world into the binary of “oppressors and oppressed.” A pervasive system of oppression is understood to characterize this oppressor-oppressed relation (familiar examples include capitalist exploitation, white supremacy, and male patriarchy). This systemic oppression is often seen partially masked by a false consciousness so subtle that neither oppressors nor oppressed operate with full awareness. Ideologies thus claim to hold the interpretative key to unmasking social oppression and liberating humanity.

While conservatives may accept moderate reforms to rectify particular injustices, projects to radically overhaul and replace inherited values and institutions cut directly against conservative skepticism about modern utopian-progressives narratives of liberation. Christopher Dawson saw ideology as characterized by “an invasion of the world of religion and metaphysics so that they claim man’s allegiance even in the things that are not Caesar’s” (The Movement of World Revolution [Sheed & Ward, 1959], 95). When ideology becomes a closed system that demands unqualified and unquestionable loyalty, it furnishes the foundation for modern totalitarianism. This type of ideology can operate as a totalizing political vision usurping the traditional position of Christianity as the highest locus of ultimate meaning within Western culture. The conservative opening to an extra-human horizon that both transcends and grounds the political order is an element that Freedon and Neill deem essential to the constitution of conservatism as an ideology; but it is precisely this which may constitute conservatism as an anti-ideology.

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The most useful interventions into the history of concepts are the ones that call attention to words and categories that we have been using without thinking. Such projects are capable of reorienting scholarly conversation, sometimes for decades, by making problems out of concepts that have previously gone undiscussed or unnoticed. The more fundamental the concept, the more integrated into multiple discourses across multiple fields, the more powerful the intervention. It becomes impossible to use certain terms—“rights,” say, or “secularization”—without engaging the critical literature that has made those terms into problems.
This is what Adam Stern has done for “survival,” a term that has increasingly come to mark anyone who has endured extreme adversity or trauma. As its subtitle indicates, Survival is not a history but a genealogy, which makes “survival” into a central problem and asks where any possible history of it might begin. Following Jacques Derrida and Gil Anidjar, Stern employs the framework of globalatinization to trace the itinerary of survival, from supervivere to survie and Überleben. Beginning by observing “the specific political and theological-political anxieties surrounding the survival of the Jews” (11), Stern’s counterintuitive hypothesis is that the centrality of Jewish survival to the discourse of survival is the index, not of its Jewish, but rather of its Christian significance. He tests this hypothesis through a series of readings of modern German-Jewish thinkers: Hannah Arendt, Walter Benjamin, Franz Rosenzweig, and Sigmund Freud. Over the course of the book, Stern shows that “Jewish survival is already Christian survival and that the survival of the Jews is an ambivalent, paradoxical, anxious, and constantly shifting Christian question” (31).

The choice of these four thinkers, and the intense focus on particular texts for each one, are not intended to provide a thorough survey or overview but rather to highlight significant sites of the articulation of survival and to demonstrate how they are already globalatinized, notwithstanding their appearance in works of what is sometimes called Jewish thought. The thinkers range across political, philosophical, literary, theological, and psychological discourses. What “survives” in each case is not always the same—it can be individuals, texts, the whole Jewish people, etc.—but Stern shows how, despite this apparent variety, the political-theological poetics of survival remains consistently inscribed within the globalatin history of concerns about Christ’s body. His incarnation, passion, and resurrection, and especially the vexed problematics of his continued presence in the Eucharist and the Church (the passage of the corpus mysticum from the Host to the Church is especially significant here), can be found in such unexpected places as Arendt’s discussion of stateless refugees and Benjamin’s comments on translation.

Review of Politics readers will be interested in Stern’s analysis of survival’s capacity “to transform abjection into power”; the problem is that this “also makes it a cunning dissimulating mechanism for the transformation of power into abjection” (8). As a figure of sovereignty, survival is shot through with paradoxes in ways that track the figure of Christ, who is both sovereign and victim, living and dead, individual and collective, natural and mystical, and so on. Imagery of ghosts and references to the Derridean literature thereon recur frequently throughout Stern’s analyses, whether of Arendt’s spectral Jews and Africans or Freud’s ruminations on Hamlet and his own dreams. Stern is strongest when he shows how categories like modernity and secularization function to disguise the continued operation of Christianity in its particularity. For example, he exposes the “strangely asymmetric application of the secularization hypothesis” in Arendt’s Origins of
Totalitarianism, according to which Jews secularize as the result of an internal process of transformation, while Christianity simply disappears, attacked and replaced by secular modernity: “When Jews become secular, they become Jews of a different kind. When Christians become secular, they cease to be Christian altogether” (25). Similar insights animate his readings of progressive temporalities embedded in Benjamin and Freud, and Stern deftly traverses the huge literature on these figures.

ROP readers may be less familiar with the other figure Stern treats, Franz Rosenzweig, who is mainly read by Weimar intellectual historians in Jewish studies and religious studies. Despite his status as the only “theologian” in this group and presumably therefore the most “Jewish” of the four, I would expect Stern’s argument for the Christian logic of Rosenzweig’s Star of Redemption to cause less controversy than his similar claim about Benjamin’s “Task of the Translator.” It helps that for Rosenzweig, more than the others, the Christological themes can be explicitly treated at length, and Stern needs fewer close readings of textual hints. Nonetheless, in all four cases, Stern persuasively carries forward Anidjar’s mission to read Christianity as “a singular structure of possible actions, the enactment of essential divisions, and their distribution across a hierarchical differential of power” (12).

In the contemporary United States, one sometimes hears the claim that “Islam is not a religion” (see Asma T. Uddin, When Islam Is Not a Religion [Pegasus Books, 2019]), but rather a political ideology. Legal arguments for Muslim rights and freedoms must correspondingly be framed in terms of religion. This comports with the reigning paradigm in religious studies, that Christianity creates the category of “religion” to apply to itself and to force other traditions to interpret themselves according to Christian categories. Judaism, too, was frequently accused in Enlightenment Europe of being a political ideology rather than a religion, and of constituting a state within a state. Stern inverts this claim: now it is Christianity that is not, or not merely, a “religion.” Over and over throughout Survival, Christianity (or at least, Latin Christianity) is rather a figure of politics, sovereignty, and empire. It is a drive to conquer, unify, subordinate, and eliminate.

Given this, it would have been interesting for Stern to broaden his project beyond his counterintuitive “Jewish” archive and to examine texts of Christian opposition to modernity and secularization. Would such texts, in light of this analysis, appear to fail to understand themselves and Christianity as well? By the same token, another path not taken is mentioned early in the book, when Stern raises and attempts to preempt an interesting possible criticism of his project, namely, that perhaps it “simply contributes further to the foreclosure of an independent and authentically Jewish perspective on survival.” His response is that “it is not always easy to separate the Jewish from the Christian or to make a clean break with the sometimes-hidden asymmetries of the Christian point of view” (31). Survival makes that case powerfully.
Survival concludes with a brief epilogue that poignantly brings together the modern Israeli Hebrew term for survival, hisardut, with an Arabic idea from the Palestinian lexicon of resistance, sumud. He could also have ended where he began, however, and returned to the contemporary United States, perhaps exploring the expanded semantic field towards which he gestures in the introduction, where “survivor” comes to designate everyone from military veterans to people who have experienced sexual assault to winners of reality-television competitions. This is not the project of a genealogy, but a reader having reached the end of the book cannot but wonder what Stern thinks about these other spheres in light of his other analyses. (I personally would have loved his take on how the entrance of “survival” into the sphere of romantic love, classically in Gloria Gaynor’s “I Will Survive” [1978] and more recently in Destiny’s Child’s “Survivor” [2001] relates to the semantic field as a whole.) Stern most likely intends to invite others to pursue such projects; among the many merits of Survival is that it is likely to inspire just that.

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In 1992 A. P. Martinich published The Two Gods of Leviathan: Thomas Hobbes on Religion and Politics (Cambridge University Press). The book is among the most significant studies of Hobbes to appear in the last three decades. The question of Hobbes’s atheism had been a contested one among modern scholars. Martinich weighed in on the side of the theists, against (among others) Straussian interpreters, but he escaped the confines of the narrow, textual methodology deployed by others of his view, including Howard Warrender. Martinich preferred a contextualist methodology, which positioned Hobbes within a particular Christian culture, namely, the Jacobean English milieu that uniquely combined Calvinist theology, episcopal ecclesiology, and a high deference to the spiritual authority of monarchs. However “nonstandard” Hobbes’s religious views might appear, Martinich insisted on their sincerity and rejected readings of them as “esoteric” efforts to undermine Christian orthodoxy.

Two Gods produced considerable pushback, and Martinich reveled in the controversies that followed. His latest book is a collection of his prior short pieces, mostly produced by these debates. There is only one original piece