







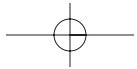
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ABOLISHING THE GHETTO ANTI-SEMITISM, RACISM, AND THE *OTHER*



VOLTAIRE ONCE NOTED IN A JUSTLY FAMOUS QUIP THAT IF GOD DID not exist it would have been necessary to invent Him. It is the same with the Jews and the Enlightenment: if the “accursed race” did not invent it then they should have. Times have changed since the totalitarian attempt to annihilate the Jews—the *other* of western civilization since its inception—seemed to justify the belief that progress had culminated in the most radical form of reification: the number tattooed on an inmate’s arm. While this stance left *Dialectic of Enlightenment* locked into identifying the *absolute* evil with the holocaust, with little to say about other atrocities, the Jew is no longer the innocent victim. Anti-Semitic slogans are still scrawled on walls; cemeteries are sacked; synagogues set ablaze; fringe groups of neo-Nazis molest Jews in the streets; a half-wit authoritarian prime minister of Malaysia, opposed to the introduction of democracy into the non-western world, rants about the power of world Jewry. But this is all very different both in terms of the quantity and quality of anti-Semitism than in times past. Outside the Middle East, where hatred of Jews is fueled by the imperialist policies of the Israeli state, anti-Semitism has become detached from any party or mass movement genuinely competing for political power. Gone are the uniforms and insignia, the pogroms and riots, the coordinated propaganda and the academically reinforced dogma, the paramilitary organizations and fascist parties, the discriminatory laws and the concentration camps. Over the last fifty years, moreover, other victims have taken center stage: people of color, women, gays, and inhabitants of colonized territories. Nevertheless, the historical experience of the Jews provides an excellent illustration of the misunderstandings associated with the critique of Enlightenment and the salience of its values for the struggles of the subaltern and the *other*.

Critical theory began with the belief that scientific rationalism had somehow undermined civilized behavior and inhibited the exercise of individual



conscience. This allowed for the unleashing of instinctual resentments against those carriers of modern capitalism in the sphere of “circulation,” the Jews,¹ and provided evidence for the way in which progress had “objectively” transformed the Enlightenment into “delusion” and anti-Semitism into the boundary, or the “limit,” that reason cannot transgress.² The vaunted pessimism of the Frankfurt School thereby reached its apex. Absolute evil was attained: there is no poetry after Auschwitz. Hope now really does exist only for the hopeless. Even education won’t help: Enlightenment projects fascism, reason withers in the face of paranoia, and—thus—the distorted perception of “the Jew,” the *other*, cannot be cured.³

This argument informed the thinking of Theodor Herzl, who became disillusioned with liberalism, cosmopolitanism, and assimilation during the Dreyfus Affair. It also supports the defense of “Jewish” identity against the heritage of the Enlightenment. Modern anti-Semitism will then be traced back over the French Revolution to the philosophes.⁴ Their writings will be combed for anti-Semitic sentiments to demonstrate their similarities with the rest of the *goyim*.⁵ It will then become apparent that the assimilation of Jews was championed by many of those who considered them a “plague on the nation.” Without drawing a distinction between the Enlightenment and the Counter-Enlightenment, however, moralizing about the ubiquity of anti-Semitism easily turns into a substitute for political judgment. The issue is not whether the Enlightenment was intent on preserving Jewish identity, but whether its values or those of the Counter-Enlightenment best enable the Jew—or the particular member of any subaltern group—to live as a citizen among other citizens and choose, most freely, what kind of private life he or she might wish to lead.

Medieval society was not kind to the Jews. The great majority of them

1. “Anti-Semitic behavior is generated in situations where blinded men robbed of their subjectivity are set loose as subjects. . . . They demonstrate the impotence of sense, significance, and ultimately of truth—which might hold them within bounds.” Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (New York: Herder & Herder, 1972), 171.
2. *Ibid.*, 204.
3. *Ibid.*, 193, 197.
4. Cf. Arthur Hertzberg, *The French Enlightenment and the Jews* (New York, 1968).
5. Cf. Leon Poliakov, *The History of Antisemitism: From Voltaire to Wagner*, trans. Miriam Kochan (New York: Vanguard Press, 1975). A modern and somewhat more esoteric version of this approach, which offers the same result, is provided by Michael Mack, *German Idealism and the Jew: the Inner Anti-Semitism of Philosophy* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 2003).

were dirt poor, lived in overcrowded ghettos,⁶ and suffered under the social power of half-educated authoritarian rabbis.⁷ Traditional debates were esoteric: free thinkers like Uriel da Casta were either driven to suicide (1640) or, like Spinoza (1656), excommunicated. Jews also bore the brunt of various myths spread by gentiles. Accusations abounded concerning how Jews purposely spread disease, poisoned wells, secretly amassed great wealth, worshipped the devil, engaged in an ongoing conspiracy against Christian civilization, and used the blood of Christian children for their *matza* on Passover. Romantics preoccupied with the organic community would view Jews as a nation within the nation or what Fichte termed a “state within the state.” It is true that for certain periods, and in certain nations, Jews lived on relatively friendly terms with their gentile neighbors: viewing them simply as “victims” would be a mistake. But this relationship was open to change at any moment. Pogroms always loomed, Jews were still perceived as killers of Christ and, in a sense, they were kept in reserve as a scapegoat. The feudal subordination of law to the Christian religion put Jews at an obvious disadvantage: most of them lived under a theocratic order in which—as St. Ambrose put the matter—“civil law must bow before religious devotion.”

This made it only logical for Jews to identify with the new monarchical state whose centralized legal system provided the foundations for modern liberal democracies,⁸ and whose “enlightened despots, like Joseph II of Austria-Hungary, attempted to abolish the legacy of prejudice inherited from the feudal past. As for the philosophes, they too mostly supported the new centralized regimes. But they were less concerned with the particular

6. “Certainly the Jewish quarters of Europe, such as, for example, the one in Venice from which all got their name, were much more crowded, poorer in living space and facilities, and more inescapable than even our worst slums of today. To use some random examples: the Jewish ghetto in Cologne was the narrowest street in town: it was even called the ‘Narrow Street.’ In the Frankfurt ghetto 4,000 persons lived in one short gloomy street, twelve feet wide, where the roofs of the small houses met at the top, making for gloomy darkness all day. In some cities the brothels were placed in the one small street in which Jews were permitted to live, to add to their ill repute. In the infamous Roman ghetto, at times as many as 10,000 inhabitants were herded into a space smaller than one square kilometer. In nearly all ghettos several families often had to occupy the same room.” Bruno Bettelheim, “Mental Health and Urban Design,” in *Surviving and Other Essays* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1979), 217.

7. Exposing the stultifying character of religious life in Poland, and demystifying the “rabbi,” are important themes in Salmon Maimon, *An Autobiography*, trans. J. Clark Murray (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2001), 155ff.

8. Blandine Kriegel, *The State and the Rule of Law*, trans. Marc A. LePain and Jeffrey C. Cohen (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 11ff and passim.

conditions of the Jews than with the universal principles underpinning the liberal polity. Locke put the matter succinctly in his *Letter on Toleration* when he wrote that: “neither Pagan nor Mahometan, nor Jew, ought to be excluded from the civil rights or the commonwealth because of his religion.”

Such is the Enlightenment response to anti-Semitism, and its logic holds for other subaltern groups. Montesquieu stood in the forefront of the battle against anti-Semitism in France, William Penn and Roger Williams led the struggle for religious liberty in the United States, while Lessing and Wilhelm Dohm pled the case of the Jews in Germany. Others may have been less altruistic but, from the beginning, the central issue revolved around whether to embrace the vision of a Christian community or a universal understanding of the citizen stripped of any particular empirical attributes. The charge of fostering a conspiracy against an organic Christian community, often levied against the Voltaire and the philosophes by the Abbé Barruel and other reactionaries, intensified the traditional xenophobic fears directed against Jews and Freemasons. This linkage of Jews and Freemasons with the Enlightenment—as conspiratorial agents of modernity and bourgeois revolution—would carry over into the thinking of twentieth-century racists and reactionaries. But there is also a way in which this linkage—if not the conspiracy—makes sense. Voltaire and many philosophes were freemasons, whose lodges were havens of toleration, and emancipating the Jews was, indeed, part of a more general political assault on the *ancien régime*.

The crowning achievements of this enterprise were the three great democratic revolutions that occurred in England (1688), the United States (1776) and France (1789). All of them were predicated on the vision of a new constitutional order in which equal citizens of diverse background and different interests might determine their fate together peacefully under the liberal rule of law. Constitutionalism and suffrage rejected—in principle—the idea of individuals living without explicit human rights in a “community” bound together by land and custom. The principle, of course, did not instantly translate into fact and, thus, there began the long struggle for suffrage by excluded groups whose most important representatives, from Mary Wollstonecraft to Martin Luther King, Jr., pointed to the contradiction between universal ideals and the prejudiced society that denied them. It only makes sense that the formation of a liberal and secular order should have been welcomed not only by those Jews seeking entry into gentile society, but—what is so often forgotten—also by those seeking freedom from the theocracy of the provincial ghetto. Eighteenth-century constitutional revolutions tore down the walls of the ghetto, opened society, and—finally—enabled Jews to

claim their rights as equal citizens. The failings of these revolutions with respect to implementing equality among citizens, it should be noted, were due less to the inadequacies of their Enlightenment supporters than the unrelenting assault upon their most basic political values by the heirs of the Counter-Enlightenment.

The mechanistic, rationalistic, individualistic, and egalitarian assumptions underpinning this constitutional political vision were contested not merely by anti-Semites but also by orthodox Jewish traditionalists and members of the newly formed *hasidim*, who sought to liberate the spirit by rendering holy the affairs of everyday life, as well as self-interested conservatives with a stake in the status quo, and small-minded provincials who sought their safety in the ghetto. They opposed the modernizing spirit of the *haskalah*, or “Jewish Enlightenment,” and their thinking often mirrored that of reactionary advocates of an organic society and the cultural conservatism of Counter-Enlightenment thinkers like Burke, DeMaistre, and Hamann. The situation is not much different with the young Gershom Scholem, who advocated a radical separatism, or Franz Rosenzweig, who called for a mystical inner renewal and the “blood” bond of the Jews. Nonsense like this has become fashionable: it seems to fascinate even postmodernist and progressive intellectuals. But few have much use any longer for Mendelssohn or his gentile friend Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, author of the celebrated plays *The Jews* and *Nathan the Wise*, though they stood in the vanguard of those who would lead the assault against both the anti-Semitic prejudices of gentile society and the provincialism of established Jewry. Leaders of the *haskalah* called upon Jews to enter society and public life. Mendelssohn himself was observant of religious custom. Nevertheless, he and his followers made easier the abandonment of religious tradition through their emphasis upon secular values and participation in the wider world of the burgeoning nation-state.

Taking advantage of the new possibilities offered by liberal society had a negative impact on the traditional sense of identity: Jews became secular, moved out of the ghetto, increased their contact with gentiles, and sought advancement. Many among the ambitious and educated would become baptized like the great composer Felix Mendelssohn-Bartholdy, Heinrich Heine, and the fascinating Rahel Varnhagen whose salon became the home of many leading intellectuals of the period. Many made their choice on practical grounds like Eduard Gans, the teacher of Karl Marx, who converted in order to secure his chair of philosophy at the University of Berlin. But others felt what Heine called the “betrayal complex” or, like Varnhagen, remained obsessed with their Jewishness until their death. The trend toward

baptism, and the exodus from the ghetto, would increasingly cause the anti-Semite to begin identifying “the Jew” less by religion than by pseudo-biological attributes. Neither the motivations nor the methods of these anti-Semites had anything to do with the Enlightenment. The problems associated with the “betrayal complex” and the dangers associated with the new pseudo-science of racism were foisted on Jews not by the Enlightenment, but by its enemies.

During the nineteenth and much of the twentieth centuries, the Enlightenment was still embraced only by a minority in Europe. It was precisely where liberal traditions and institutions were strongest, however, that the pursuit of Jewish “identity” was best protected. The “Jewish question” *became a question* only in nations where progressive social forces committed to constitutional liberalism and capitalism confronted powerful reactionary social forces committed to the hierarchical and “catholic” vision of a feudal past. Emancipation was not an issue of any practical importance in the United States while, in Imperial Russia, it was not even a topic for discussion. To be sure: economic crisis brings out anti-Semitic sentiments but, with respect to the issue of “emancipation,” this should not be considered the primary issue: England, the United States, and the Netherlands also suffered from the “Great Depression” without experiencing the same racist consequences as Germany. In western nations with liberal institutions and liberal traditions, indeed, “emancipation” was basically successful.⁹ A sense of identity, meanwhile, did not help the Jews in Poland and Eastern Europe from the Nazis. It makes as little sense to speak about the “failure” of Jewish emancipation in nations lacking liberal institutions and deeply rooted liberal traditions as it does to speak about the “failure” of Marxism in economically underdeveloped nations where proletarian revolutions were undertaken without a proletariat.

Critics of “emancipation” have noted how, during the French Revolution, Clermont Tonnerre emphasized that the aim of the new society was to liberate individual Jews rather than Jewry.¹⁰ But this criticism misunderstands the nature of constitutional liberalism. It offered individuals freedom from the arbitrary interference of the state in their private lives, and equali-

9. For a somewhat different view, see Leonard Dinnerstein, *Antisemitism in America* (Oxford University Press, New York, 1994).

10. Reinhard Ruerup, “Judenemanzipation und buergerliche Gesellschaft in Deutschland,” in *Vorurteil und Voelkermord: Entwicklungslinien des Antisemitismus* hrsg. Wolfgang Benz und Werner Bergmann (Freiburg: Herder, 1997), 138

ty under the law; it did not offer “group rights.” It sought to turn each individual into a capitalist, not to abolish capitalism; it offered formal equality under the law, not substantive equality in the realm of civil society; it projected fraternity in terms of the national interest and the primacy of self-interest in economic matters. Marx indeed saw these defects as warranting the move beyond “political emancipation” and toward “human emancipation” in his early work, “On the Jewish Question” (1843),¹¹ which employs anti-Semitic terminology and retains anti-Semitic overtones.

Written prior to what would become his famous analysis of capitalism, lacking the categories he would later employ in *Das Kapital*, Marx associated the new economic system with Jewish attributes: he built on an economic motivation for anti-Semitism inherited from the Middle Ages when, following the Third Lateran Council of 1179, Christians were prohibited from charging interest and Jews were placed in the position of serving as money-lenders in an agrarian society. The anti-Semitic characterizations used by Marx were common among intellectuals of the period. More striking was the lack of any institutional referent for “human emancipation” against the idea of “political emancipation” predicated on the existence of a republic. This same inadequacy is apparent in the thinking of those seeking the “emancipation of Jewry.” Their abstraction from political history is noteworthy since everywhere the success of the struggle for Jewish emancipation ran parallel with the fortunes of constitutional liberalism.¹² Often, initially, only Christian males with property were granted full citizenship and the right to vote. Since constitutional liberalism was predicated on universal principles of formal equality and reciprocity, however, it became possible to contest discriminatory laws and practices. That is precisely what anti-Semites and reactionaries hated about the new order introduced by the democratic revolutions, articulated by the Enlightenment, and unevenly spread throughout Europe by Napoleon.

Emancipation not in the abstract, but into the broader society, was the hope of the Jews. Organizing themselves in terms of their “identity” was nowhere a viable political option: Zionism was itself a “post-emancipation” phenomenon with little intellectual or mass support before the last quarter

11. Note the seminal study by Henry Pachter, “Marx and the Jews,” in *Socialism in History: Political Essays of Henry Pachter*, ed. Stephen Eric Bronner (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984), 219–255.

12. Paul W. Massing, *Rehearsal for Destruction: A Study of Political Antisemitism in Imperial Germany* (New York: Howard Fertig, 1967), 3ff and *passim*.

of the nineteenth century. The liberal vision of emancipation offered the sole serious possibility for bettering the lives of Jews in the historical context of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The Jews knew it and proponents of the anti-Semitic reaction knew it as well. The champions of liberal democracy fought for it and the counter-revolutionary enemies of liberal democracy fought against it. Jewish critics of emancipation thus focus on the wrong target. The primary problem was—again—not with the proponents of emancipation who recognized “the Jew as a person, but not as a Jew” but, instead, with the opponents of emancipation who refused to recognize the Jew as a human being endowed with rights under the law and instead saw this “outsider” as a threat to their atavistic vision of an organic and homogeneous “community.”¹³

The years following the Napoleonic Wars were dominated by attempts to introduce a “restoration” of precisely such a community. Stendhal appropriately called the period, stretching from 1815–1848, a “swamp”; it was dominated by the army and the church or, using the title of his most famous work, “the red and the black.” Anti-Semitism and the romantic ideology of this self-proclaimed “counterrevolution” shared a profound and transparent connection. Both were directed against everything associated with the Enlightenment and the French Revolution. Experience and intuition were given primacy over reason. Christianity was resurrected, so to speak, in order to contest the earlier trend toward secularism.¹⁴ Authoritarian demands for obedience, adherence to tradition, and a romantic assault on modernity became the response to republicanism and “freedom of conscience.”

Integral nationalism and messianic visions of a Christian destiny have always intoxicated the advocates of both racism and the Counter-Enlightenment. But Jews too, especially those who worry most about the erosion of their identity, can evidence the qualities of their persecutors. The strengthening of prejudice became the underside of the struggle for liberty. With the struggle for the republican ideal of the citizen came the attack on the rights of the *other*. Rejection of natural rights and human dignity, which the Enlightenment inherited from the Renaissance, was the motor for trans-

13. A different perspective, which highlights how Jewish distinctness became the prism for reflecting upon German culture, is presented in the intelligent study by Jonathan M. Hess, *Germans, Jews, and the Claims of Modernity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002).

14. Eva G. Reichmann, *Hostages of Civilisation: The Sources of National Socialist Anti-semitism* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1949), 83ff.

forming hatred of the Jew into a distinctly social prejudice during the early nineteenth century. This ongoing battle of differing value systems was—again—generated less by some “dialectic” inherent within the Enlightenment than the political vision of its representatives as against those of the Counter-Enlightenment.

Concern with race reaches back to the “purity of blood” statutes introduced during the fifteenth century in Spain: it was, clearly, directed against Jews who had converted to Christianity (*converso*s) as well as those who secretly continued to follow their original religion (*marranos*). Francois Bernier was probably the first to use the term “race” as a way of demarcating groups through physical attributes in 1684 and Voltaire employed the category in *The Philosophy of History* to counter the idea that all people are commonly descended from Adam. Kant employed “race,” though he juxtaposed it against the idea of the “species,” in “Of the Different Human Races” (1775). Whatever the misguided prejudices of these thinkers, however, the crucial point is that none of them viewed race—or religion—as an organizing category for action. Their concerns with race were mostly academic and, especially for Voltaire and Kant, it had little bearing upon their activism or their general theories.

Romantic advocates of German nationalism introduced the first political program based on “purity of race.” Their motivation was not simply to establish hierarchical relations of superiority and inferiority, or even to create perverse stereotypes, but to oppose the opening of the ghettos. Spurred by *resentment* against the Jewish entry into public life, their racism consciously opposed to the universal principles of Enlightenment political theory. It instead served to justify their *ishes*, or anti-Semitic “resentment,” and provide reasons why Jews could not assimilate into the nation. The point was to show why Jews were not people like other people and why they were incapable of participating equally in Christian society: indeed, precisely because Jews were seen as constituting an organic “race” or “nation,” it followed that non-Jews must begin identifying themselves in the same way. Only through an explicitly racial consciousness would it be possible to recognize the Jewish threat. And so, depending upon the context, “the Jew” would be pitted against “the French” or “the German,” or “the Aryan.” Those who ignored this ineradicable conflict between Jews and gentiles were obviously traitors to the nation and the race.

Anti-Semitism evidences pre-modern longings for provincialism, authoritarianism, and hierarchy that resist cosmopolitan, liberal, and socialist values. The connection between these values was solidified—again—during the

Dreyfus Affair.¹⁵ Movements like the *Action française* and the various fascist *ligues* no less than the Nazis exhibited an almost pathological fear of any attempt to fragment society and turn young against old, intellectuals against workers, faction against faction, class against class. The French Revolution undertaken against a monarchy rooted in ancient traditions—if not according to Edmund Burke then according to those more extreme in their conservative views—could only have been the work of “outsiders” intent upon manipulating simple-minded people with dreams of equality and democracy. Again, the quest for uniformity and the willingness to impose it upon the community has its roots not in the Enlightenment, but the Counter-Enlightenment.

Such thinking was in already prevalent in Germany when, just as the debates over Jewish emancipation were taking place, the “Hep-Hep” pogroms broke out in 1819.¹⁶ They spread throughout southern and eastern Germany, causing loss of property and lives, fueled by what demagogues called the “anger of the people.” A new form of Counter-Enlightenment protest was crystallizing. It would simmer in the next three decades following the pogroms: the old aristocratic reaction remained dominant. But then it burst forth in the decades following the revolutions of 1848 that, essentially, sought to establish republican institutions and social justice. The ensuing reaction ultimately brought figures like Napoleon III and Bismarck to power even as it generated a new commitment to integral nationalism and the organic community. Counter-Enlightenment ideas of this sort inspired the rise of populist movements led by powerful figures like Karl Lueger, who would become the longstanding mayor of Vienna, and Adolf Stoecker the court chaplain of Kaiser Wilhelm I in Berlin. Literary figures in France like Maurice Barrès worried about their nation becoming “deracinated” while in Austria during the last quarter of the nineteenth century Georg Ritter von Schoener-

15. “As a universal weapon, anti-Semitism targeted the Republic (Jewish in origin and nature) and defended Catholicism (attacked by Jewish Freemasonry) and the people against capitalism (Jewish usurers, Jewish Banking). The Dreyfus affair appears to have been decisive in France, however: in the end, anti-Semitism became fixed on the right and the socialist movement seems to have purged itself of its last anti-Jewish relics.” Michael Winock, *Nationalism, Anti-Semitism, and Fascism in France*, trans. Jane Marie Todd (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), 101–2.

16. “Hep-hep” was an anti-Semitic cry, or the slogan, which tended to accompany anti-Semitic actions. Its roots are unclear although the best guess is that it goes back to the time of ancient Rome when the Temple fell and the Romans yelled “*Hierosolyma est perdit*” (“Jerusalem is lost”). Detlev Claussen, *Vom Judenhass zu Antisemitismus: Materialien einer verleugneten Geschichte* (Darmstadt: Luchterhand, 1987), 74ff.

er—among the leaders of the staunchly authoritarian and anti-Semitic German-national movement and an idol of the young Hitler—was already successfully employing the slogan: “Germany for the Germans” and “From Purity to Unity.”¹⁷

Behind the seemingly endless array of mutually exclusive interests—bourgeois and proletarian, universal and particular, pacifist and imperialist—a unifying force, these reactionaries believed, must exist. It was necessary to find a way of explaining the seeming triumph of the Enlightenment, the revolution, and the dire consequences both held for Christian society. Employing racism as an explanation for the dynamics of history was the point behind popular works of anti-Semitism like *The Jewish Question as a Racial, Moral, and Cultural Question* (1881) by Eugen Duehring, *Jewish France* (1886) by Edmund Drumont, and *The Foundations of the Nineteenth Century* (1899) by Houston Stewart Chamberlain. The use of race by these avowedly Counter-Enlightenment thinkers enabled anti-Semites to fuse the multiplicity of liberalizing and secularizing modern forces into a single enemy, the Jew, and the extent to which this enemy could be identified with *all* enemies of the organic community proved the extent to which anti-Semitism dominated the thinking of the political right in any particular nation. It increasingly became an article of faith among the forces of reaction that the republic was an alien system imposed by an alien entity upon the “people’s community” and, everywhere in Europe, the attempt was made to translate the attack on “the Jew” into an attack upon “the Jew republic” —whether the Third Republic in France or the Weimar Republic in Germany.

Contempt for the masses or “the crowd,” which Gustav LeBon originally identified with the social democratic labor movement, *by the masses and the “crowd”* was the key to the new anti-Semitic perspective on politics in the modern era. Since only they can really understand the urgency of the situation given the supposed Jewish control over public life, anti-Semites long for an authoritarian state in which they can press their message without criticism or opposition. The connection between antidemocratic and anti-Semitic politics occurs from the very onset of modernity. Anti-Semites always—correctly—saw liberal democracy as hampering their ability to deal with the Jewish conspiracy: its civil liberties, reliance on common sense, and democratic discourse left them hamstrung in attempting to persuade the more gullible gentiles of the threat posed by the “Jewish” conspiracy. That

17. Brigitte Hamann, *Hitlers Wien: Lehrjahre eines Diktators* (Munich: Piper Verlag, 1998), 337ff.

idea would, indeed, fit nicely with the thinking of a Counter-Enlightenment obsessed with the ways in which the “crowd” was being misled by the forces of modernity.

Nowhere does this become clearer than in the infamous forgery known as the *Protocols of the Learned Elders of Zion*.¹⁸ Its anti-Semitism, explicitly directed against the political legacy of the Enlightenment, was justified by the supposed existence of a Jewish world conspiracy against Christian civilization. The tract responds not merely to economic or political conditions, but to existential needs as well. It expresses the usual paranoia, projects conspiratorial violence on the Jew, and constantly employs negative stereotypes. Hatred of Jews appears as an irrefutable lived experience through which, in Sartre’s great phrase, the bigot “turns himself into stone.” The anti-Semite cannot defend his position for that would place him in existential jeopardy: intuition thus supplants reason as the primary basis for making an argument. Or, better, anti-Semitism becomes an article of faith: the overwhelming power of the Jews, and the invisibility of the conspiratorial threat they present, is simply assumed.

Discursive justification or empirical verification is unnecessary. Arguments become legitimate only insofar as they support the claims of a faith, or an experience, uncontaminated by critical reflection. Reason is, after all, universal: it can be employed by anyone at anytime and it privileges no “place.” No wonder then that the anti-Semite sees reason as the tool of the “rootless cosmopolitan” Jew, who lacks a fixed “place” in the world, or that the intellect should be seen as lacking appeal for the uncomplicated Christian, who is guided by intuition, formed by experience, and aware of his position in an imaginary society. The lack of feeling for any “place” combined with the rejection of healthy intuition is what supposedly enables the Jew to manipulate events; it explains to the anti-Semite why the Christian—loyal to his “experience” and his “place”—is always outwitted and why both the Jew and the need for anti-Semitism have persisted in various forms from the beginning of time. It is important to consider, however, that the Jew can embrace a similar complex of paranoid epistemological assumptions that in moments of crisis can prove not merely self-defeating, but a self-fulfilling prophecy. Indeed, with paranoid views of the non-Jewish world, the result for Jews can only be isolation from the rest of global society.

18. A fuller exposition of the arguments derived here can be found in Stephen Eric Bronner, *A Rumor about the Jews: Anti-Semitism, Conspiracy, and the Protocols of Zion* (Paperback Edition: New York: Oxford University Press, 2003).

Not every traditional anti-Semite was a fascist and not every fascist was an anti-Semite, but the two positions reinforced one another. The fascist ideology seemed a way of reinvigorating the more traditional politics of anti-Semitism by infusing it with a new missionary, almost religious, fervor. The enemies of fascism were, moreover, generally the same as those of more established elites whose views derived from the Counter-Enlightenment. Such traditionalists were generally driven to panic by the Reds and their “Jewish” leaders. They were just as committed to a homogeneous “people’s community,” and most were just as critical of the cultural “decadence” and liberal spirit associated with the Enlightenment, as the partisans of the more extreme right. Remnants of the past were carried over into modernity: pre-capitalist classes struggled against the new capitalist system; aristocrats and the petit bourgeoisie battled first the monarchical nation-state and then its republican incarnation; and, finally, religious institutions fought the Enlightenment legacy. There is nothing pure about progress: even its proponents were often scarred with outworn prejudices. The anti-modern reaction was built into modernity from the very beginning and helped shape its development. Older forms of anti-Semitism thereby became reconfigured in the new liberal context: their supporters were increasingly thrown on the defensive.

The history of anti-Semitism attests to the superiority of Anglo-American over a continental liberalism that was far less individualistic and far more inclined toward an exclusivist, inflexible, and emotive form of nationalism. Its advocates retained a certain romantic commitment to the idea of a homogeneous “people’s state” (*Volksstaat*) and they often aligned themselves with authoritarian state builders like Bismarck. Some like Fichte deified the German *Volk* and considered nationalism as the equivalent of revealed religion. Continental liberals dominated the famous “anti-Semitism controversy” (*Antisemitismusstreit*) of 1879 between Heinrich von Treitschke and Theodor Mommsen in which the former stressed the undue influence of Jews on German society, called upon Jews to become more “German,” and introduced the phrase that would become a popular slogan under the Nazis: “The Jews are our misfortune!” (*Die Juden sind unser Unglueck!*). Such views, contradict the spirit and the premises of constitutional liberalism. Indeed, they attest to the lack of a genuinely liberal tradition in Germany and other nations where anti-Semitism played an important political role.

In the shadow of the holocaust and amid lingering memories of the failed Weimar Republic, which Hitler trampled on the road to power, postwar scholars showed themselves increasingly skeptical about liberal solutions to the “Jewish question”: they looked to Germany in order to ex-

plain the “failure” of emancipation.¹⁹ But, in fact, it proved emblematic only of those nations in which the liberal “emancipation” of Jews was attempted without indigenously rooted liberal institutions and traditions. Emancipation was undertaken gradually in Germany, step by legislative step, with varying degrees of success in a mosaic of mostly reactionary principalities where radically different numbers of Jews lived. Germany was not even a nation in the beginning of the nineteenth century and the lateness of its emergence as a state generated what would remain an assorted set of existential problems associated with its national identity.²⁰ The liberal assumptions embraced by supporters of “emancipation,” in short, cannot be judged by the results more than a century later in what was still notably an “illiberal society.”²¹

Anti-Semitism like racism and hatred of the *other* has always been embedded in a Counter-Enlightenment marked by the anxiety of provincials, the traditionalism of conservatives, and the brutal irrationalism of fascists. Anti-Semitism not only remains “the socialism of fools,” but the philosophy of those who choose to think with their gut. Its claims rest on *faith*: the point is not whether they are true, but whether the anti-Semite *believes* them to be true. The power of bigotry, indeed, has always stood in inverse relation to the support for Enlightenment ideals. That is still the case: recognizing the dignity of the *other* is the line in the sand marking the great divide of political life.

19. Reichmann, *Hostages of Civilisation*, 20ff and passim.

20. Helmuth Plessner, *Die Verspaetete Nation* (Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer, 1959).

21. Fritz Stern, *The Failure of Illiberalism: Essays on the Political Culture of Modern Germany* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1955), 3ff.