

# Editor's Note



WITH OUR FIFTH ISSUE, *Zionism*, we launch our second year of SAPIR. The response to our first issues has been dramatic. More than anything else, we have heard from readers an appreciation for our commitment to pushing the envelope, touching the third rail, giving voice to provocative views that change the nature of Jewish communal conversations. We have often heard a version of: “I don’t agree with everything in this piece, but I’m glad you’ve published it. It’s pushed me to think differently, to clarify my positions, to question my assumptions.”

There is a broader context here. From the editorial pages of the *New York Times* to those of the *Wall Street Journal*, Americans of different partisan colors agree that there is a free-speech crisis in the United States. For the most part, the crisis is not yet a legal and political one, though there are worrying instances of censorship at the state and local level.

But there’s little doubt that there is a free-speech crisis in our cultural and social life. Survey after survey shows that people are afraid to speak their mind, lest they invite social ostracism

or professional cancellation. A growing list of topics remains all but undiscussable in what counts as polite company. Social-media companies and private universities use their immunity from the First Amendment to shut down speech they dislike, often in the Orwellian name of combating “misinformation.”

The crisis is also personal. Many of us—including many who profess a belief in the value of free speech—can be quick to take personal offense at what is intended only as intellectual provocation. How an argument makes us *feel* is often taken as evidence of its validity or lack thereof. Instead of delighting in the contest of ideas, we retreat to the comfort of agreement.

When we founded SAPIR last year, we did so with a goal and a theory. The goal was to offer ideas for a thriving Jewish future—ideas that moved beyond diagnosis to prescription; ideas to inspire action. Sometimes the value of those ideas is not only in the agreement they elicit, but also in the dissent they provoke.

The theory was that the way to generate the best ideas was to be intellectually diverse and inclusive. SAPIR has published pieces spanning a wide political spectrum and will continue to do so. It reflects no particular stream of Judaism. And it is certainly not intended to reflect my personal views, except in the essays published under my own name.

Instead, it is heterodox on principle and eclectic by design. The Jewish tradition is rooted in argument for the sake of heaven. We believe this is a tradition that best suits the challenges of our time.

Every issue of SAPIR, including the current one, reflects this belief. You will probably encounter opinions, analyses, even word choices in this issue with which you strongly disagree—and those with which you fully agree. We think the greatest intellectual value comes from having a robust mix of both, and we are confident that our readers will approach these essays as whetting stones to sharpen their own thinking, whether they run with the grain or against it. \*

—Bret Stephens,  
April 18, 2022