective, Israel is beyond reproach from every conceivable angle. That is unenlightened fanaticism. Before criticising him, however, let us hear what he has to say.

Perhaps I should begin by reiterating something I have already said, namely that Hacker's book is not historically reliable. For him, the explanation of what has been happening in Israel and the Gaza Strip from 7 October 2023 to the present day begins on 7 October, as if the world had come into being at that very moment. Thus, the historical, social, political and military context—which is always required to generate authentic historical explanations—is, for him, completely redundant and, consequently, he ignores it. I shall return to this aspect of his approach later, but for now let us ask: what happened that day, according to Hacker? His answer is quite simple: Hamas militants launched an unexpected – and, of course, entirely unjustified – and ferocious attack against Jewish settlements and military posts located in the south of Israel. The invading 'terrorists' allegedly used missiles and modern weapons to invade legitimate Israeli territory—a territory that once belonged to them—to commit all sorts of atrocities in that 'tiny country' that is Israel, forced as it is to fight on seven different fronts simultaneously just to survive. Obviously, Hacker does not even mention the fact that Israel opened up those seven fronts because it suited its interests. Iran is the latest example of this. But, regardless of that, already in Israel – just like the death squads of Guatemala and El Salvador – the Palestinian terrorists would have blown the skulls of small children to smithereens, raped every woman who fell into their hands, mercilessly murdered more than 1,100 defenceless people, and returned to Gaza with more than 300 hostages. Hacker's account, however, is not limited to a mere recounting of bare facts, however falsified they may be, but is also something of a manifesto of contemporary Zionism, an unreserved apology for the Zionist state, a defence of the policy of Greater Israel, and all of this wrapped up in an extraordinary number of lies, distortions and fallacies, all of them shrouded in a hatred that is impossible to conceal.

With regard to the 'invasion' of Israel by Palestinian terrorists, it might be worth briefly highlighting some of Hacker's most obvious and brazen lies. To begin with, it would be useful to point out to him that those he calls 'terrorists' are nothing more than the soldiers of a people who are forced to live and operate in secret because Israel does not recognise the state of Palestine and therefore does not allow the

Palestinian people to have a formal army. Needless to say, Hacker does not even mention the possibility that the Palestinian militants may have fallen into a trap, set well in advance by B. Netanyahu's own government, a trap very similar to the one the Americans set for the Japanese at Pearl Harbour in November 1941. The claim that the attack was a complete surprise is only half the truth. We now know, from explicit statements made by a significant number of Israeli soldiers, that they were ordered to do nothing; there are also confessions from other Israeli soldiers who have admitted to killing an unknown number of their fellow citizens on the orders of their superiors. Of course, the Palestinian 'missiles' could be lethal, but they were essentially homemade weapons. Hacker, however, maintains a shameful silence regarding the weapons used by the Israel Defence Forces – weapons befitting a superpower: state-of-the-art tanks, fighter jets, drones, helicopters, etc., that is to say, all the weapons that the most advanced technology can provide. Faced with an army as well-equipped as the Israeli one, the 'terrorists' of Palestine were practically defenceless. That they are great fighters is another matter. In any case, Hacker's description of the prevailing situation in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip is not merely erroneous: it is simply a caricature of the real situation.

Hacker's text is riddled with what might be called linguistic 'asymmetries', through which he clearly aims not to convince his readers by means of arguments, but to lull them into a false sense of security and persuade them through insinuations and vague phrasing. For example, he speaks of the Iranian theocratic dictatorship, but says nothing of Israel's rabbinical government; he reminds us that in times past the Arabs mistreated the Jews living in the Holy Land, but says not a word of the spitting parades that nuns have to endure today when walking through the streets of Jerusalem or Tel Aviv, to the extent that they have to carry umbrellas to shield themselves; he points out with horror that all the actions of Hamas terrorists are contrary to international law, but he does not mention a single one of the many well-known atrocities that Israelis (men and women) commit in their jails against Palestinian prisoners, regardless of their age or physical condition (many of whom are held there **without** charge). His entire discourse is a mixture of debatable descriptions and arbitrary assessments, such as when he repeats *ad nauseam* that Israel is the only democracy in the Middle East, the only country where there are elections and a free press. One wonders: can we really speak of a 'free press' when it is strictly forbidden to report on what is happening here and now in, say, Tel Aviv? Are we talking about freedom when someone can be sentenced to five years in prison for publicising the effects of the war with Iran? Can a country that has murdered more journalists than any other in the world be considered genuinely democratic? Rather than a serious text, that sounds like a bad joke.

Something that catches the eye right from the first page is the hypocritical and fanciful nature of Hacker's account. Time and again, he laments the alleged biased and unfair treatment Israel receives from both the world's press and institutions such as the UN. The truth is that if there is one thing about which Israelis, Zionist or otherwise, simply cannot complain, it is the alleged criticism broadcast on the radio, in the press and on television. Nowadays, even a child knows that the mass media in the Western world are either in Jewish hands or under Zionist control (as is the case with the BBC), so complaining about journalistic treatment and television news programmes is a grotesque ploy to try to conceal the constant, intense and systematic disinformation campaign that the media carry out on a daily basis in favour of Israel and to the detriment of the Palestinian cause. Joining wholeheartedly in the flow of disinformation, Hacker speaks of the atrocities committed by Hamas guerrillas, but says nothing of the daily bombardment of Gaza, a bombardment that has now lasted more than 900 days, during which time Israel has dropped the equivalent of more than seven atomic bombs like the one used on Hiroshima, and that on a defenceless population. Hacker deludes himself in a ridiculous way by thinking he is fooling his readers when he makes a fuss over the criticism of Israel levelled by the UN Secretary-General, the French President, and so on, when he knows better than anyone that these are nothing more than mere statements, empty pronouncements, rhetoric unsupported by action, and that the West has not taken a single punitive measure against Israel. We are also astounded by his lament regarding former President J. Biden's indifference towards Israel, given that, as we all know, firstly, the real president during the four years of the Biden administration was Anthony Blinken, and that the latter—who is a staunch Zionist—provided Israel with every possible support from the US government for four years. Truly, either Hacker thinks we are ignorant, or he is simply having a good time mocking his readers. Similarly, only someone with an entirely biased perspective could publicly deny that the confrontation between the Palestinians and the Israel Defence Forces is completely disproportionate, and the proof lies in the death toll. Given that the 'democratic' Israeli government refuses to officially report anything, the only thing one can do is estimate the death toll, even if the results are not entirely accurate. basically, in its war with Gaza, Israel has suffered around 5,000 casualties, whilst the number of Palestinians killed is no less than 250,000. According to Hacker's calculations, which border on the absurd, by December 2025 there would be no more than 19,000 Palestinian civilian deaths. Claims such as this are simply not serious, but we now understand why they cannot be: Hacker's text as a whole is nothing more than a crude pro-Zionist and pro-Israeli propaganda piece. If that is understood, then we will no longer be surprised that Hacker brazenly claims that the Israeli soldiers are the most decent and humanitarian in history, when we all know that not only do they use prohibited weapons, they use Palestinians as human shields placed in front of their tanks, they steal everything they can from Palestinian homes, including the properties themselves, something they cynically publish themselves on

social media. The hundreds of Palestinian children (one is tempted to say, ‘little angels’) maimed by bombs and operated on without anaesthesia due to the destruction of hospitals are a tangible demonstration of the ferocious genocide committed by Israeli soldiers in Gaza. The truth is that the respected Oxford professor’s full support for the Israeli military leaves him in a rather poor moral light.

I shall now briefly comment on two of Hacker’s ‘arguments’ to illustrate the general thrust of his approach. The first is that the children of refugees are no longer refugees. In this case, Hacker is playing with words and ignoring the facts. Palestinian refugees still retain their Palestinian nationality and in general do not acquire new ones, wherever they may be; so how do we refer to these people who, although they were not physically expelled from their homeland, are not assimilated by any other? In fact, I am surprised that Hacker maintains such a view, because what today happens to Palestinians used happen to Jews: they were expelled from, for example, Poland and moved to Germany, but that did not make them German. They and their descendants remained “refugees” (or whatever term was used). I therefore consider his argument to be invalid. And the second ingenious argument of Hacker’s that I think is worth examining is his rejection of the charge of disproportion. According to him, the argument holds only if the use of force is disproportionate in relation to the previously established objectives. But all this does is highlight that the Israeli government’s military objective was the total destruction of Gaza and the Palestinian people. Of course, as the latter has not yet been achieved, it follows that the accusation of disproportionate force does not apply. Equally absurd is the justification offered by Hacker for the destruction of hospitals in Gaza: what was happening (it no longer happens because there are no longer any hospitals) is that members of Hamas use to hide in them. So Israel was entirely justified in destroying a hospital for, say, 500 children since 10 members of Hamas were hiding there. I no longer even consider it relevant to mention the incursions by soldiers into hospitals and the atrocities committed against patients, doctors and civilians which happen to be there, of which there is ample footage on social media. However, I, who consider myself a disciple of the eminent Prof. Hacker, also believe that his reasoning is twisted and absurd.

Hacker’s ‘book’, as I said, has two parts: one dealing with the military events of the last three years, and another which is the ideological section aimed at singling out the Jewish people and distinguishing them from all others throughout history. The Jews have been attacked (even by their own people) since the time of Jesus of Nazareth, later in North Africa, certainly in Europe and even in the East. No people (Indians, Blacks, etc.) has suffered more than the Jewish people. Not even the 28 or more million people who died in the Soviet Union during the Second World War can be equated with Jewish suffering. The Jews have always been victims of others and

have never been the perpetrators. That is why anti-Zionism is neo-Marxist anti-Semitism in disguise. That is the political message of Hacker's text.

It goes without saying that we cannot, here and now, engage with the biased interpretation of history that the learned Prof. Hacker would have us accept. In my view, virtually everything he asserts is either false or, in principle, refutable. One need only glance at the first volume of A. Solzhenitsyn's book, *Two Hundred Years Together*, to demolish much of what Hacker simply takes for granted. From start to finish, the author adopts a completely uncritical stance towards Israeli policies, particularly those directed against the Palestinian people, to the extent of denying well-known and even observed facts. It would seem as though Hacker wanted to convince us that what we with our own eyes see in videos of infamous bombings of a city already completely destroyed (worse, incidentally, than Dresden, which is no small matter), of rows of young people laughing and enjoying the scene whilst sitting with drinks and food in their hands, mothers overcome with excruciating grief carrying the bodies of their children, etc., etc., are nothing else than hallucinations, exaggerations by media hostile to the Israeli government and the Jewish people. I believe that, in the face of such an attitude, the correct response is to denounce the intellectual immorality and moral blindness of those who adopt such a stance towards the rest of the world. Hence, the only thing to which the highly respected Prof. Hacker can aspire with his latest book is the condemnation of his heartless attitude and the reinforcement of the idea that it is our duty to defend the interests of humanity beyond cherished prejudices and distorting ideological lenses.