## Pensée 2: Egregious Abuses Warrant a Boycott

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Recent calls to boycott Israel, including its academic institutions, have stimulated heated debate over the relationship between boycotts and academic freedom. Academic boycotts admittedly raise complex issues, as they typically trammel academic freedom to some degree. Nonetheless, I do not favor a blanket refusal to engage in them. Although applying a negative presumption, we should consider academic boycotts on a case-by-case basis.

Boycotts are nonviolent actions—one of the few effective ways that citizens may directly register moral outrage over the behavior of a state or other actor. A presumption against academic boycotts recognizes their potential infringement of academic freedom. However, case-by-case consideration acknowledges that academic freedom may, under unusual or extreme circumstances, be justifiably subordinated to other fundamental values. The United Nations recognized as much in its resolution supporting an academic, sporting, cultural, and economic boycott of apartheid South Africa. In that context, the world body judged that the freedom of South African academics—and businessmen, athletes, artists, and others—could be sacrificed in the interest of achieving freedom and equal rights for all South Africans. I believe that was a correct judgment.

Israel's treatment of Palestinians is another such exceptional circumstance.

In July 2005, one year after the International Court of Justice ruled Israel's separation wall illegal, more than 170 Palestinian civil-society organizations called for a comprehensive boycott of Israel. The academic dimension of the boycott targets Israeli institutions, not individuals. Thus, formal research and other agreements with Israeli universities would be suspended. However, invitations to Israeli professors to join conferences or to publish in foreign journals would continue. Nonetheless, it is likely that the boycott would impose limitations on freedom for some Israeli academics.

Israel's defenders have protested that Israel is not the worst human rights offender in the world, so singling it out is hypocrisy or even anti-Semitism. Rhetorically this shifts focus from Israel's human rights record to the imagined motives of its critics.

However, "worst first" has never been the rule for whom to boycott. Had it been, the Pol Pot regime, not apartheid South Africa, would have been targeted. Yet Cambodia's ties to the West were insufficient to make any embargo effective. In contrast, Israel assiduously guards its public image. A dense web of economic and cultural—and, yes, academic—relations also ties Israel to the West, rendering it susceptible to boycott.

Israel's violations of the human rights of Palestinians include expelling or intimidating into flight the country's majority Palestinian population; denying

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refugees internationally recognized rights to return to their homes; subjecting Israel's own Palestinian citizens to systematic discrimination in virtually all spheres of life (including in education); and occupying and illegally settling the lands of its neighbors. Israel has also massively disrupted academic life in the occupied territories by closing and physically damaging educational institutions, denying visas to foreign employees of Palestinian institutions, and restricting Palestinian students' freedom of movement.

Israel's behavior toward Palestinians is similar to or worse than that of apartheid South Africa toward blacks, according to South African Archbishop Desmond Tutu, African National Congress member and current government minister Ronnie Kasrils, and U.N. special rapporteur in the occupied territories John Dugard. Dual laws for Jewish settlers and Palestinians, segregated roads and housing, and restrictions on Palestinians' freedom of movement strongly recall apartheid South Africa. If boycotting apartheid South Africa was appropriate, it is equally fair to boycott Israel on a similar, and possibly worse, record.

Assuming a general boycott of Israel is justified, are there reasons to exempt its academic institutions? Many Israeli academic institutions either benefit from, or participate in, Israeli government actions that violate Palestinian rights. For example, Tel Aviv University sits in part over land belonging to Sheikh Muwannis, a Palestinian village, the residents of which were expelled by Jewish militias or fled in fear in March 1948. Hebrew University in Jerusalem uses over 800 acres of land illegally expropriated from Palestinian private owners in the West Bank after the 1967 war. Bar Ilan University has established a branch in an illegal Israeli settlement in the West Bank.

Although a handful of Israeli academics are deeply critical of their government's policies, many others have provided state agencies with expertise in demography, psychology, strategic studies, history, anthropology, and other fields that have assisted the state in its control of Palestinian populations. Israeli university administrations have harassed dissident scholars yet turn a blind eye to openly racist expression by right-wing Israeli academics.

The international community, over six decades, has failed to compel Israel's compliance with international law. The U.S. government alone has vetoed forty-one Security Council resolutions condemning Israeli actions, thus enabling Israel's continuing abuses and leaving concerned citizens with few alternatives to a peaceful boycott.

No doubt many Israelis will initially react defensively to a boycott. In the long term, however, a boycott may stimulate reflection within Israel, including among Israeli academicians, on the policies that have led to international isolation. Carrying on "business as usual," including academic business, has the opposite effect—that is, to normalize Israel's actions and communicate to its citizens that nothing is truly amiss.

Boycotts, just like government sanctions, are somewhat blunt instruments. If some Israeli academics suffer mildly, that may be the regrettable but necessary price to pay for freedom and equal rights for nearly ten million Palestinians.

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