(MIS-)UNDERSTANDING ANTI-SEMITISM AND JEWISH IDENTITY

From Bernard Lazare to Hannah Arendt

by

Milen Gotchev Jissov

A thesis submitted to the Department of History
in conformity with the requirements for
the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Queen’s University
Kingston, Ontario, Canada
April, 2009

Copyright © Milen Gotchev Jissov, 2009
Abstract

This study examines the responses of European intellectuals since the 1880s to an increasingly virulent and organized anti-Semitism in Europe, and the ways in which they sought to understand the character and origins of the hatred, and to fathom and work out the problems, terms and possibilities for Jewish identity. Focusing on the French figures Bernard Lazare and Marcel Proust from the time of the Dreyfus Affair and then on the Frankfurt School of social theory and Hannah Arendt from the period around and after the Second World War, the thesis argues that these thinkers created a common historical-psychological discourse on anti-Semitism, which attempted to confront, comprehend and explain the historically critical issues of anti-Semitism and Jewish identity. The study explores the discourse’s fundamental assumptions, insights, and arguments regarding the origins, character, and magnitude of anti-Semitism. It also analyzes its contentions concerning the contradictions, sources, and alternatives for Jewish identity. But, more, it claims that, despite their frequent perceptiveness, these figures’ interpretations of the two concerns proved limited, deficient, even deeply flawed. The thesis seeks to show that its intellectuals’ attempt to understand the twin issues was hence a failure to grasp and interpret them adequately, and to resolve them. It contends further that what impaired the authors’ engagements with anti-Semitism and Jewish selfhood were ideas that were fundamental to their thinking. These intellectual factors, moreover, connected the figures solidly to important historical contexts that they inhabited, thereby implicating the significant settings in the epistemological errors and defeats. These momentous ideas thus operated as both contextualizing and destructive
forces—linking the intellectuals to their home contexts and transforming their understanding of their historic problematic into a misunderstanding.
Acknowledgments

Many individuals provided help towards the completion of this project. Research for it was carried out at Harvard University’s Houghton Library, the Bibliothèque nationale de France and the Bibliothèque de l’Alliance israélite universelle in Paris, France, and the Queen’s University libraries. I am grateful to the staffs at these institutions for their friendly professionalism. I also offer special thanks to Marcel Duran Pujol for guiding me through the unfamiliar book delivery and photocopying procedures at the Bibliothèque nationale. The Interlibrary Loan unit of Queen’s University’s Stauffer Library proved to be a model of efficiency, and an important aid.

Colleagues and friends also made significant contributions. For the many conversations and discussions that helped my ideas crystallize, for pointing me to literature relevant to my research, for their comments on draft parts of the thesis, and for their criticisms and suggestions regarding my work, I am indebted to Ivan Stoiiljkovic, Dr. Silviya Lechner, Dr. Nolan Heie, Dr. Gordon Dueck, Christopher Churchill, and Dr. Tim Conley. For her devoted friendship, I am grateful to Iva Tonchev. I also thank Yvonne Place, for her patient help with the administrative formalities involved in pursuing graduate studies.

My greatest intellectual debts I owe to my professors. Dr. Ian McKay and Dr. Sandra den Otter were inspiring teachers during my first year at Queen’s. Dr. Sonia Riddoch and Dr. Gerald Tulchinsky showed a keen interest in the topic, and shared their knowledge of German history and the history of anti-Semitism. I am especially grateful to Dr. Robert Shenton, for his friendship, intellectual mentorship, and constant
encouragement. Dr. Shenton’s support went far beyond what I could have expected. Above all, I am indebted to my supervisor, Dr. Harold Mah. The intellectual elegance of Dr. Mah’s work has been my main source of inspiration. His sensitive advice influenced and shaped every key argument of the thesis. In a very real sense, his intellectual generosity and dedicated guidance made the completion of this project possible.

Finally, I incurred a debt of an existential order, my greatest one. Along the journey that this study was, I learned a lesson, which I have always known, but which only my doctoral work fully impressed on me: the lesson that I have been blessed with a truly wonderful family. In my brother and sister-in-law Ivo and Hristina Jissovi, in my niece and nephew Niya and Georgi, and in my parents, Nenka and Gotcho Jissovi, I have found only love and utterly unflagging support. Without them, this thesis would have been unthinkable. The dedication only hints at the extent of my indebtedness and gratitude. I hope that it was all worthwhile.
To my parents, Nenka and Gotcho Jissovi
# Table of Contents

Abstract ................................................................................................................................. ii

Acknowledgments ................................................................................................................ iv

Dedication ............................................................................................................................... vi

Table of Contents .................................................................................................................. vii

CHAPTER 1 Introduction ....................................................................................................... 1
  Notes .................................................................................................................................. 32

CHAPTER 2 Literature Review .............................................................................................. 34
  Notes .................................................................................................................................. 49

CHAPTER 3 Bernard Lazare: The Enigma and the Traps of the Jewish Question .......... 51
  Introduction ......................................................................................................................... 51
  Background, Initial Pursuits and Influences ........................................................................ 54
  First Encounters with the Jewish Question: The Trap of Hate ............................................ 62
  Rethinking Hatred: Lazare and the History of Anti-Semitism .............................................. 69
  The Dreyfus Affair, and Its Outcome—Jewish Nationalism .................................................. 85
  Conclusion: Meanings of a Pioneer’s Quest ......................................................................... 103
  Notes .................................................................................................................................. 108

CHAPTER 4 Remembrance, and Lapses Therein: Marcel Proust on the Dreyfus Affair, Anti-Semitism and Jewish Identity .......... 113
  Introduction .......................................................................................................................... 113
  Proust and the Dreyfus Affair: Issues of Representation ...................................................... 117
  The Storm and Its Echoes: The Affair in Remembrance ....................................................... 122
  Proust and Anti-Semitism .................................................................................................. 139
  The Issue of Marcel’s Anti-Semitism .................................................................................. 161
  Proust and the Conundrum of Jewish Identity ..................................................................... 171
  Conclusion: Fateful Patterns ............................................................................................... 178
  Notes .................................................................................................................................. 183
CHAPTER 5 Challenging Diagnoses: The Frankfurt School 
and the Disease of Anti-Semitism .......................... 188 
Introduction ................................................................ 188 
Studies in Prejudice: The Empirical Dissection 
of Anti-Semitism .......................................................... 195 
Dialectic of Enlightenment: Anti-Semitism and 
the Philosophy of History ............................................ 252 
By Way of Conclusion: A Cunning New Context .......... 275 
Notes ........................................................................ 283 

CHAPTER 6 The Perplexities of History: Hannah Arendt 
on Jewish Identity and Anti-Semitism ....................... 292 
Introduction ................................................................ 292 
Arendt’s Conception of Mental Activities: 
Thinking and Judging .................................................. 300 
Deluded Transcendence, Hopeless Embeddedness: 
The Story of Rahel Varnhagen ..................................... 309 
The History of Anti-Semitism Revisited: 
Transcendence as Method .......................................... 321 
The Peril of Embeddedness in Origins and 
Eichmann in Jerusalem .............................................. 346 
Conclusion: Elusive Hopes .......................................... 358 
Notes ........................................................................ 362 

CHAPTER 7 Conclusion: A Retrospect of a Discourse Past........ 365 

Bibliography ................................................................ 403
Chapter 1

Introduction

“Vandals knocked over 23 headstones and 10 short pillars in [Berlin’s] largest Jewish cemetery. Located in the eastern … district of Weissensee, it is also one of Europe’s largest Jewish cemeteries with 115,000 graves and elaborate tombs…. Had it appeared in a European newspaper in the 1930s, such an account would have been unsurprising. As it happens, it does not come from the bygone age of the mass-circulation paper and the radio. It appeared on the Anti-Defamation League’s website. The date of the incident is … April 28, 2008!1

And this is not the only hateful offense the site reports. Berlin was also disgraced five years before, on July 8, 2003: “A Jewish memorial … was vandalized. The vandals apparently threw small paving stones, gouging the surface of a memorial dedicated to the former Levitzowstrasse synagogue, which was used by the Nazis as detention center to deport Jews.”2 Nor does Germany stand alone as a scene of ignominy. Firmly on the list is also France. Not one, but two, incidents occurred in a major urban center on January 20, 2004. First: “[a] parked minibus used to transport children to a Jewish
school in the eastern French city of Strasbourg was burned.” Second: “[p]olice reported that a group of assailants hurled stones at the door of a Strasbourg synagogue.”

Students of history and the politically conscious know that outbursts of anti-Semitism do occur. But the reports of them somehow always surprise us. The news never sounds quite believable. One asks every time how such outrages could be possible now, in the age of cyberspace, in the twenty-first century. And one is always perplexed with how they are possible after—and so many years after—the Holocaust.

But even less credible than usual is the following account. “This past weekend, described by one Jewish leader as ‘a weekend of hate’ aimed at the Jewish community, was capped by the actions of unknown vandals who knocked over 22 gravestones in Bathurst Lawn Memorial Park….” Earlier the same weekend, swastikas were painted on the walls and seven stained glass windows were broken at the Pride of Israel synagogue on Lissom Crescent. Two windows were broken at the Joseph and Faye Tanenbaum Educational Centre on Patricia Avenue. And seven swastikas and profanities were painted on United Jewish Appeal signs and a swastika on a clothing donation box at the B’nai Torah Community Centre.…

What is shocking about this description is that these anti-Semitic incidents occurred, in March 2004, in tolerant Canada. They were, in fact, part of a larger outburst that included the firebombing of the United Talmud Torah elementary school in Montreal, in April 2004. To be sure, the incidents were unrelated to each other, and were not the result of an organized anti-Semitic campaign. But they do show, perhaps even better than the examples from Germany and France, that anti-Semitism is still very much alive, that it is an all too active abscess of political realities all over the globe. How this is, indeed, true was revealed in a journalistic comment on the firebombing of the Jewish school in Montreal. “This stuff happens in France,” the writer remarked. “But Canada?
Evidently the virus has jumped the ocean.”7 Evidently, one might reply, anti-Semitism is normal in France!8

But this article contains a further key moment. It articulates a deeply significant stance on anti-Semitism. “I think of anti-Semitism,” says the author, “as a form of mental deformation, which attaches itself to the Jews because they represent some archetypal Other.” Condemning “race hatred” in this way, she also writes: “I am convinced that no amount of education, or well-meaning lessons in tolerance and multiculturalism, or trips to Holocaust museums, will ever wipe out all this slime. You might as well tell someone suffering from schizophrenia to stop having delusions.”9 Now, most of us in the West today would agree with these statements. We do think of anti-Semitism as a malady, a mental disorder and defect that needs a cure. And we would probably agree that kindly educational methods are inadequate for bigots vandalizing synagogues. But this way of thinking actually shows a grave flaw. We know the disease is all too real; but all we do is label it. We are aware we sorely need cures, and we can prescribe some. But we also know we do not possess one that is effective. We know that the ones we have are hopelessly unhelpful. This is the critical quandary that the article exhibits.10 And it points to what is probably a main reason why, after a general condemnation of ethnic hatred in the West, anti-Semitism is still present in our societies: our fundamental inability to understand it adequately.

This incapacity is all the more surprising, in view of the immense effort expended on comprehending anti-Semitism. Since at least the late nineteenth century, many, often leading intellectuals, as well as scholars in the humanities and social sciences, have repeatedly and persistently tried to understand the nature of anti-
Semitism. But despite their continual attempts, they have in fact failed to offer a conceptually rigorous, sufficiently truthful, adequate explanation of anti-Semitism. Their endeavors have not produced a sound knowledge of it, in the way scientific research has yielded knowledge of, say, the once devastating scourge of smallpox. In this sense, the persistence of anti-Semitism is an outcome of a limited understanding of what it is. And, its continuing presence reflects a failure, indeed a momentous one, on the part of the modern humanities and social sciences, and of modern independent intellectuals.

In the foreword to *Studies in Prejudice*, the most comprehensive analysis of ethnic prejudice until 1950, Max Horkheimer and Samuel Flowerman asserted: “[o]ur aim is not merely to describe prejudice but to explain it in order to help in its eradication.” They saw explanation, social scientific explanation in their case, as a crucial means of combating anti-Semitism. Explanation would produce the scientific knowledge necessary for designing strategies for overcoming the lethal prejudice. But notwithstanding their authors’ confidence in them, the explanations of these social scientists, as well as those of other intellectuals, have proven inadequate in understanding, let alone abolishing, anti-Semitism. The many and sustained modern inquiries into anti-Semitism have often provided complex, conceptually avant-garde dissections of it, but their interpretations have also been, in crucial ways, deeply deficient. Despite the hermeneutic complexity, these analyses’ understanding of anti-Semitism has been in critical respects—continually and recurrently—a misunderstanding. The investigations have thus been intellectual, interpretative, epistemological fiascos, where knowledge failed to adequately grasp its object.
This study is an historical examination of several notable attempts to understand anti-Semitism, and the related issue of Jewish identity. It writes a history of them, charting, delineating, and scrutinizing their main conclusions, views, and arguments. But besides exploring their central claims, it also exposes key faults in them, acute deficiencies that undercut and damaged them. It hence analyzes how these endeavors were breakdowns of knowledge, failures of understanding. The study adopts this critical approach to show some historic ways in which an adequate explanation of anti-Semitism did prove elusive. And it hopes that the critique will enable it to thus bring out what indeed is a probable reason why we have not eradicated anti-Semitism yet.

The study examines, concretely, the responses of European intellectuals since the 1880s to an increasingly virulent and organized mass anti-Semitism in Europe and the ways in which they sought to formulate and reformulate explanations of the character and origins of anti-Semitism and of the problems, terms, and possibilities for Jewish identity. It considers in particular independent and left French and German intellectuals situated at two key moments: the dawn of this new era of mass anti-Semitism in France and its climax and denouement in Germany. Focusing on the works and experiences of the French figures Bernard Lazare and Marcel Proust at the time of the Dreyfus Affair, the study discusses the manner in which they tried to deal with the spread of a new, extremist anti-Semitism in France and to reflect on the sources and conflicts of Jewish identity. It then concentrates on intellectuals’ re-conceptualizations of Jewish identity and anti-Semitism around and after the Second World War in the work of the Frankfurt School of social theory and of Hannah Arendt.
The focus on this particular constellation of intellectuals is not fortuitous. On the contrary, deeply important and compelling factors justify its determination. These justifications are related to the history of European anti-Semitism, to the figures’ places in it, to their biographies, and to the connections among them. And they also arise from the character and the intellectual and historical significance of the authors’ interpretations of anti-Semitism and Jewish identity. Since the history of the hatred in Europe is a key warrant of the study’s specific concentration, an overview of it is in order here. Such an excursus is all the more necessary, as this history constituted the fundamental context that the thinkers inhabited, responded to, and tried to confront, understand, and rectify. This context was, indeed, the very raison d’être of the part of their work and ideas that the study considers.

The history of European anti-Semitism is veritably formidable. It is at least two thousand years long, while anti-Semitism formed a solidly integral part of European culture until the middle of the twentieth century. The hatred exhibited a changing and manifold character over this period, depending on the time and the context. Its most fundamental, most constant, and longest-standing current—going as far back as the beginnings of Christianity—was religious. This strain was, in fact, almost fated to define anti-Jewish hostility in a Christian Europe—whose eyes saw the Jews as deniers of its divine savior, and indeed as his killers. Christian fanaticism was thus the main motive behind the persecutions of the Jews during the Crusades. Those perpetrated by the Inquisition were set off above all by the resolve of a culturally and politically dominant Catholicism to crush its perceived religious foe. During the Reformation, Martin Luther’s animosity
was instigated by what for him was the insufferable refusal of a people to convert to his own, reformed version of Christianity. In the late nineteenth century, Catholic publications were powerful and leading sowers of anti-Semitism in a France torn asunder by the political turmoil of the Dreyfus Affair. And even Adolf Hitler, clearly not a religious anti-Semite, wrote in Mein Kampf: “his [the Jew’s] spirit is inwardly as alien to true Christianity as his nature … was to the great founder of the new doctrine. Of course, the latter made no secret of his attitude towards the Jewish people, and when necessary he even took to the whip to drive from the temple of the Lord this adversary of all humanity…. In return, Christ was nailed to the cross….”

Besides the religious enmity, another main aspect of anti-Semitism, dating back at least to the Middle Ages, was socio-economic. The violent medieval hostility against the Jewish usurer exemplified this trend, as did its modern successor—the vicious hatred of the Jewish banker and capitalist. A third strand was political. Emerging with the decline of Christianity and the rise of democratic politics in the modern period, it became anti-Semitism’s principal current after the eighteenth century, coming over time to dominate all its other elements. Political impulses, for example, motivated the reactionary efforts of individuals and authorities in the German lands to rescind, after Napoleon’s expulsion, the political rights that the French imperial conquest had brought to the Jews. Political attitudes also composed arguments, voiced by the nascent German nationalist movement of the early nineteenth century, opposing and denying the Jews’ inclusion in and belonging to the German nation. And, starting around the 1870s, anti-Semitism was transformed into a fairly permanent fixture of European mass politics. In the years before the First World War, mainstream parties, like Karl Lueger’s Christian
Social Party in Austria, used it as a key part of their platforms, while extremist organizations, like Jules Guerin’s French Anti-Semitic League, mobilized it as their raison d’être. After the War, transformed into an annihilationist ideology, anti-Semitism reached its political climax during the Nazi regime in Germany.

All three of these forces of anti-Semitism continued to operate at least until the end of the Second World War. But in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, the prejudice underwent a momentous mutation. The concept of “race” having developed, after the Enlightenment, into a central force in European thinking about human nature, history and politics, anti-Semitism too was racialized—in the late 1870s. Eventually, its modern, racist element displaced in importance its older religious and socio-economic currents. While the hatred both grew and became increasingly hysterical in the turbulent period after the First World War, its racism also solidified definitively at that time into its defining feature. And precisely this racist, centuries-old, but also historically recent, anti-Semitism, converted into a political ideology and inflamed to unparalleled genocidal extremes by the Nazis, culminated in the Holocaust.\textsuperscript{14}

The study, then, concerns itself with the period of modern, racist and political, anti-Semitism. Reaching its peak during the Nazi regime, this hatred was first articulated as “anti-Semitism” also in Germany. 1879 saw the publication of what Jacob Katz has called “the first anti-Semitic best-seller”—Wilhelm Marr’s pamphlet \textit{The Victory of Judaism over Germanism}.\textsuperscript{15} In it, Marr argued that the “Western world” had succumbed to Jewish domination: “[w]e are so Judaized,” he wrote, “that we are beyond salvation and a brutal anti-Semitic explosion can only postpone the collapse of our Judaized society, but not prevent it.” Marr attributed the Jews’ “success” to their “racial
qualities,” and seemed to passively accept the gentile’s position of inevitable subjugation. “The ‘twilight of the gods’ has begun for us,” he affirmed. “You are the masters; we are the serfs.”16 But only several months after the pamphlet’s appearance, the hypocrisy of Marr’s argument became evident when he started the publication of the periodical *Deutsche Wache* and announced the founding of the *Antijüdischer Verein*, soon to be renamed the *Antisemitenliga*. Marr’s ideas did not differ significantly from those expressed in other anti-Jewish writings in late 1870s Germany; but through his pamphlet and his periodical he “officially” introduced the term “anti-Semitism” onto the European political scene.17

Besides having its modern version identified there first, anti-Semitism also became all too active in Germany during the late nineteenth century. Marr was not its only agent. In 1878, the Protestant pastor Adolf Stoecker founded the Christian Social Workers’ party, which grew into a potent mouthpiece of the hatred and attracted with its help considerable popular support. Moreover, one of the main parties in the Wilhelmine Reich—the Conservatives—endorsed Stoecker openly and gave him its support. In the period between the mid-1890s and the First World War, anti-Semitism declined in the arena of German politics. But as Shulamit Volkov has argued, it stayed alive and strong during those years as “a cultural code.” It had become intertwined with other attitudes and ideas: “extreme nationalism, … colonial and imperial [ambitions], an enthusiasm for war[,] … an advocacy of a pre-industrial moral code,” and “an opposition to democracy,” “liberalism, capitalism, [and] socialism.” In the late 1870s, these and further similar beliefs coalesced into a unified ideological configuration. By the mid-1890s, this formation had spread extensively, and come to undergird and demarcate, an
entire conservative subculture within German society, which thereafter exerted significant social and cultural influence all the way to the War. Thus, although it withered politically after the mid-1890s, anti-Semitism, by fusing into the larger ideological structure and then infusing the retrograde subculture, infected Germany widely and continuously from the time of Marr and Stoecker until the War.\textsuperscript{18}

But while modern anti-Semitism was articulated originally and spread thus in Germany, France became the scene of its first major explosion in Western Europe. The political crisis of the Dreyfus Affair provided the occasion and the setting for a massive rise of the hatred, and for many, intense, and even violent outbursts of it; combined, the upsurge and the flare-ups constituted a dress rehearsal for the later Nazi genocide.\textsuperscript{19} The Affair began in the fall of 1894, when the Jewish officer Captain Alfred Dreyfus was unjustly accused of passing military secrets to Germany. On December 22, he was wrongfully convicted and sentenced to deportation and life imprisonment; in April 1895, he arrived on Devil’s Island to begin serving his sentence. It would take eleven years and the efforts of many people, among whom his brother Mathieu, Emile Zola, and Lazare played vital roles, before his innocence was proclaimed. Those years saw the outbreak of a storm of articles, public debates, and organized campaigns discussing and fighting over Dreyfus’s trial and personal fate. And they also witnessed the eruption of forceful political passions, often ferocious and sometimes even resulting in violence, which challenged the very existence and viability of France’s Third Republic.\textsuperscript{20}

The most fateful of these passions was anti-Semitism. It had been on the rise since the early 1880s, before the beginning of the Affair. The collapse of the Catholic Union Generale Bank in 1882 had intensified prejudices about predatory Jewish
finance. In 1886, Edouard Drumont published the manifesto of nineteenth-century French anti-Semitism, the rabid La France juive. “Antisemitism was merely a slightly shameful tradition of the Ancien Régime,” Maurice Barres noted later, “when, in the spring of 1886, Drumont revived it ... [and] caused a great stir.” Drumont also took part in the establishment of the short-lived National Anti-Semitic League of France in 1889, and, in 1892, he became the editor of the newly founded La Libre parole, the most virulently anti-Semitic newspaper of the time. By 1894, its circulation had reached a formidable 200,000.

On the ascendant since the early 1880s and then inflamed by La France juive, anti-Semitism had become an all too active force in French politics by the early 1890s. Radicalizing these beginnings, the Affair “projected [anti-Semitism] on to the screen of general opinion, giving it an unprecedented national audience and dimension.” The years of the Affair saw the foundation of anti-Semitic organizations, such as Anti-Semite and Nationalist Youth, the National Anti-Jewish Federation, and, most importantly, Guérin’s French Anti-Semitic League, whose membership numbered several thousand and whose Fuehrer was Drumont’s most serious rival for the “unofficial leader[ship] of the anti-Semitic movement.” That movement was complemented by a press of considerable influence, including many national and provincial newspapers with a combined circulation of hundreds of thousands. Among them was La Libre parole’s near equal—the Catholic La Croix, published by the Assumptionists. In 1895, its circulation (not counting its many separate, regional editions) was 170,000. Its success shows that French anti-Semitism at the time of the Affair was not only rampant; it also had a powerful religious current—a sign of tenacious roots reaching back centuries.
From the very beginning, anti-Semitism was the main catalyst of the Affair’s public storm. “It is clear,” notes Stephen Wilson, “... that the explosion of the Dreyfus Case into the Dreyfus Affair ... was largely the responsibility of an organized antisemitic movement and newspaper press.” Having for several years inflamed popular passions, the anti-Semitic campaign reached its violent culmination in 1898. The publication in January of Zola’s “J’accuse,” where the writer declared his support for Dreyfus, accusing army officers of illegalities, served as the immediate spur to violence and, in the course of the following two months, anti-Semitic riots erupted throughout France. Some of them spontaneous, many provoked by agitators, many also prepared by previous anti-Semitic propaganda, the riots numbered more than fifty and sometimes involved hundreds of people. The participants in the bigger riots “gathered in force in important squares and thoroughfares, chanting slogans, throwing stones, attacking Jewish property and sometimes Jewish people, and insulting and resisting the police who tried to disperse them.” Jewish people were injured, while hundreds of rioters were arrested as a result of the racist frenzy. In the spring of 1898, this frenzy threatened to transform the Affair’s struggles and turmoil into a bloody conflict.

The 1898 riots formed the violent peak of French anti-Semitism at the time of the Affair. More generally, the barbaric developments of that period in France—the rise of the prejudice, the establishment of anti-Semitic organizations and of a virulent press, and the 1898 outbursts of violence—constituted a first, ill-omened, culmination of modern anti-Semitism in Western Europe. The hatred subsided in France after the Affair’s end in 1906, and while it smoldered in right-wing circles in the years before the First World War, it did not reach its previous explosive levels. The War then overwhelmed French
politics, overshadowing other political concerns. Anti-Semitism revived in its aftermath, and during the Vichy period, it produced new, much vaster and much more lethal excesses. The regime’s anti-Semitic misdeeds were a different order of enormity, including official discrimination and persecutions, and policies of collaboration with the Nazis that contributed to the deaths of tens of thousands. But the Vichy outrages were influenced to a significant extent by the anti-Jewish crimes of Nazism. Germany, not France, became the scene of a second, incomparably greater, culmination of anti-Semitism in Western Europe, in the middle of the twentieth century. This was the Holocaust—the ultimate climax of modern Western European anti-Semitism, a genocidal catastrophe unprecedented in the history of Europe, and of the West.

While anti-Semitism spread solidly throughout the Wilhelmine Reich before the First World War, the War’s end ushered in the era when it became a leading, even a dominant, force in German politics. The humiliating military defeat and the Versailles Treaty, which many Germans perceived as egregiously unjust, created a noxious complex of intense dissatisfaction, disorientation, and despair. The dire and persistent economic cataclysms of the two postwar decades prolonged and often aggravated these tensions, while also destabilizing radically the political life of the fledgling Weimar Republic. These pernicious developments made up the environment where anti-Semitism, offering a culprit and an explanation for the times’ devastating woes, could grow and thrive. And thrive it indeed did. It pervaded German politics all through the Weimar period. Starting with the end of the War, right-wing circles, organizations, and parties embraced it en masse, and broad strata of society also readily accepted it. Having
thus infected deeply German society and politics by the early 1930s, anti-Semitism was then exploded into its historically unprecedented extremes by the Nazi regime.

Hitler’s seizure of power in January 1933 marked the beginning of modern anti-Semitism’s climax in the Holocaust. Starting from the early 1920s, the Nazi party had by 1933 developed into the hatred’s most powerful exponent in Germany. For the Nazis, anti-Semitism was not a mere platform plank; rather, it belonged to the very heart of a fanatical nationalist-racist ideology that singled out the Jews as Germany’s worst enemy. Once in power, the Nazis unleashed an all-out war on the foe that their ideology had been attacking for years. Their regime was a period of a persistent intensification of anti-Semitic persecutions. Within months of their political takeover, the Nazis started adopting discriminatory legislation. The 1935 Nuremberg Laws then stripped Jews of their citizenship. In 1938 broke out Kristallnacht (“the night of broken glass”): a purposely orchestrated pogrom in which synagogues and Jewish properties were attacked and vandalized throughout Germany. But the sustained anti-Semitic offensive before the Second World War was far exceeded in enormity by what the Nazis perpetrated after the War’s beginning—the Holocaust, the planned total annihilation of European Jewry. Joining into the German invasion of the Soviet Union in 1941, special armed units (Einsatzgruppen) deliberately hunted down and massacred Jewish people in the newly conquered territories to the East. Then from early 1942 the Holocaust escalated even further. In camps established especially for torture and murder, and using industrial killing methods such as mass gassings of inmates, the Nazis set out to finish the obliteration of Europe’s Jews. By the end of the Second World War, the number of the Holocaust’s victims had reached almost six million.30
This, in outline, is the tragic record of modern, racist and political, anti-Semitism in Western Europe. And this too is the hatred that assailed the study’s intellectuals and that they confronted and tried to understand. Originating many centuries before, it entered a new stage in its history in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, and the choice for consideration of the thesis’s period reflects the historical distinctness of the phase. Besides this important correspondence, there are deeply compelling reasons that justify the selection and scrutiny of the particular figures and works. Admittedly, the authors also exhibited disparities that could raise doubts about the focus of the study. The body of the thesis shows thoroughly the primary justifications and the foremost skepticism regarding its concentration, and reveals amply that the warrants outweigh the suspicions categorically. But since these threefold considerations constitute the study’s originary premises, a synopsis of them is imperative here, at the outset.

Difference, to begin with the skepticisms, is a manifest hallmark of the study’s intellectuals. They represent a diverse group, and their writings form a multifaceted mosaic of distinct treatments of anti-Semitism and Jewish identity. The authors, for one, did not belong to the same political tradition; in fact, they differed greatly in their political allegiances and views. After an early fascination with literary symbolism, Bernard Lazare embraced anarchism, which remained his fundamental, and lifelong, political commitment; he later turned to Zionism, becoming even one of its founders, but he retained his solid anarchist beliefs. As Remembrance of Things Past famously shows, Marcel Proust’s supreme faith was literature. He saw himself first and foremost as a writer, and his devotion to art transcended and led him to turn his back on the lowly
realm of politics. The work of the Frankfurt School belonged, self-consciously and emphatically, to the tradition of Marxist social theorizing. Hannah Arendt for her part eschewed conventional political labels, refused to be classified according to them, and consistently declared her independence from them. She is thus best seen as a politically independent intellectual, dedicated to philosophical thinking, but also, and especially, to understanding burning concerns of her age.

Besides showing political disparities, the authors also differed in their fields of work. During his life, Lazare engaged in multiple and various pursuits—including historiography, when he wrote a pioneering history of anti-Semitism; but he was above all a journalist, in fact a well-known name in the French newspaper world. Proust was, of course, a novelist, one of the finest writers in European literature. The Frankfurt School was a collection of philosophers and social scientists, who studied an immense array of subjects in their specialties. And Arendt wrote, at different times, works in highbrow journalism, history, political theory, and philosophy. Unsurprisingly moreover, the figures’ engagements with anti-Semitism and Jewish identity reflected abundantly their intellectual domains. In their vast majority, the interpretations of the two issues came from and belonged to the thinkers’ different disciplines, as they were founded on and deployed the methods and conceptual apparatuses of the distinct areas of inquiry. They correspondingly embodied the fields in their substance and texture, and hence differed in their disciplinary character. A journalist’s history of anti-Semitism thus stands next to a literary treatment of the twin concerns, a psychological and sociological analysis of the hatred by the Frankfurt School, and then another history of anti-Semitism, now informed by concepts derived from classical Greek thought, by Arendt. The professional
differences among the intellectuals were in this manner mirrored in their attempts to understand their problematic.

Adding even to these diversities, the thinkers came to espouse individual, characteristic stances, distinctive intellectual perspectives. For Lazare, anarchism became a fundamental prism filtering his perception of events and issues. Proust apotheosized literary art as the highest vantage point for observing the world. The Frankfurt School created an avant-garde neo-Marxist theoretical approach, based also on empirical social science, which it called “Critical Theory” and which it employed in its wide-ranging interpretations of society, economics, politics, history, and human beings. Arendt’s inquiries into these areas articulated her own conceptions of the human mind and of history, which accordingly became defining perspectives in her work. The figures’ attempts to understand anti-Semitism and Jewish identity were connected to, and even bore the distinct stamps of, their distinguishing stances. As a rule, the characteristic standpoints shaped and determined the character of the authors’ engagements with the hatred and Jewish selfhood, as these were based firmly on, and were indeed often expressly elaborated from, the intellectual perspectives. Anarchism in the case of Lazare, the apotheosis of literature in Proust, Critical Theory, and then Arendt’s conceptualizations of the mind and of history were linked to, characterized, and defined their differing readings of anti-Semitism and Jewish identity. The thinkers’ interpretations of the twofold problematic thus exhibited considerable diversity of individual perspective.

But this strong variation notwithstanding, there are several critical factors that justify the selection and scrutiny of the study’s figures, works, and ideas. Outweighing
by far the thinkers’ multiple diversities, these justifications demand an examination of
the particular intellectuals and their particular attempts to confront, understand, and
untangle their problematic.

Crucial grounds for the specific focus are the overall contours of anti-Semitism’s
history in Western Europe since the 1870s. The hatred traced a line that, as we saw,
exhibited two discrete high points—its rise and spillover in Dreyfus-Affair France and
its genocidal climax in Germany several decades later. The study’s *dramatis personae*
are situated at precisely these two pivotal junctures. Their location at the crises
constitutes a central similarity they share. But the two positions of the figures’ writings
on the trajectory of modern Western European anti-Semitism have a further strategic
implication. They enable a comparison between the *fin-de-siècle* works and those at the
second locus, which can explore critical continuities and changes in the authors’ views
on anti-Semitism. Probing such tendencies is an important objective of the study.

And the justifying correlations among the intellectuals go beyond their historical
locations. The authors’ works on anti-Semitism and Jewish identity were firsthand
attempts, direct responses to developments. As such, they possess key characteristics:
immediacy of reaction and a heightened authenticity and accuracy in representing their
contemporary historical reality and conveying the magnitude of its events. These are
basic elements the writings share; they are qualities that connect and unify them. But
what relates them even more closely is that they were first, path-breaking endeavors to
confront and comprehend their historic problematic in a sustained and rigorous manner.
All of the figures were pioneers, even mavericks. Their works were founding ones—they
broke novel ground, laid a foundation, and indeed helped develop new areas of
intellectual and academic inquiry. All of the authors illustrate this vital role. Lazare’s history of anti-Semitism was a ground-breaking study, whose analytical soundness enabled it to become over time an established text in the historiography of its subject. In the majestic *Remembrance*, Proust offered an incisive, extensive, and elaborate treatment of anti-Semitism and Jewish identity, utterly unusual and exceptional in these respects in *fin-de-siècle* European literature. In a massive scholarly project in the 1940s, the Frankfurt School produced a theoretically complex and unprecedentedly comprehensive analysis of ethnic prejudice—in the series *Studies in Prejudice*, a monumental milestone in the modern social sciences. And Arendt was among the first European intellectuals to try to explain what many of them then considered to be the incompressible evil of Nazism. She forged a set of concepts designed expressly to tackle the daunting interpretative task. The result of her struggles was *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, a hermeneutic feat and now a classic examination of the Nazi regime. These particular works are thus tremendously important in their own right. And the authors’ engagements with anti-Semitism and Jewish identity in general—bringing forth these and other vital writings—are momentous landmarks in the intellectual history of modern Europe. As well as their being immediate and pioneering responses to critical events, their very intellectual and historical significance constitutes a forcefully compelling reason for their scrutiny.

Even these aspects, similarities and connections do not exhaust what justifies the examination of these particular figures. Unifying them solidly, and thus further warranting their study, are key aspects of their engagements with anti-Semitism and Jewish identity. Despite their disciplinary diversity, the explorations of the two issues in
fact showed a remarkable similarity of character. The authors—as a rule—considered anti-Semitism and Jewish selfhood as historical, or psychological, or historical and psychological problems, broadly defined. And their attempts to understand the twin concerns reflected this uniformity of their approaches. In an overwhelming proportion, their interpretations of the twofold problematic were either historical, or psychological, or historical-psychological in nature. Lazare produced a history of anti-Semitism, while in it he also dwelled on the hatred’s inner sources. Remembrance was a meticulous portrayal of France at the fin-de-siècle. In it Proust studied the hatred’s vicissitudes at this historical moment, looking also at psychological factors involved in forging a Jewish self, but especially dissecting the psychology of anti-Semitism. One volume of the Frankfurt School’s Studies in Prejudice was Paul Massing’s Rehearsal for Destruction, now a classic in the historiography of German anti-Semitism. The remaining four books all examined the psychology of ethnic prejudice, constituting the most extensive analysis of its kind until then. Finally, Arendt interpreted Jewish identity in an historical mode, writing a history of its contradictions and potential viable forms in her biography of the Jewish salon hostess Rahel Varnhagen. She then re-thought and re-wrote the history of anti-Semitism in Origins. And starting with the latter and continuing in the well-known Eichmann in Jerusalem, she carried on the psychological current of her predecessors’ work by investigating the mental traits of Nazis and Nazi supporters.

Also legitimizing the study is a crucial dimension of the figures’ distinctive intellectual perspectives. These individual stances did set the thinkers apart. And they did differentiate the authors’ engagements with anti-Semitism and Jewish identity, as they were related to, characterized, and imprinted themselves on the interpretations of
the two issues. But though being sources of differences, the perspectives’ links to and substantial marks in the investigations of anti-Semitism and Jewish selfhood in fact justify further the choice and examination of the particular figures and works. The perspectival connections and traces permit an assessment of the stances’ epistemological role, as it were, in grappling with the twofold problematic. Their linkages to and imprints in the analyses of the hatred and Jewish identity allow an appraisal of the ways in which the perspectives were interpretatively enabling or disabling—of how they facilitated or obstructed the understanding of the twin concerns. As one of its main tasks, the study pursues exactly such an evaluation of the thinkers’ work on the two problems. While primarily assessing the work itself, this exploration also sheds light on the historical role and significance of the individual stances. The latter, moreover, exemplified vital currents in the history of European ideas: anarchism, modern literary art, and Marxism and empirical social science; in developing her conceptions of the mind and of history, Arendt deployed concepts drawn from Western philosophy and ancient Greek historiography. The critical evaluation of the perspectives’ interpretative performance has, therefore, important implications for the meaning and the value of these grander intellectual forces.

The intellectual biographies of the authors reinforce still further the justifications for the study. Of critical relevance here is the status, as it were, of their confrontations with anti-Semitism and Jewish identity. The thinkers’ endeavors to understand the problematic are distinguished by their magnitude. Their engagements were central and substantial parts, veritable pivots of their intellectual careers. They were immensely persistent and sustained, extensive and comprehensive in scope, and they became
overriding, even lifelong, intellectual commitments. Starting from the early 1890s, first anti-Semitism and later Jewish identity became primary—often the exclusive—preoccupations of Lazare, and remained such until his death in 1903. The two problems constituted a central concern of Proust, and in Remembrance he provided an unusually thorough exploration of it. Lasting several years and involving hundreds of scholars and research subjects, the examination of prejudice that was published as the Frankfurt School’s Studies was the most massive project of its kind until then. Augmenting even that monumental endeavor, the School’s two leading figures, Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno, elaborated a rigorous speculative inquiry into anti-Semitism, in what is a masterpiece of twentieth-century European philosophy—their Dialectic of Enlightenment. Arendt’s writings, finally, spanned a wide range, including the historical study On Revolution, the political theory treatise The Human Condition, and the philosophical inquiry The Life of the Mind. But beginning with her early biography of Varnhagen, passing through Origins, and then leading to Eichmann in Jerusalem, anti-Semitism and Jewish identity emerged as one of her most central and enduring intellectual concerns. Even her last work, The Life of the Mind, was prompted directly by her investigation of the Eichmann trial.

Now, the study’s intellectuals were not alone in attempting to understand anti-Semitism and Jewish identity. Other figures of the period also considered the issues. Stressing its function of displacing attention away from real socio-economic problems and towards an illusory Jewish culprit, the Austrian socialist Ferdinand Kronawetter formulated the well-known definition of anti-Semitism as being “the socialism of the fools.”31 The founder of psychoanalysis, Sigmund Freud, also examined the hatred,
elaborating, for example, several explanations of it in his *Moses and Monotheism.*

Then a major French philosopher, Jean-Paul Sartre, provided what is probably the most famous inquiry into anti-Semitism and Jewish selfhood—*Anti-Semite and Jew.* But these and other thinkers’ engagements with the concerns were not as sustained, comprehensive, or fundamental to their careers as those of our authors. Even Sartre’s exploration was, above all, a succinct, clarion, onetime statement prompted by the Nazi crimes; it was not a grand examination, a pursuit lasting years, or a solidly central aspect of his entire corpus. For the intellectuals selected here, the problematic acquired precisely a centrality that very much defined their lives’ work. This magnitude is a crucial similarity they share. And together, the import and the parallel provide a powerful support for the study.

As a final sanction for their scrutiny, the figures showed important intellectual interconnections. Lazare was, again, a pioneer, even among our cast. Chronologically, his work on anti-Semitism and Jewish identity preceded that of the others; and it also played a decisive role among the sum of writings the study considers. Crucial here is its character. We noted that Lazare examined anti-Semitism’s history, while also probing in his inquiry its psychology. By exploring the hatred in historical and psychological modes, he defined the general terms of the subsequent confrontations with anti-Semitism and Jewish selfhood. His engagement with the hatred and Jewish identity thus anticipated those that followed. After him, the other thinkers took up in their own ways one or both of the modes of analysis, *ex post facto* and indirectly linking their endeavors to his. And of course, by pursuing these explanatory currents, they forged the common,
twofold—historical and psychological—character of their work, establishing its most fundamental mutual connections.

Situated at the same historical juncture as Lazare, Proust was not influenced in his outlook by the anarchist journalist. Nor was his work linked in appreciable ways to Lazare’s. But it did show a key presence in that of the Frankfurt School, in Studies in Prejudice. Reflecting the School’s Marxist orientation, the series was comprised of Massing’s history of anti-Semitism, and the four studies of the psychology of ethnic prejudice, which employed empirical social scientific research and theoretical concepts derived mostly from Freudian psychoanalysis and ego psychology. Its main and most extensive volume was The Authoritarian Personality. The work of a team of scholars and based on information from more than two thousand research subjects, it is one of the most far-reaching attempts to create a psychological profile of the ethnically prejudiced individual. Veritably colossal, it is a foundational text in the social sciences. Two of its early, severe critics argued that its authors had not made sufficiently extensive use of the existing sociological scholarship on prejudice. “The lack of references [to this literature],” wrote the critics, “seems hardly in keeping with a thousand-page study to which is attached a 121-item bibliography, and in our view a great deal is missed thereby.”

Surprisingly, one of the entries in the short bibliography is Remembrance. Though discreet, the novel’s bibliographical presence is critical. It shows that Proust’s exploration of psychological dimensions of anti-Semitism and Jewish identity must have served as a helpful intellectual foundation for the dissection of the prejudiced person. What is certain is that, even while vitally relevant sociological work was being...
neglected, the literary masterpiece formed an integral part of the research that produced the social scientific *The Authoritarian Personality*.

But the strongest intellectual interconnections appeared in Arendt. Reading them in a rigorous and sustained manner, she engaged particularly with Lazare and Proust. She discovered Lazare’s writings through her involvement with Zionist circles early in her career, and they grew into a serious intellectual interest. She came to admire them in the 1930s, and in the 1940s became the first to draw scholarly attention to Lazare by editing a collection of them and according him a place in what she called the “hidden tradition” of “Jewish [intellectuals] … [who] evolve[d] the concept of the pariah as a human type.”36 Proust, conversely, became a central source of insight for *The Origins of Totalitarianism*. Producing one of the most incisive interpretations of *Remembrance*, Arendt examined critically and employed his scrutiny of anti-Semitism and Jewish identity in her analysis of the hatred’s history in modern Europe. In this way, his novel became a crucial building block of what is, arguably, Arendt’s *magnum opus*. Lazare’s and Proust’s work thus constituted a vital force in Arendt’s own, serving as a key source of influence, reflection, and ideas. In this sense, it developed deep connections with Arendt’s, and ones also powerfully drawing together the discussion of anti-Semitism and Jewish selfhood generated by the study’s collection of figures.

These factors constitute the main justifications for the study. Taking them into consideration, it argues that its intellectuals created what I call a common historical-psychological discourse on anti-Semitism. The authors, admittedly, did not set out—consciously or deliberately—to construct a collective, uniform, internally consistent discursive formation expressly intended to address the most aberrant development in
modern European history. They had neither the intention nor the consciousness of participating in a joint interpretative enterprise; they often explored disparate themes, sometimes followed incompatible lines of argument, and even abandoned once-held beliefs for their complete contraries. But they did study—and indeed learn from—each other’s writings. And anti-Semitism was the central problem of the part of their work examined here. Their discourse is thus best seen as an uneven web of claims, arguments, and contentions on the subject, forming a shared discussion that spanned almost a century, while their works constituted separate, autonomous sources of the discourse. And because their writings were in fact responses to contemporary events, this discourse can be described as being repeatedly ignited by historical developments.

Founded on these conceptual considerations, the study argues that these French and German intellectuals, reading each other’s work and increasingly aware of the dangers of organized anti-Semitism, sought to come to terms with a radicalizing anti-Semitism. At its basic, the study seeks to reveal the fundamental assumptions, insights and arguments of their emergent historical-psychological discourse on anti-Semitism. But, more, it tries to show how, despite their best intentions and frequent perceptiveness, these figures’ interpretations of anti-Semitism proved deficient in understanding the historical, political, social and psychological character of anti-Semitism and inadequate in recommending viable practical solutions to the problem of ethnic hatred.

A key thread of the discourse on anti-Semitism was the theme of Jewish identity. Accordingly, the study considers the treatment of Jewish selfhood in the historical-psychological discussion of anti-Semitism. It explores how its intellectuals, endeavoring to understand the hatred, reflected also on the contradictions and conflicts of Jewish
identity, considered the possibilities for forging a viable form of it, and tried to articulate its potential terms. On the one hand, the study examines their arguments concerning the contradictions, terms, and possibilities for Jewish selfhood. On the other, it tries to show the limitations of their analyses and the ways in which the identities they envisioned as viable were actually faulty. The study thus suggests that these intellectuals proved incapable of confronting anti-Semitism adequately and of proposing a functional conception of Jewish identity. It seeks to show how their understanding of these two historically critical issues was in crucial ways also a misunderstanding—an epistemological failure to unravel their momentous problematic.

Deepening its critique, the study examines the factors that degraded the figures’ understanding of anti-Semitism and Jewish identity into a misunderstanding. Its analysis in fact exposes unexpected impairing forces. Powerful among them was, surprisingly, the hatred itself. The study’s intellectuals tried to confront, comprehend, and explain their two problems in a serious manner and to evolve well thought-out positions on them. But paradoxically, their primary object of knowledge infiltrated and thereby blighted their confrontations with their historic subjects. The evil they struggled with infected in precisely this way the thinkers situated at the first historical moment—Lazare and Proust. And then a set of other agents damaged the work of all the authors. The study proposes that the limitations of their conceptualizations of the two issues stemmed, to a significant extent, from key ideas of their distinctive intellectual perspectives: anarchism, modern literary art, Critical Theory, and the conceptions of the mind and of history. It turns out that these perspectives could provide only limited help in confronting modern European anti-Semitism and the conundrums of Jewish selfhood.
Indeed, their adoption actually obstructed, in a deeply cunning manner, the understanding of the two questions. This adoption turned the intellectuals in decisive ways into poor interpreters of the twofold problematic. While their confrontations with it constituted an attempt to offer new insights, to provide positive solutions, to overcome supremely critical dilemmas and crises in the historical contexts in which they lived, central elements of their perspectives stymied their efforts. Besides anti-Semitism, these perspectival aspects emerge as the second kind of harmful agents, thwarting the figures’ historic efforts to understand anti-Semitism and Jewish identity.

The study uncovers, further, what is a momentous side of all of the damaging factors. It argues that precisely these forces linked the authors solidly to significant historical contexts that they inhabited. Anti-Semitism permeated the politics, society, and culture of Europe around the turn of the century, producing in France an organized movement and even exploding into violent excesses. Incorporating it into themselves, the views of Lazare and Proust thus exemplified the environment of the European fin-de-siècle. The study, furthermore, claims that the particular damaging agents arising from their distinctive perspectives also abundantly reflected important contexts the figures occupied. Anarchism was a widespread trend in Lazare’s France; he adopted it as his stance, coming to embody the doctrine’s considerable contemporary presence. Proust then emerges as a representative of modern European literature, sharing one of its central precepts—the view of art as the utterly highest pursuit. The Frankfurt School, in turn, belonged firmly to two foremost Western intellectual currents, deeply powerful around the middle of the twentieth century—Marxism and empirical social science. It deliberately founded itself on them, embraced them, and re-articulated them into...
fundamental principles of Critical Theory. These basic tenets thus reflected directly the Theory’s two founding traditions. Lastly, Arendt deployed concepts from ancient Greek historiography to formulate her understanding of history, and then used ones from continental philosophy to develop a full-blown conception of the human mind. Her work was in this manner anchored firmly in two crucial elements of the European tradition of historiography and philosophy, turning her into this tradition’s unmistakable exemplar. At the same time, as she earned a doctorate in philosophy, the conceptual connections to the classical heritage and to continental philosophy reflected her formal training, also making her a representative of the German academia at the middle of the twentieth century. And as the two moments of Western thought from which she drew concepts, and indeed the tradition as a whole, were very much alive in Europe’s academic and intellectual circles at that time, Arendt’s links to them transformed her work into a reflection of this select and important milieu of thinkers and ideas.

The study thus proposes that the factors that impaired, often very badly and even hopelessly, the intellectuals’ engagements with anti-Semitism and Jewish identity played a role of enormous import in their work. Anarchism with Lazare, Proust’s apotheosis of literary art, the tenets of Critical Theory embodying Marxism and empirical social science, and Arendt’s views on the mind and on history were fundamental conceptions for the figures. They embraced them firmly, actually adopted them as foundational elements of their thinking. Their writings on anti-Semitism and Jewish selfhood were connected to these ideas; as a rule, the thinkers in fact deployed them in their confrontations with the dual problematic. But together with anti-Semitism, the conceptions also linked the intellectuals to the key historical contexts they inhabited.
Together, all of these factors reflected solidly the significant settings, and connected soundly the authors’ interpretations of the twin problems to the contexts. But exactly these particular, basic and vital, and, as it were, contextualizing, forces obstructed the figures’ attempts to interpret their twofold concerns. Precisely they confounded critically the understanding of the two issues—turned it into a misunderstanding.

Tracing in this fashion its intellectuals’ ties to the contexts they inhabited, the study advances a decisively historical approach. Its dramatis personae were powerful, original, and prominent thinkers. Their writings were significant, pivotal phenomena in the intellectual history of Europe, and of the West, since the mid-nineteenth century. Because of their magnitude, the works are often approached—by scholars and non-academics alike—on the assumption that they formulated or discovered trans-historically valid truth. The expectation is that they somehow contain conclusive answers, or insights that are universally, even eternally, true. Abandoning such absolutistic premises, this study instead looks at how the historical contexts they participated in influenced the figures and tended to turn them into their products. Following its historical direction, the study locates the thinkers in these contexts by examining their links to them. It claims that exactly the ideas that forged these connections limited the attempts to understand anti-Semitism and Jewish identity. Ideas and principles characterizing the contexts were reflected in the authors’ work, and then, refracted through the prism of their thinking, corrupted, perplexed, and defeated their interpretations of anti-Semitism and Jewish selfhood. Rather than being discoverers of trans-historically valid truths, the figures hence emerge very much as children of their home contexts. And precisely forces that molded them this way hampered their understanding of the two issues. To an appreciable
extent, their particular contexts were thus involved in their interpretative failures. They contributed—negatively—to transforming the intellectuals’ historic attempts to understand their truly momentous problematic into a—perhaps equally historic—misunderstanding.37
Notes

8 For assessments of recent anti-Semitism, see the collection David I. Kertzer, ed., Old Demons, New Debates: Anti-Semitism in the West (Teaneck: Holmes & Meier, 2005).
10 Ibid.
12 Adolf Hitler, Mein Kampf, trans., Ralph Manheim (London: Hutchinson, 1974), 278.
14 For a history of racism and (racist) anti-Semitism in modern Europe, see George L. Mosse, Toward the Final Solution: A History of European Racism (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1985).
15 Katz, From Prejudice to Destruction, 260.
17 Katz, From Prejudice to Destruction, 261.
19 I thank Dr. Harold Mah for helping me to see the Dreyfus Affair as foreshadowing the subsequent developments in Nazi Germany.
22 Quoted in Ibid.
23 Wilson, Ideology and Experience, 9, 171-174, 205-208.
24 Ibid., 9, 170-174, 179, 188, 197, 205-208.
25 Ibid., 205-206.
26 For a discussion of anti-Semitism among Catholics at the time of the Affair, see Ibid., 509-583.
27 Ibid., 4.
29 Wilson, Ideology and Experience, 110, 119.

The history of the Holocaust has been the subject of scholarly interest and discussion for several decades. One prominent debate in the resultant historiography is that between the co-called “intentionalist” and “functionalist” historians, centered on the issue of the Holocaust’s intentionality and inexorability. For “intentionalists,” the Holocaust was the direct product of a premeditated and consistently pursued intention on the part of the Nazis—and especially Hitler—to destroy Europe’s Jews; originally conceived before 1933, this intent was persistently implemented after the outbreak of the Second World War, resulting in the unprecedented genocide. In contrast, “functionalists” believe that, to a significant extent, the Holocaust grew—contingently and gradually in the course of the Nazis’ regime—out of manifold specific decisions and policies initiated in multiple political contexts and bureaucratic loci within the machinery of Nazi rule. For a pithy analysis of the two opposing perspectives, see Michael R. Marrus, *The Holocaust in History* (Toronto: Lester & Orpen Dennys, 1987), 31-54. Most scholars today would agree that contingent factors did play an important role in the Holocaust. But the debate aside, the Nazis’ anti-Semitic policies after 1933 traced a general trajectory of an unmistakable escalation of persecutions. My overview of Nazi anti-Semitism is not meant to suggest that Hitler’s seizure of power led inexorably to the Holocaust. It tries above all to outline precisely the overall contours of the Nazis’ attempt to annihilate European Jewry.

31 The phrase, as Peter Pulzer points out, is “often attributed to [August] Bebel,” but it was “probably” formulated by Kronawetter. P. G. J. Pulzer, *The Rise of Political Anti-Semitism in Germany and Austria* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1964), 269.


37 I thank Dr. Harold Mah for showing me the solidly historical approach of the study, and also that the intellectuals’ being products of the contexts they inhabited was what limited their understanding of anti-Semitism and Jewish identity in these ways.
Chapter 2

Literature Review

There are of course many, often profound, studies of European intellectuals since the mid-nineteenth century, and of the intellectual and cultural scene they inhabited and helped construct. Well-known classics, for example, are H. Stuart Hughes’s *Consciousness and Society*, Peter Gay’s *Weimar Culture*, and Robert Wohl’s *The Generation of 1914*; more recent assessments of equal caliber include Richard Sonn’s *Anarchism and Cultural Politics in Fin-de-Siècle France*, Steven Aschheim’s *The Nietzsche Legacy in Germany, 1890-1990*, Harold Mah’s *Enlightenment Phantasies*, and the collections *Intellectuals in Politics* and *Intellectuals in Twentieth-Century France*.¹

These and similar other works provide sensitive and rigorous examinations of the endeavors, ideas, and historical role of Europe’s leading thinkers, and of its culture and intellectual life, in this period. But an inquiry focused especially on the intellectuals, and the set of historic ideas, scrutinized here, has not been written. In this sense, this study does not compete or argue with other books on the same topic.
One significant, related historiography is that of anti-Semitism. The decades since the Second World War and the Holocaust saw an explosion of interest and research into the history of anti-Semitism on both sides of the Atlantic, which produced a vast and comprehensive literature. This study relies on some of its principal arguments and assumptions. To assess critically the ideas of Lazare, and indirectly those of Arendt, it employs in particular its notion of an historical nexus between earlier religious hatred and the rise of murderous twentieth-century anti-Semitism. This idea is central in general histories of anti-Semitism, such as Jacob Katz’s *From Prejudice to Destruction: Anti-Semitism, 1700-1933*, and Léon Poliakov’s four-volume classic *The History of Anti-Semitism.* It also figures in debates about the uniqueness of the Nazi atrocities; in *The Destruction of the European Jews*, Raul Hilberg, while insisting that the organization of the Nazi extermination camps was an unprecedented event, emphasized the continuities between Christian anti-Jewish hatred and Nazi anti-Semitism. Scholars like Ismar Schorsch have criticized this emphasis, arguing that “[t]o make Christian [anti-Semitism] the root cause [of Nazi anti-Semitism] is to render the Final Solution inexplicable, for Christianity never called for the extermination of the Jews.” But, even if not completely applicable to the history of German anti-Semitism, the model is still relevant for other contexts. In his *Antisemitism in Modern France*, for example, Robert Byrnes argued that the Catholic establishment in France was an important seedbed of anti-Jewish prejudices before the Dreyfus Affair. “The main current of [anti-Semitism],” wrote Byrnes, “just prior to [the mid-1880s] was distinctly conservative and Catholic.”

These are the main principles from the literature on anti-Semitism that the study considers and takes up. But while important, its ties to this historiography are mostly
tangential. Much closer are those with another kind of work—that focused specifically on the lives, endeavors, writings, and ideas of its individual figures. This is the scholarship, also considerable, that the study engages with most continually and directly.

A familiar name in fin-de-siècle French journalism and public life, Lazare was largely forgotten by both contemporaries and historians not long after his death. A rare exception was, in fact, Arendt. As we noted, she was the first to draw scholarly attention to him in the 1940s. But the oblivion was dissipated definitively only in the late 1970s, with the appearance of Nelly Wilson’s biography Bernard-Lazare: Antisemitism and the Problem of Jewish Identity in Late Nineteenth-Century France. The product of a pioneering, scrupulous excavation of primary sources—Lazare’s personal papers, correspondence, and many publications—the book remains the centerpiece in Lazare scholarship. Emphasizing his sustained quest for an adequate embrace of his Jewish origins and for a meaningful Jewish identity, Wilson reconstructed the defining trajectory of her protagonist’s life: that of an arduous journey from youthful literary aspirations, anarchism, a belief in Jewish assimilation, and even anti-Semitic convictions, through a deep disillusionment produced by the anti-Semitic frenzies of the Dreyfus Affair, to a final, resounding articulation of an idiosyncratic, left Zionism—what Lazare himself preferred to call “Jewish nationalism.” Delineated already by Wilson, this same path was also the trajectory traced and elaborated by two further biographies: Jean-Denis Bredin’s 1992 Bernard Lazare: De l’anarchiste au prophète, and Philippe Oriol’s 2003 Bernard Lazare. Bredin’s book, essentially, retold the life story Wilson had constructed, supplementing—rather than revising—her fundamental narrative. For its part, Oriol’s study amplified various aspects of Lazare’s life that
Wilson and Bredin had left undissected, but its author likewise adhered to his predecessors’ main arguments, complementing their, now composite, biographical account.\(^6\)

Wilson’s, Bredin’s, and Oriol’s studies are the three principal works on Lazare. Together, they amount to a comprehensive biography of their protagonist. But while analytically rigorous, they do not, either separately or combined, adopt a solidly critical, intensely exacting approach to his endeavors. They bring out the essential journey of his life and work—from his manifold early quests to an eventual, distinctive Zionism—without probing too deeply crucial elements of disorder—of confusion, great error, and even grave failure—also belonging to Lazare’s path.\(^7\)

This thesis also adopts a biographical framework, but its aim is thereby to outline the central shifts in Lazare’s outlook, not to narrate the story of his life. It examines specifically and critically his confrontation with anti-Semitism and Jewish identity. It concentrates precisely on the messy components of these issues for Lazare, on those aspects of his engagement with them that are incoherent, misguided, downright wrong.

In a second key departure from previous studies, the thesis re-appraises the historical meaning of Lazare’s quests. While analyzing his texts and ideas on their own, it locates them within a long-term discourse on anti-Semitism, by conceiving them as a part of it and indicating critical relationships between them and those of its other figures. It reveals, for example, their vital role in the longer discursive enterprise: that of constituting its beginning, the founding moment that moreover defined its twofold (historical and psychological) character. And as it situates Lazare’s work in the larger discourse, the study emphasizes its significance and instates it centrally within the
history of European intellectuals since the mid-nineteenth century, by showing how it produced important echoes transcending its author’s biography and historical context.

Unlike Lazare, Proust was never the victim of oblivion. His monumental novel *Remembrance of Things Past* has been celebrated as a literary phenomenon since its appearance. The publication of its first volumes in the 1910s brought Proust the reward very few writers enjoy in their lifetime: a wide readership and a considerable fame. He was recognized as a foremost man of letters in France, and *Remembrance* itself as a landmark in French literature. Accordingly, the novel has been the object of an enduring, intense, and prolific interest on the part of scholars, from a myriad of disciplines. It has, indeed, given rise to a veritable academic industry aimed at what seems to be the impossible task of fathoming the nature of Proust’s genius and the meaning of his achievement.

In this enterprise there is a notable kind of relatively general—literary critical or more philosophical—studies, focused chiefly on *Remembrance*. Their authors, often leading intellectuals in their own right, try above all to understand what they take to be the novel’s central meaning. Foremost examples include Samuel Beckett’s *Proust*, Gilles Deleuze’s *Proust and Signs*, and Georges Poulet’s *Proustian Space*. These and other similar inquiries are probably the most profound, interpretatively complex, and rigorously theoretical works in Proust scholarship, and the ones most illuminating in unraveling the enigma that Proust’s novel is.⁸ This study accordingly takes them into account, using in particular Poulet’s strongly theoretical analysis, to determine *Remembrance*’s fundamental character and representational objectives. This broad determination outlines the basic framework of its own reading of the novel.
But while it is thus related to such powerful interpretations, the study engages more closely with more conventional scholarship. It takes as its point of departure George Painter’s well-known description of Remembrance as a “creative autobiography,” in his classic biography of Proust.9 Noting that, while justified, Painter’s statement decreases the novel’s potential meanings, it argues—using Poulet—that Proust’s work has a much greater, and far more historical, scope, one encompassing fully the history of France in the writer’s times. And as the Dreyfus Affair and the rise of anti-Semitism came to define France’s political life in the 1890s, so Remembrance echoes recurrently, and indeed examines persistently, both issues, as well as the related one of Jewish identity. Precisely these echoes and this exploration is what the study then goes on to inspect.

Previous scholarship (other than Poulet’s) has already noticed Remembrance’s historical orientation. Richard Kopp’s Marcel Proust as a Social Critic and Michael Sprinker’s more recent History and Ideology in Proust thus saw French society as an object of interest and even study for Proust in his novel.10 The work of two other scholars, Stephen Wilson and Seth Wolitz, likewise captured this focus, while also considering more intensely Proust’s engagement with anti-Semitism. Wilson is probably better known as a student of anti-Semitism, for his encyclopedic Ideology and Experience: Antisemitism in France at the Time of the Dreyfus Affair.11 But in a notable article, he drew attention to Proust’s analysis of the socio-economic structure of French society, his portrayal of the Dreyfus Affair, and his treatment of anti-Semitism. Wilson tried to outline what he considered to be Proust’s “ahistorical” conceptualization of anti-Semitism, claiming that “on the whole [Proust] seems to regard [anti-Semitism] as
something perennial, always latent, occasionally erupting.” 12 In his *The Proustian Community*, Wolitz for his part examined the representation of Jewish and anti-Semitic characters in *Remembrance*, concluding that anti-Semitism was “used deftly” by Proust as a “technique of character delineation.” 13 More crucially, Wolitz revealed that Proust “offered several different views on the subject [of anti-Semitism].” 14

This scholarship serves as a vital basis for the study. It is especially indebted to Wolitz’s work, particularly for noticing the multiplicity of Proust’s ideas on anti-Semitism. 15 But aiming to further these writings, it diverges markedly from them as well. As in the case of Lazare, it looks at Proust more critically, analyzing his interpretation of anti-Semitism and Jewish identity, but also exposing fatal cracks and flaws in it. But to thus critique the writer, the study brings up the work of another scholar, Albert Sonnenfeld. In two audacious articles, Sonnenfeld considered a supremely difficult issue—of whether Proust was, in fact, an anti-Semite. And, further, he suggested that, if not outright anti-Semitism, at least a distancing from Jewishness on the writer’s part was indeed at work in *Remembrance*. 16 Taking its cue from Sonnenfeld’s work, this study revisits its grim problematic. Approaching the latter from a new perspective, one more cogent historically, it concludes that an intermittent anti-Semitism was a severe lapse of the novel.

Deficiencies of this dire kind did not afflict the work of the intellectuals after Proust. The Frankfurt School and Arendt could not even think of toying with anti-Semitism, like Proust, let alone express it, like the young Lazare. For them, it became a deadly plague, an historic menace allowing only the most somber intellectual approach. Their engagements with anti-Semitism and Jewish identity too showed dubious aspects;
but these defects tended to be different. They were more strictly conceptual in character, results of interpretative error, or products of malfunctioning concepts or fundamental assumptions. In other words: they were related to less straightforward lapses. As with Lazare and Proust, analyzing critical flaws in the Frankfurt School’s and Arendt’s inputs into the shared discourse on anti-Semitism is a main objective of the study. And it is a key effort it tries to contribute to the scholarship on both.

That scholarship is, once again, considerable. The Frankfurt School has been the object of enduring interest for at least three decades. The extensive scholarly corpus generated by this lasting attention can be divided in two main categories: general histories of the School and works (usually more in-depth) scrutinizing specifically the thought of its individual members. Most significant within the first group is, of course, Martin Jay’s 1973 *The Dialectical Imagination*. Jay’s classic is not only foremost among the general histories, but is indeed *the* central study in all Frankfurt School scholarship. The book’s importance is shown by the fact that, as Jay noted in its 1996 edition, “the French translation of *The Dialectical Imagination* in 1977 first alerted [Michel Foucault] to the similarities [between his work and that of the Frankfurt School].”17 Jay’s book was followed a few years later by another study, David Held’s *Introduction to Critical Theory*. Unlike Jay, Held focused primarily on the work of Max Horkheimer, Theodor Adorno, Herbert Marcuse and Jürgen Habermas, producing an additional, now standard, general history.18 Then a German scholar, Rolf Wiggershaus, added a massive contribution, his *The Frankfurt School: Its History, Theories and Political Significance*. It was a study of the School’s history that was even more detailed and comprehensive than Jay’s and Held’s.19 Besides these general histories, a work that complements them
solidly is a notable collection of essays: Jay’s own *Permanent Exiles*. Published after *The Dialectical Imagination*, it further elucidated different aspects of the work of the Frankfurt School, enriching in this way additionally its historiography.20

These works are all cornerstones of the latter. Combined, they uncovered, and also covered and analyzed, the main available sources related to the institutional and intellectual history of the Frankfurt School. They explored extensive samples of these sources and dissected the most pivotal works the School’s intellectuals produced. They examined the key endeavors of the School since its foundation in the 1920s, scrutinized the main currents of its figures’ thought, and provided in-depth, often unsurpassed, interpretations of their ideas. They thus make up a thorough and rigorous general history of the Frankfurt School.

This sound historiographical basis has been enhanced further by the second group of studies: those dealing with the Frankfurt School’s individual members. Prominent examples include examinations of the School’s two leading figures—Horkheimer and Adorno. Thus a 1990s collection exploring the former’s work is *On Max Horkheimer: New Perspectives*.21 As the Frankfurt School’s foremost thinker, Adorno has attracted much greater attention. A classic interpretation of his thought was, again, written by Jay. His 1984 *Adorno* outlined its main themes, arguments, and ideas, capturing, expounding, and painting a lucid picture of its central substance.22 More recently, scholarly interest concentrated on a part of Adorno’s later philosophy—his aesthetics. Two 1997 books, Shierry Weber Nicholsen’s *Exact Imagination, Late Work* and the collection of essays *The Semblance of Subjectivity*, analyzed this crucial but abstruse part of Adorno’s thinking, unpacking some of its central concerns, concepts, ideas, and implications.23
Focusing on each member of the Frankfurt constellation, these and similar other studies augment the general histories by exploring the thinking of these intellectuals much more intensely. They uncover their ideas’ deeper—implicit, remote, theoretically technical—meanings, and are thus more philosophical in character. Together with the histories, they constitute an historical-philosophical corpus that provides a multi-faceted, rigorous, and comprehensive dissection of the Frankfurt School.

This study examines only one component of the School’s prodigious output. But it is a crucial element—its massive, path-breaking analysis of anti-Semitism. This was a collective project, and thus its scrutiny here is situated between the histories of the School as a whole and the works on its individual members. Employing a narrower focus than the former, the thesis follows the latter in their greater analytical closeness, and inspects intensely the research on anti-Semitism. Parts of the secondary literature do of course deal with this research. Perhaps the best example is Jay’s chapter on “The Jews and the Frankfurt School: Critical Theory’s Analysis of Anti-Semitism” in Permanent Exiles. But none of these explorations, including Jay’s, dissects the examination of anti-Semitism as thoroughly and closely as this study.24 And the thesis also develops the literature by taking up again its critical approach: while exploring the main claims of the historic investigation, it focuses extensively on its important problematic features as well.

The study applies this critical approach also to the last of its figures—Arendt. Mainly because of her forceful analysis of totalitarianism and her highly controversial report on the trial of the Nazi bureaucrat Adolf Eichmann, Arendt emerged as one of the foremost Western intellectuals after the end of the Second World War. Her life and work
have accordingly enjoyed enormous attention. Most aspects of her writings have been
the subject of rigorous analysis. Even before Arendt’s death, for example, Margaret
Canovan wrote *The Political Thought of Hannah Arendt* (1974), producing a pithy
sketch of Arendt’s political philosophy—and what is a standard treatment of its topic.25
Interest in Arendt’s thinking on politics has, indeed, not abated since the 1970s. Jeffrey
Isaac examined it more recently in his notable *Arendt, Camus, and Modern Rebellion.*
Isaac’s inquiry in fact brought up a theme that is central to the look at Arendt in what
follows—“rebellion,” or in this study’s terms, “transcendence”—although the author
interpreted the issue in a very different manner. He analyzed what he considered to be a
“vision of rebellious politics at which Arendt and Camus converge,” affirming that they
“are best thought of as democrats of an anarchist stripe.”26 Another facet of Arendt’s
outlook that has engaged scholars—and one also related to the reading of her here—are
her views on history and historical method. They have been considered in numerous
analyses in books and articles, and these multiple elaborations serve as a backdrop and
launch pad for this study’s own attempt to unpack Arendt’s understanding of history and
the writing of history.27 And of course, also absorbing scholarly effort has been another
key matter: the importance of Arendt’s Jewish origin, its relationships to her work, and
the significance and meanings of her intense and recurrent confrontations with the
Jewish question. The interpretations of this crucial problematic form the literature that is
most relevant here.

As early as 1978, in one of the pioneering assessments of Arendt, Jay suggested
that her “involvement with Jewish issues” was, because of its influence on her thought,
an “obvious starting point” for future attempts to delineate her then largely unexplored
intellectual biography. Subsequent scholarship amply validated Jay’s proposal, as it delved into Arendt’s engagement with the Jewish question and demonstrated its crucial significance in her life and work. The first substantial step was Elisabeth Young-Bruehl’s 1982 biography *Hannah Arendt: For Love of the World*. Still unsurpassed, this study foregrounded Arendt’s “involvement with Jewish issues,” so that, as Richard Bernstein has noted, her “Jewishness and her concern with the fate of the Jewish people in the modern age stand at the very center of her being.” This recognition of the importance of the Jewish question lay at the basis of Dagmar Barnouw’s 1990 *Visible Spaces: Hannah Arendt and the German-Jewish Experience*. In the words of its author, this book was “a biography ... of [Arendt’s] acts of thinking.” Barnouw examined Arendt’s repeated confrontations with Jewish issues, such as the life and views of the Jewish *salonnière* Rahel Varnhagen and political Zionism, while showing how Arendt’s experiences as a female Jewish intellectual influenced these engagements and how the latter were connected to the development of her political thought. The links between Arendt’s grappling with Jewish concerns and her thought in general became the subject of Bernstein’s 1996 *Hannah Arendt and the Jewish Question*. Showing, for example, how *The Origins of Totalitarianism* adumbrated “the major themes” of her later conception of politics, Bernstein argued that Arendt’s sustained attempt to tackle “the Jewish question was the catalytic agent for crystallizing her thinking.” Also in 1996, Seyla Benhabib published her *The Reluctant Modernism of Hannah Arendt*, where she considered Arendt’s work from a more general perspective. Expanding Barnouw’s and Bernstein’s arguments, Benhabib claimed that Arendt’s political thought had two key sources—“her experiences as a German Jewish woman in the age of totalitarianism” and
“German ‘Existenz philosophy’ of the 1920s, ... in particular the thought of Martin Heidegger.” For Benhabib, these were the roots of two distinctive currents in Arendt’s political philosophy: a modernist tendency, from which Arendt struggled with Jewish issues, and, thence, tried to understand some of the challenges of modernity and embraced some of its promises (like the stress on human rights); and an anti-modernist impulse stimulated by German philosophy that led her to search for a model of politics in ancient Greece.

Granting the validity of these, the most significant inquiries into Arendt’s confrontations with Jewish issues, this study pursues a firmly contrary path, in order, among other things, to expose what is an acute conundrum in her work. In a key contrast, it focuses again on crucial disorders and failures in Arendt’s attempts to understand the twin concerns of anti-Semitism and Jewish identity. And, then, it considers how her philosophical thought, while indeed molded by her engagements with Jewish issues, in fact diverged from her historical-psychological examinations of the two critical questions. The study analyzes, as one of its main objectives, how Arendt’s philosophical concepts actually subverted her considerations of anti-Semitism and Jewish identity, spawning a grave perplexity that marred her work in general and her interpretations of the two momentous problems in particular.

These, then, are the works in the sets of scholarship on the study’s individual figures that are especially germane to its own historical interpretation. The units of secondary literature constitute an indispensable foundation for the discussion here, as it re-treads ground that they broke and adopts and uses some of their claims. But the study seeks to deepen them too in several main ways.
Highlighting key connections among its figures, for one, is a general aim of the study. Tracking such relationships is thus a pursuit it contributes to the sets of secondary literature. Focused on the separate individuals and not approaching them as participants in a shared discourse, that literature does not reveal what are often crucial links among the authors. Nor does it show, moreover, that the joint discussion the thinkers built in fact constitutes a significant development in the history of European intellectuals since the mid-nineteenth century.

The study’s *dramatis personae* were towering figures in European intellectual history since the mid-nineteenth century. Existing scholarship reflects this role, generally tending to view their works *positively*—as *vital* forces of that history. Reading solely their engagements with anti-Semitism and Jewish identity, this study diverges from previous interpretations in concentrating also on the bleaker, sore spots—the confused, faulty, defective aspects—of these confrontations. This focus is the defining feature of the critical approach, distinctive and its own, that the study contributes to the secondary literature. It adopts the strategy to see and demonstrate how its figures’ attempts to understand anti-Semitism and Jewish selfhood were disordered and mistaken—and how the history of their efforts was therefore disorganized, confused, even deeply messy. But even more, the study examines how these flaws were not slight slips, but went to the very roots of the authors’ outlooks. It shows how the defects stemmed from foundational premises, assumptions, and principles of the thinkers’ fundamental intellectual perspectives. And at its most general, the study looks at how the deficiencies derived from elements of these perspectives that tied their owners to the European intellectual tradition. It suggests that grander ideas, intellectual tendencies of very long standing,
may in fact be involved in the muddles and errors. It may well be that Europe’s intellectual tradition is implicated in the critical perplexities.
Notes


4 Schorsch, “German Antisemitism,” 259.


7 Ibid.


11 Wilson, *Ideology and Experience*.


14 Ibid., 159.

15 While indebted to Wolitz’s analysis, the study also departs from it in many significant ways. Both the departures and the agreements with it will be acknowledged either in the text or in the notes.


*Ibid.*, ix. For Barnouw’s discussion of Arendt’s analyses of the experiences of Rahel Varnhagen and of political Zionism, and of the connections she discerns in these analyses between Arendt’s own experiences, her confrontation with Jewish issues, and her political thought, see *Ibid.*, 30-134.

Bernstein, *Hannah Arendt*.


Seyla Benhabib, *The Reluctant Modernism of Hannah Arendt* (Walnut Creek: AltaMira, 2000), xxiv-xxv.

Chapter 3

Bernard Lazare: The Enigma and the Traps of the Jewish Question

“You must understand that here was a man, I have said with great exactness a prophet, for whom the whole apparatus of powers, reasons of state, temporal powers, political powers, authorities at every level, political, intellectual, even mental, did not weigh an ounce compared to a revolt, compared to a prompting of conscience.”

–Charles Péguy, “A Portrait of Bernard Lazare”

Introduction

Historians have noted that Roger Martin du Gard’s novel Jean Barois paints a picture of fin-de-siècle France that is unusually “faithful” to the historical record. The novel provides a glimpse into the history of France by following the activities of its main protagonist, Jean Barois. After separating from his wife and leaving his hometown for Paris, Barois, together with a group of friends, founds a review, The Sower, aimed at becoming the “mouthpiece of ... [those] studying positive philosophy or sociology.” At the time of the review’s foundation–1895–Barois and his friends are unaware that they would shortly play a fateful role in French politics–they would spearhead the revisionist campaign in defense of the wrongly accused officer Alfred Dreyfus. It is the only Jewish member of The Sower circle, the timid Woldsmuth, who provides the initial impetus for the campaign. After a painful period of anxiety about the Dreyfus case, Woldsmuth confesses to Barois that “a report” on the case, “compiled by a man who’s practically
unknown, a man who has a heart of gold and, with it, a lucid, admirably logical mind,” has convinced him of Dreyfus’s innocence. Asked about the man’s name, Woldsmuth replies, “Bernard Lazare.”

The historical original of the “report” Woldsmuth mentions is Lazare’s pamphlet *Une erreur judiciaire. La vérité sur l’Affaire Dreyfus*. The pamphlet was the first attempt to prove and proclaim Dreyfus’s innocence, and Martin du Gard conveys accurately the importance of Lazare’s contribution to the triumph of justice. The novel, however, also contains a portrait of the historical individual Bernard Lazare. In it, the character Lazare manages to induce the mentor of *The Sower* circle, the philosopher and politician Marc-Élie Luce, to seek the truth about a possible miscarriage of justice. Luce’s impressions of Lazare disclose a saintly image. “One soon realizes,” says Luce, “that [Lazare] is one of those men for whom the whole array of the powers-that-be—the State, officialdom, the intellectual, and even the moral arbiters of our present-day world—weighs less than a feather in the balance against the dictates of conscience. Moreover, he has a lucid, logical mind, and his arguments were most disturbing.”

Martin du Gard based these impressions on the portrait of Lazare by his friend Charles Péguy. This straightforward description, however, was complemented by a more subtle portrayal. The “heart of gold” that Woldsmuth admires in Lazare is also a trait he possesses himself. Woldsmuth’s spiritual nobility is revealed after the meeting when Barois and his friends discuss their contributions to *The Sower*’s first issue. The group is leaving Barois’s apartment when one of them remembers that they have not talked about Woldsmuth’s contribution. Nobody, it seems, has paid any attention to the
self-effacing Woldsmuth. When his friends ask him what his contribution is going to be, he hesitates for a moment and then replies that he will “simply copy out a very sad letter [he has] ... received from Russia.” “Six hundred Jewish families,” he explains, “have been expelled from a little town in the Kiev district. Why? Because a Christian child has been found dead, and the Jews were accused of killing him—a ritual murder, you know—for making their unleavened bread! Incredible, isn’t it? But that’s how things are over there.”

Martin du Gard’s contemporaries could have easily recognized Lazare in the character Woldsmuth. Indeed, by the early 1900s, Lazare had emerged as a prominent spokesman against the plight of the Jews in Romania. Lazare’s passionate concern with the situation of Romanian Jews was the result of a long engagement with the problems of anti-Semitism and the meaning of being Jewish. This chapter seeks to trace precisely this confrontation with the Jewish question.

Charting Lazare’s path-breaking struggle with the issues of anti-Semitism and Jewish identity, the chapter argues that his sustained confrontation with them evolved into an attempt to combat anti-Semitic hatred and to prescribe a vision of a viable, nationalist Jewish self. It thus became an effort to remedy his context—that of a France and Europe, before the rise of Zionism as an organized, influential movement, stained by a widespread anti-Semitism. This engagement, the chapter claims, was in some ways an achievement, as it articulated insights that have stood the test of time. But, in others, it was also a disaster. It was disrupted by Lazare’s acceptance of French and European ideas and culture. His espousal of anti-Semitism and anarchism–integral elements of his
intellectual and cultural context–repeatedly disorganized his attempts to formulate an adequate response to anti-Semitism, and to the perplexities of Jewish identity at the fin-de-siècle.

Like any historical narrative, this chapter is a story–of Lazare’s efforts to tackle the issues of anti-Semitism and Jewish identity. As his thinking changed radically over time, the story follows a biographical line, to elucidate the shifts in outlook. However, it also focuses more exclusively on three key moments, which exemplify distinct stages that in fact define Lazare’s intellectual engagement with the Jewish question: an initial anti-Semitic phase, a subsequent period of a critical analysis of anti-Semitism, and a denouement of an idiosyncratic Jewish nationalism. Examining texts representative of these times, the story looks at both the peaks and the failures of Lazare’s struggles at each of them. Ultimately, it seeks to show how, the heights notwithstanding, at all these stages Lazare proved incapable of rising up to his fateful problematic, and how these defeats were connected solidly to the ideas and culture of the Europe of his time. But before it does that, the story takes up its biographical logic and begins at the beginning–with Lazare’s childhood and youth.

Background, Initial Pursuits and Influences

Little in Lazare’s background suggested that he would become a passionate spokesman against the plight of the Jews. He was born on June 14, 1865 in Nîmes, in a middle-class Jewish family. Even though his parents still observed Jewish religious rituals, Lazare and his three brothers participated in them more out of respect for their parents
than out of any strong belief. His father was “a small but fairly prosperous [trader of
clothes]” who had carried on and expanded his family’s business. Since Bernard Lazare
was the eldest son, it would have been all too natural for him to follow in his father’s
footsteps.10

Lazare’s secondary education seemed particularly suitable for such a future. He
entered the Nîmes lycée, where he was enrolled in a “practically orientated” course of
study “intended for future managers and businessmen.”11 Precisely the years of his
conventional secondary education, however, saw the first inklings of Lazare’s later
career of a radical contrarian. Having “a passion for philosophy and literature,” Lazare
became deeply dissatisfied with what he felt were the dry teaching methods and stifling
atmosphere at the school.12 Upon his graduation in 1882, he plunged into the pursuit of
what seemed the only worthwhile endeavor—the career of a writer. He engaged in the
literary life of Nîmes, becoming a correspondent of the Literary and Artistic Society of
Nîmes (Société littéraire et artistique de Nîmes), at the same time making his first forays
into literature. Lazare would not become a writer, but his love for literature prompted
him to take a step that would have important consequences for his future career.
Encouraged by his cousin, the poet Ephraïm Mikhaël, Lazare left Nîmes in 1886 for the
infinitely more stimulating atmosphere of Paris.13

The most alluring Parisian attraction for Lazare was the then current symbolist
vogue, the “battle for symbolism” in which his cousin was involved.14 At the center of
this veritable craze was Stéphane Mallarmé. By the second half of the 1880s, Mallarmé
had acquired an enormous prestige among young poets aspiring to redefine the
conventions of artistic worth and to earn recognition for themselves. These poets gathered around Mallarmé, meeting regularly on Tuesdays in his apartment to discuss art and politics. For them, Mallarmé’s “salon” was an institution of debate and reflection, and the “master” himself the paragon of artistic excellence. The Mallarmé circle was not an esoteric coterie open only to initiates. Instead, its members founded numerous magazines, such as Le Décadent, La Plume, and La Revue blanche, expanding their debating forum and making their concerns known to a wide audience.\(^{15}\)

Precisely this atmosphere of intellectual effervescence awaited Lazare in Paris. His cousin Mikhaël “encouraged” him to “join ... the young symbolists” and Lazare soon started contributing to the symbolist press, becoming in 1891 an editor of Les Entretiens politiques et littéraires (Political and Literary Conversations). The Entretiens provided space for discussion on a wide variety of literary and political topics, publishing contributions by Mallarmé and Paul Valéry, but also excerpts from Marx’s “Communist Manifesto.”\(^ {16}\) The magazine was an ideal means for Lazare to test his abilities as a writer, and to participate in the current debates. This was the place where he proclaimed his endorsement of symbolism, in an 1890 article entitled “The Four Faces.” The genuine embodiment of truly “beautiful poetry,” he argued, is symbolist poetry. “The only poet,” he affirmed, “... is the creator of myths and symbols, who knows how to clothe these symbols in elaborate and varied rhythms, in diverse harmonies, following his [own] nature.”\(^ {17}\)

Lazare’s fascination with symbolism, strong though it was, did not last for long. It was soon replaced by an advocacy of a “social art,” one exhibiting a much stronger
political commitment than the art of Mallarmé and his followers. “The principle of [social] art,” Lazare declared in an 1896 lecture, “should be that life is good and that its manifestations are beautiful. Its ugliness is the product of society. To give life back its beauty, art must ... help transform society[;] and it is in this way that all social art becomes a revolutionary art.”18 A sign of a profound shift away from symbolism, this notion of a social art was itself symptomatic of an even more thoroughgoing shift in Lazare’s outlook. The year following his celebration of symbolism in “The Four Faces,” Lazare embraced anarchism, having become acutely conscious of the Third Republic’s bitter social problems, and especially the widespread poverty.19 It was specifically an anarchist revolution he had in mind when he proclaimed the aims of social art.

By the time Lazare turned to anarchism, the doctrine itself had acquired a long history, dating at least as far back as the late-eighteenth-century writings of William Godwin.20 In his history of anarchism, George Woodcock defines it “as a system of social thought, aiming at fundamental changes in the structure of society and particularly ... at the replacement of the authoritarian state by some form of nongovernmental cooperation between individuals.” A firm opposition to the existing state and to all forms of authority, a profound distrust of any organizational structures, both the anarchists’ own and those of other movements and parties, a parallel disinclination to outline rigorously a future “utopia” for fear that it might “prove stultifying” if implemented, an “extreme concern for the sovereignty of individual choice,” and a deep belief in the human ability to “liv[e] in freedom and social concord:” these are some of the main attitudes comprising the anarchist outlook. All of them find their embodiment in what
many anarchists consider the “free society”–a free federation “in which the administration of social and economic affairs will be carried out by small local and functional groups demanding of the individual the minimum sacrifice of sovereignty necessary for a life that has been decentralized, debureaucratized, and highly simplified.”

Rather than a vision of these lofty ideals, however, at the end of the nineteenth century anarchism came to be seen by many as a dangerous doctrine. The last two decades of the century saw a marked rise of incidents of what came to be known as “propaganda by the deed,” the notion that individual acts of violence were the best means of protest and of exposing the corruption of bourgeois society. The number of explosions, assassinations, or attempts at assassination inspired by anarchist ideas grew throughout Europe. In France, the first half of the 1890s witnessed what Eugen Weber has aptly called “a vicious crescendo of repression and revenge.” In 1892, Ravachol tried to punish magistrates for their participation in a trial of anarchists by planting bombs in the buildings where they lived. At the end of 1893, Auguste Vaillant threw a bomb in the bastion of the bourgeois republic, the Chamber of Deputies, while the following year Emile Henry blew up a café in an attempt to punish peaceful citizens–unobtrusive but all-too-important pillars of bourgeois society. Anarchist violence culminated in the assassination of President Sadi Carnot in the summer of 1894, which was followed by the passing of the so-called *lois scélérates* (“villainous laws”), suppressing anarchist propaganda, and by intensified police persecution of anarchist leaders and propagandists.
The laws affected not only those devoted to anarchist politics, but also many members of the artistic avant-garde. Among the writers, poets, painters and journalists of the 1880s and 1890s anarchism found some of its most devoted followers. Mallarmé himself, to cite a famous example, subscribed to the anarchist *La Révolte.* The Parisian police was well aware of the connection between anarchism and the avant-garde: as one informer noted in 1891, “[t]he literary reviews, the published books, are filled with developments of the anarchist idea, developments which will carry their fruit in several years.” A review the informer might well have had in mind was the magazine where Lazare had made his entry into journalism, the *Entretiens politiques et littéraires.* Precisely its pages were the place where the prominent anarchist Paul Adam proclaimed approvingly in July 1892 that “the murder of Ravachol”—who had been sentenced to death for a crime unrelated to the explosions—“will open an era.”

Lazare was almost as unequivocal in his declaration of anarchist faith as Adam. He revealed his sympathies in an 1892 article in the anarchist *L’Endehors.* Entitled “Necessity of Socialism,” the article argued that leaders of French socialism such as Jules Guesde, by participating in bourgeois politics, distort socialism’s revolutionary promise. The latter’s only true fulfillment, according to Lazare, is a state of anarchy. Marxist socialism, he prophetically suggested, shows a tendency to engender tyranny. But, paradoxically, the prospect of a proletarian dictatorship may not be that ominous—it may in fact be the only means of establishing anarchy. At the time of tyranny, said Lazare, the oppressed will rediscover the meaning of liberty, since history will have taught them that
all authority is harmful simply because it is an authority; that any State is oppressive simply because it is a State; that every law is excessive simply because it is a law; and [the people] will turn towards those who will have always declared ... that authorities, like the State, like the law, should not exist[.] [They] will turn towards the doctrine that declares that nothing should destroy the sacred liberty of the individual: [they] will turn towards liberating Anarchy.27

“Liberating anarchy,” and not literary art, was Lazare’s new ideal. His commitment to anarchism would remain a key feature of his outlook until the end of his life.28

In true anarchist fashion, Lazare did not articulate a rigorous anarchist theory, or a systematic utopia. He did, however, admire two of the most prominent anarchists of his time–Pierre-Joseph Proudhon and Michael Bakunin. A thinker of international repute, Proudhon had an enormous impact on many French socialist and labor activists in the late nineteenth century.29 A larger-than-life Russian noble, Bakunin became famous as the pioneer of anarchist praxis, founding the first anarchist organizations in the 1860s.30 Lazare’s admiration for Bakunin emerged in a “sketch” he wrote on him in La Revue blanche, on the occasion of the publication of a volume of Bakunin’s writings. Lazare admitted that Bakunin is not a “builder of systems,” and argued that he is above all a “matchless agitator” with a rare talent for “implement[ing] practically” his ideals. The ideas guiding Bakunin are clear: he distrusts “peaceful solutions; [bourgeois] parliamentary politics [disgusts] him almost as much as authority....” “Bakunin want[s],” Lazare approvingly asserted, “the suppression of the State, the State as an entity, built above those subjected to it, as a power centralized and organized from above; he want[s] a state organized from below ‘by the free federation of individuals, districts, provinces and nations of humankind.’” Freely federated humankind–this is the core of the “universal revolution” that Bakunin “dreams about,” whose purpose is the
achieve[ment] [of] human liberty.”

Lazare reflected on the anarchist conception of federalism in two 1895 articles in *L’Écho de Paris*. In the first one, “Federalists and Federalism,” he criticized the misguided ideas of “federalists” who fight for the political and administrative decentralization of France, and, like Maurice Barrès, call for the revival of “provincial nationalities.” This federalism is deeply misplaced, and only serves the interests of the “industrial and landed bourgeois class, which wants to have supremacy in [each] province....” It has nothing in common with “revolutionary federalism”–the subject of Lazare’s second article. “The city of tomorrow,” Lazare wrote there, “will be composed of the federation of production groups,” and the blueprint for its establishment is provided by the ideas of Proudhon. In his works, Proudhon had elaborated a distinct notion of contract and outlined a future anarchist society. He had argued that “society must be ... ‘rebuilt upon the idea of CONTRACT’”–an “‘essentially reciprocal’ ... agreement for equal exchange,” entered into voluntarily and securing the interests of all involved, not profitable only to some. Associations of individuals constituted by such contracts would form the backbone of economic life. Coupled with the abolition of existing structures of authority, the “principle of contract” would thus result in a decentralized contractual society. Lazare summed up Proudhon’s creed in these words: “To the governmental, feudal and military regime, which presupposes hierarchical centralization, Proudhon opposes [an] industrial system based on the organization of economic forces, on the grouping of associations formed by free contract.” This Proudhonian “contractual federalism,” and not the Barrèsian retrograde one, is the
progressive doctrine that contains the promise of liberty.  

First Encounters with the Jewish Question: The Trap of Hate

Lazare’s turn to anarchism was not anything exceptional—as we have seen, the doctrine flourished among the avant-garde. Anarchism and symbolism, indeed, shared a strong rebellious impulse against authority and convention, and this urge was a source of attraction for young intellectuals. Lazare himself embraced it wholeheartedly. It surfaced, for instance, in an 1891 article where he tackled an intriguing problem—the “necessity of intolerance.” Individuals who have changed the course of history, Lazare declared, people like Luther and the Jacobins, have shown a rigid intolerance to ideas opposing their own. In contrast, the “great tolerant ones,” like Voltaire and Renan, “are those whose feeble soul has never been able to attain a lasting belief.” The article’s conclusion was a resounding call to intolerance addressed to youth. “Whatever you may be,” Lazare proclaimed, “atheists or Catholics, conservatives or anarchists, ... if your faith is sincere, if you have not chosen it for disreputable and ignoble reasons, ... then, young people, be intolerant!”

Lazare’s call to intolerance was a summons to intellectual audacity and self-assertion. The intolerance he had in mind had to be inspired by the opposite of “disreputable” and “ignoble” impulses. It was precisely in the context of his attraction to symbolism, his budding anarchism, and the rebellious spirit of both that Lazare formulated his initial position on the Jewish question. The impulse of rebellion both imparted a youthful inconsiderateness to his claims and contributed to their vehemence.
The sad irony was that Lazare showed an intolerance inspired precisely by dishonorable motives. Lazare, the future spokesman against Jewry’s plight, appeared indistinguishable from the anti-Semites of the day.

Lazare’s anti-Semitism came out in three 1890 publications. In light of his later passion for Jewish causes, these pieces are truly surprising. His intolerant boisterousness provides one explanation for his outbursts; it led him to say things he would later have considered sacrilege. More important, however, was a key stance of his in the early 1890s—his acceptance of assimilation as the best political and cultural alternative for French Jewry, and for himself as well. In an 1893 article, entitled “The French Nationality and the Jews,” Lazare posed the rhetorical question of “How the [French] Jews will escape from ... anti-Semitism...” “They can escape from it,” he answered, “in one way only: by disappearing, by losing themselves in the flow of the nation.” In fact, the “superior representatives of the race” had already achieved this goal. “In a few years,” said Lazare approvingly, “they will no longer be Jews.”

Here, then, was a believer in assimilation, someone who saw himself first and foremost as a Frenchman. For such an advocate of a French identity, hating Jews for their (un-French) otherness was almost a default position. The Jew appeared as an odious other in the young Lazare’s outlook, and a main reason for this view was precisely his embrace of assimilation.

The first piece where this invidious image came through was “The Eternal Fugitive,” a fictional story based on the Biblical legend of the golden calf. Moses and the Hebrew elders having ascended Mount Sinai, the people begin to “feel abandoned”
both by their leaders and by God. Tired of their travails in the desert and suspecting that God will not fulfill His promise of bringing them to Canaan, they begin to “accus[e] [Him] of abandoning them.” Unlike most, “the elderly ... resist[...] the bad insinuations[;] ... they threaten[...] [the traitors] with the divine anger....” Heedless of these warnings, the Hebrews make a golden calf from their precious ornaments, and the calf becomes the new idol of worship. The making of the calf frees the Hebrews from their fear of God and they plunge into revelry. Their revelry, however, is interrupted by Moses’s return from the mountain, come to deliver the tablets with God’s commandments. Moses resumes his place among his followers and prophesies that the Hebrews will be abandoned by their God and dispersed forever.41

The very subject of “The Eternal Fugitive”–the story of the golden calf–carried anti-Semitic connotations. The “identification of the Jew with gold,” writes Stephen Wilson, “was a commonplace of [nineteenth-century] antisemitic writing,” and this identification often took the form of the stereotype of the Jews as “worshippers of the golden calf.”42 But Lazare’s anti-Semitism was not limited to the story’s subject and suffused many of its other elements. It surfaced most clearly in his rendition of the sinners’ revelries. “Stuffed with food, drunk with wine,” Lazare wrote,

the men were relieving themselves noisily and were rolling without shame in their vomit. In front of the exalted beast, they were embracing each other, shameless, aggravating their relapse, mixing Sodom, Gomorra, and the sins of other cities; those who had remained seated at the feast were throwing scraps of meat at the idol, and they were all quivering with an unfamiliar and tremendous joy, for they could insult a god with complete freedom.43

Lazare couched his rendition of the festivities in unmistakably anti-Semitic terms. Common at the time were the stereotypes that Jews possessed a deviant, or excessive,
sexuality, and that they were abnormally prone to homosexuality, itself considered a pathological condition. 44 Other widespread views were the associations of Jews with pigs, dirt and vomit. 45 Lazare relied precisely on these stereotypes for his depiction of the Hebrews’ unholy festivities. His revelry is a lewd and swinish bacchanal. The Hebrews are transformed into lascivious beasts, wallowing in their own vomit and in wild (homo)sexual excesses.

“The Eternal Fugitive” revealed a glaring contradiction between Lazare’s anti-Semitic views and his Jewish background. This paradox could not have escaped Lazare himself. For, even if he was a French intellectual, a celebrant of assimilation, he came from a Jewish family, where religious rituals had been followed, even if his own observance had been only formal. He must have, at some level, perceived himself as being also Jewish. Unsurprisingly, shortly after his malicious story, he published two articles where he tried to demonstrate that not all Jews were, in fact, that bad. Even in “The Eternal Fugitive,” not all Hebrews succumbed to sin. In the two subsequent articles, “Jews and Israelites” and “The Jewish Solidarity,” Lazare emphasized much more strongly the distinction between good and bad Jews, separating European Jewry itself into two radically different categories.

“Jews and Israelites” offered some reflections on the nature of anti-Semitism. There is a religious element in it, Lazare affirmed, but its “true cause ... is social.” Jews are perceived as the representatives par excellence of capitalism; they are symbols of social power and wealth, which have a basis in reality in the Rothschild “new monarchs.” For the non-Jewish masses, especially in moments of crisis, “the social
symbol” acquires a religious character; their hatred of “the powerful [among Jews]” begins to cover and encompass all members of the Jewish religion; and thus all Jews, both rich and poor, incur the masses’ hate. To Lazare, this unselfconscious displacement of hatred onto all Jews is an erroneous misplacement, since, and here was his main point, there are two radically different types of Jews—bad ones and good ones, or, as he called them, “Jews” and “Israelites.”

Lazare’s description of the Jews was as devastating as his portrayal of the sinners in “The Eternal Fugitive.” The Jew is ubiquitous and, whether a journalist, a banker or a politician, he never fails to become the symbol of iniquity. “The Jew,” asserted Lazare, is “the one who is dominated by the sole concern of making a quick fortune, which he will obtain too easily by fraud, lies and cunning. He scorns virtue, poverty, selflessness.” The golden calf, Lazare charged, “has remained his only object of worship.” The Israelites are the Jews’ polar opposite. “For years, they have lived peacefully, attached to the [French] soil that saw them being born, where many generations have succeeded each other....” They have earned their living by honest work. If “they are magistrates[,] ... their integrity is beyond suspicion;” if “they are ... officers ..., [they are] enamored of war, ... [as behooves] descendants of ancient heroes.”

Good Israelites and bad Jews—this was the distinction that Lazare tried to solidify. It enabled him both to justify his own anti-Semitism to himself and to exorcize any anxieties about his own identity that might have haunted him. Indeed, he concluded his article on a note that harmonized well with this twofold function of his dichotomy. “It would only be befitting,” he concluded, “that the anti-Semites, at last, become rather
Lazare’s article, therefore, was not a critique of anti-Semitism, but a correction of the misplacement of hatred. Anti-Semitism was perfectly acceptable, and would even be supported by “many Israelites,” as long as it was directed at the right Jew. Lazare could thus without pangs of conscience revel in his hatred.

“The Jewish Solidarity” was an indulgence in virulent hostility. In a surge of hate, “Jews and Israelites” declared that there were good “Israelites” and bad “Jews.” To this hateful distinction, Lazare now added a new dichotomy, one applicable to European Jewry as a whole.

The occasion for the article were protests by Jewish journalists against the situation of Russian Jews. For almost a decade, Russia had been the scene of pogroms supported by the authorities; the assaults had forced thousands to leave, many of whom had come to France. In 1890, the concern for Russian Jews had far-reaching implications, as France had been seeking an alliance with Russia; the two countries, in fact, signed an accord the following year. Incensed, Lazare opposed the protests, and launched an attack on the general problem he felt they raised–Jewish solidarity.

Lazare made the argument–a pseudo-rational cover of his anti-Semitism–that efforts to revive Jewish solidarity, like those of the Alliance israélite universelle, were misplaced. Jewish solidarity, he insisted, cannot have a religious basis. Religious faith is no longer strong among Israelites; there is, in addition, no “need for an ‘International’ aimed at affirming [religious] belief:” Muslims do not have such an organization and their faith is still strong. Efforts to revive Jewish solidarity on the basis of religion are,
therefore, misguided. The basis for an organization like the Alliance could only be race. And that, affirmed Lazare, is both “wrong and dangerous.” Not, of course, in itself, but because there is more than one Jewish race. There are, claimed Lazare, two radically different groups of Jews—the Sephardim and the Ashkenazim—that exhibit all too real biological differences. The Sephardim, those living in Spain, Portugal and France, “belong” to the “dolicocephalic” human type, whereas the Ashkenazim, living in Germany, Austria, Poland and Russia, are “brachycephalic.” To the biological differences correspond cultural distinctions. The Ashkenazim are culturally barren—they possess no creativity and are incapable of “produc[ing] literature and science.” In Poland, they “have not ... offer[ed] anything other than [a] Talmudic literature,” which is “insincere,” “dreary,” simply “detestable.” The Sephardim are the Ashkenazim’s exact opposite. “When a Portuguese Jew,” wrote Lazare, “is faced with ... Talmudists wishing to break his spirit and abolish his independence of thought, he will develop and flourish into a very high civilization.” The idea of Jewish solidarity based on race is, thus, also untenable. In fact, solidarity’s defense of emigration makes it dangerous to French Jewry, especially to the superior, Sephardic “Israelites.” These children of France are wrongly “confounded” with the Jewish “hordes” from Central and Eastern Europe “who pour down on [French Israelites] ... like locusts,” bringing on them the infamy of their “immorality” and “indifference to the public good.”

At the end of his article, Lazare outlined what seemed an appropriate solution to the harm done to French Israelites. “We must,” he announced, “... expel [these Jews] ourselves from our midst, when they are oafs.” This call to expulsion was the logical
culmination of Lazare’s spiraling dichotomies. From the distinction between the pious Hebrews and the worshippers of the golden calf, through the contrast between the honest Israelites and the wicked Jews, to the sharp division between superior Sephardim and inferior Ashkenazim, what stood behind the proliferation of contrasts was a self-justifying and increasingly irrational hostility.

Filled with hatred, Lazare’s invectives nevertheless recommended a political and cultural ideal for French Jewry. In the early 1890s, as we noted, Lazare believed in assimilation. At the same time, his anti-Semitic tracts commended France’s “Israelites.” The ideal Lazare considered most suitable for French Jews was thus that of the upright Israelite bent on a homogenizing politico-cultural merger into the French nation. This ideal was, of course, deeply flawed, as its formulation was inextricably tied with a bitter anti-Semitic gall. Indeed, Lazare himself would later condemn this identity as pernicious. But before he could decry it, and propose an alternative vision, he had to go through what was perhaps a requisite preliminary—that of evolving a more thoughtful position on anti-Semitism.

Rethinking Hatred: Lazare and the History of Anti-Semitism

Lazare’s anti-Semitic seizures were nothing unusual at the time. We have seen that anti-Semitism, on the rise since the early 1880s and then stirred up by *La France juive* in 1886, had become a dynamic and potent force in French politics by the early 1890s. In 1890, Lazare definitely aided this tide of hate. But he would not—could not—let himself be engulfed by it forever. Even in the period of his outbursts, as Nelly Wilson has
shown, he felt he could not renounce definitively his Jewish roots. He also became increasingly “worried” about anti-Semitism; as the brother of an officer, he was left flabbergasted in 1892 by press attacks on “The Jews in the Army,” as a *Libre parole* title ran. Finally, from the beginning of his involvement in anti-Semitic wrangling, Lazare’s hatred had been mixed with a desire to evolve a “sincere” position on anti-Semitism.\(^5\)

Initially, this sincerity perhaps purified and sharpened his hatred. But, before long, these three motives—his sense of Jewish selfhood, his anxiety, and the impulse to an honest stance—led Lazare towards a radical rethinking of his views on the Jewish question.\(^5\)

The rethinking involved several shifts. In the first place, Lazare was beginning to adopt a much more positive view of Judaism, and of Jews in general. In an 1893 article on “The Revolutionary Spirit in Judaism,” he argued that the “Hebrew spirit” is inherently revolutionary, since Judaism’s basic ideals are those of freedom, justice and equality, including social justice and equality. Imbued with these ideals, claimed Lazare the anarchist, Jews are bound to become agents of revolution in any society where they live.\(^5\)

Moreover, Lazare not only distanced himself from his earlier anti-Semitism, but became critical of it. In an 1892 article, he dismissed Drumont’s views as wrong, calling the anti-Semite a “pamphleteer of great talent, but useless.”\(^5\)

The growing distance was evident in another major change in his attitudes: from a firmly held belief, anti-Semitism became for him an object of study. Lazare spent several years studying anti-Semitism’s history, and his researches resulted in the publication of articles such as “Anti-Semitism and Its General Causes” and “Anti-Semitism in the Middle Ages,” which tried to analyze the phenomenon.\(^5\) Parts of such articles were incorporated into the most
substantial product of Lazare’s inquiries—Antisemitism: Its History and Causes. Published in the summer of 1894, the book was, as Robert Wistrich has noted, “the first systematic study of the question until that time.”

As its subtitle suggests, the book examined anti-Semitism’s historical manifestations and causes. It consisted of fifteen chapters divided into two distinct parts. The first part, comprised of seven chapters, analyzed the history of “anti-Judaism” from antiquity to the French Revolution. In Lazare’s view, “anti-Semitism” was the modern, racist version of the anti-Judaism of old, not radically different from its predecessor, but possessing its own racist “philosophy.” The book’s second part, consisting of the remaining chapters, examined this modern type of hatred. Lazare’s analysis delineated five ways of explaining anti-Semitism, five conceptual tendencies as it were that, taken together, constituted his interpretation of the history and sociology of anti-Semitism.

“I am neither an anti-Semite, nor a philo-Semite,” Lazare noted in the book’s preface. “It has been my intention,” he added, “to write neither an apology nor a diatribe, but an impartial study in history and sociology.” Impartiality for Lazare meant the avoidance of both anti-Semitism and philo-Semitism, but the word “impartial” did not describe well his reflections. “Ambivalent” would have captured much better the attitude that emerged in his analysis. And, a bit further, “multivalent” could have indicated the multiplicity of its explanations.

Lazare’s first line of analysis focused on anti-Semitism’s target—the Jews themselves. Given the universality of anti-Jewish hostility, he reasoned, “it must needs
be ... that the Jews were themselves, in part, at least, the cause of their own ills.” (A, 8)
The Jews’ unsociability and exclusiveness, rooted in their strict adherence to their
“political and religious cult,” had provoked throughout history the ire of anti-Semites. In
Judaism, Lazare argued, religious and secular laws are indistinguishable, since all of
them proceed from the Bible. “With such an idea of his Torah,” wrote Lazare, “the Jew
could not accept the laws of strange nations,” and Jews in antiquity sought “exemption
from the customs of the people amidst whom they were to live.” This separation was
aggravated by “the growth of the Talmud, the authority and rule of the doctors who
taught a pretended tradition.” With it came a powerful emphasis on strict religious
observance, a stress on separation from foreign peoples and cultures, and an insistence
that “the Jewish people is chosen by God,” which produced a sense of “immense pride.”
(A, 9-13) The Talmudists’ rise to cultural and political dominance was a slow process
that was completed only in the fourteenth century. (A, 14, 63) But once their reign was
established, its results were disastrous. By that time, indeed, the rabbis “had made of
[Israel] a small and miserable nation, soured by isolation, ... demoralized and corrupted
by an unjustifiable pride.” (A, 14) Even emancipation did not destroy immediately
Talmudism’s suffocating consequences, which had begun to disappear only recently. (A,
97, 165, 177, 179-180) For Lazare, Israel’s exclusiveness constituted an unmistakable
cause of anti-Semitism: “the Jews,” he said, “... detest the spirit of the nations amidst
whom they live–the nations chase them.” (A, 14)

The second explanation of anti-Semitism was found in religious history. Throughout the centuries, Lazare suggested, religion was consistently a key, perhaps the
main, cause of anti-Semitism. In Christian antiquity, anti-Judaism was the direct product of the conflicts between Judaism and the nascent Christian Church. As Lazare put it, “[t]he Church is the daughter of the Synagogue; she owes her early development to the Synagogue; she grew in the shade of the Temple, and from her first infant cry she opposed her mother, which was quite natural, for they were divided by a wide divergence of opinion.” Anti-Judaism retained its overwhelming religious roots at least until the eighth century, with the difference that, after the reign of Emperor Constantine, Christian anti-Judaism “defined itself and became harsher, more severe and aggressive,” giving rise to discriminatory legislation. (A, 29, 41) Religious antagonisms were also the primary cause of anti-Semitism in the Middle Ages; indeed, during this period of supremacy of the Church, anti-Judaic hostility became omnipresent. (A, 56-57, 69) Religious enmity remained the main determinant of anti-Judaism during the Renaissance and the Reformation, now having the opposite effect: hostility weakened, a result of the slackening of Christian religious fervor. (A, 73-74) Even after the French Revolution, religious hatred has retained its importance as a cause of anti-Semitism. Like Talmudism, Christian anti-Judaism could be said to have diminished, together with the weakening of religious belief in general, only at the end of the nineteenth century. (A, 111, 180-181)

Anti-Semitism, for Lazare, also had a third set of determinants, and these were socio-economic. In the Middle Ages, the development of “capitalistic power” brought with it an “increase” of “the passion for money,” while, at the same time, periods of economic difficulties required borrowing of capital. Capital, however, was not easy to
procure, since the Catholic Church opposed usury. Only non-Catholics who did not have to face the Church’s opposition could fulfill the role of lender, and wealthy Jews were very suitable for this role. Rooted in very real socio-economic grievances—they themselves unrelated to the Jews—the anti-Judaism of the poor became the displacement of those grievances onto the Jew as the hateful usurer, the oppressor whom they could see and meet. For the powerful of the day, oppression of the Jews was a source of profit. “They employed [the Jew] as a leech,” Lazare asserted, “let him swell up, fill himself with gold, then they made him clear.” (A, 60-61, 65-66)

In the modern period, according to Lazare, anti-Semitism was related to the triumph of capitalism; and its socio-economic causes superseded in importance its religious ones. “The French Revolution,” Lazare contended, “was ... an economic revolution,” “the consummation of a struggle between ... landed capital ... and industrial and speculative capital” resulting in the victory of the latter. From the outset, the Jews joined the ranks of the bourgeoisie, but the alliance gave rise to a conservative anti-Semitism—the hatred of landed capitalists against their destroyers. To this current of hatred was added another one after the victory of the bourgeoisie. This was the treacherous hatred of the bourgeoisie for its Jewish allies, who had now become “formidable competitor[s].” (A, 109-110, 116, 165, 172-173)

There was no doubt in Lazare’s mind that the Middle Ages were the period of Jewry’s greatest woe. If Lazare did cherish philo-Semitic sentiments, they became most visible in his description of Jewish suffering in the Middle Ages. “What was to be done against an epidemic,” he exclaims,
unless to kill the Jews who conspired with the lepers to poison the wells? And so they were exterminated in York and London, in Spain at the instigation of St. Vincent Ferrer; in Italy, where John of Capistrano preached; in Poland, Bohemia, France, Moravia, Austria. They were burned in Strassburg, Mayence, Troyes. In Spain the Marranos mounted the scaffold by the thousands, elsewhere they were ripped open with pitchforks and scythes; they were beaten to death like dogs.

What crimes could have deserved such frightful punishments? How poignant must have been the afflictions of those beings!

These “frightful punishments” were not rooted in religious hostility alone. They were the result of a convergence of religious hatred and the social grievances against the usurer. This convergence gave rise to sheer horror. (A, 65, 71)

A source of medieval cruelty, anti-Semitism’s economic causes later became linked to capitalism, thus showing a clear variation through time. In this they differed from another set of factors, remarkable for their permanence. These were psychological; and, even though, in the early 1890s, Lazare had hardly any concepts to analyze the psychology of hatred, he discerned in anti-Semitism a complex psychological dimension. He felt, for instance, that anti-Jewish hostility showed irrationality and detachment from any putative Jewish characteristics or activities. He noted that, by the end of the eighteenth century, anti-Jewish polemicists had produced a whole “literature” of prejudices, unrelated to the Jews themselves. “The wildest stories about the Jews were circulated,” he wrote, “... the blackest vices, the most heinous crimes, the most despicable habits were attributed to them.” While “many of these beliefs remain inexplicable,” they were a product of an “excessively [excited] ... popular imagination.” (A, 92) Lazare also saw in anti-Judaism’s psycho-dynamics a mechanism of displacement of resentment onto a scapegoat. In the Middle Ages, he observed, “whenever extortions, misery, hunger, destitution maddened the people, they would
avenge themselves on the Jews, who were made victims of expiation.” (A, 70) But, above all, anti-Judaism was rooted in ambivalent responses to an uncanny other. In antiquity, the Jews lived in isolation, as strangers, “excit[ing] curiosity as well as aversion.” They remained “the strangers *par excellence*” throughout history, and it is as such that they incur their enemies’ hatred. (A, 21, 100) As Lazare put it, “[a]t the bottom of the antisemitism of our own days, as at the bottom of the anti-Judaism of the thirteenth century are the fear of, and the hatred for, the stranger.” The ambivalence towards the stranger–containing both fear and hatred–was “the primal cause of all antisemitism, the never failing cause.” (A, 176)64

We noted that, for Lazare, modern “anti-Semitism” was both similar to and different from “anti-Judaism.” (A, 8) As he claimed, “the causes of [modern anti-Semitism] have not altered appreciably [from those of anti-Judaism].” Where anti-Semitism differed was in its intensity and purposefulness–it was “more self-conscious, more pragmatic, more deliberate”–and in its new racist “basis.” (A, 176) From Christian antiquity to the eighteenth century, “anti-Judaism” was mainly religious in character, its socio-economic component gradually becoming more significant. (A, 84-95) To these two currents, Lazare claimed, modern anti-Semites have added the stress on “the inequality of races,” a “doctrine” that, systematized by Marr, has transformed anti-Judaism into modern, racist “anti-Semitism.” (A, 110-119) “Race is, however, a [pseudoscientific] fiction” because, argued Lazare, a “pure” race does not exist, all the putative “races” being hybrids of more than one racial element. Racism, while providing a new anti-Semitic theme, is nothing “but the [pseudoscientific] veil [that] covers some
real causes of antisemitism,” causes that are “national and economic.” (A, 119-128)

Anti-Semitism’s “national” causes were one of three political developments peculiar to the Middle Ages and modernity whose delineation made up the last of Lazare’s explanations. For him, the history of anti-Semitism is related to the history of the institution of the European state. Before the end of the eighteenth century, the state was religious in character, “based upon unity of belief.” The French Revolution destroyed this “conception of a Christian State,” rendering meaningless anti-Semitic claims that Jews “could not be tolerated in a Christian [State].” Retaining thus a religious atavism, modern anti-Semitism is conservative; it “represents one phase of the struggle between the feudal state ... and the opposite notion of a neutral and secular state,” and springs from “the dream of the Christian antisemite” to “restore” the Christian state. (A, 83, 162)

If the feudal state “had its foundations in theological principles,” the modern, secular state acquired a different basis—the nation. (A, 162) Modern anti-Semitism is a consequence of the new phenomenon of nationalism. Before the end of the eighteenth century, “the royal government in itself constituted the national unity—the representative, constitutional government placed that unity somewhere else: in the community of origin and language.” In the era of nationalism, anti-Semitism is the hatred towards those who have retained their ethnic particularity and thereby stand in opposition to attempts at ethnic homogenization. Nationalism, though a relatively new development, is retrograde and is being superseded by “tendencies” towards “cosmopolitanism.” These tendencies, Lazare was convinced, would “some day defeat [nationalism].” In the meantime,
complicating anti-Semitism is a trans-historical feature of the Jewish “character”–its cosmopolitanism. The conflict between cosmopolitanism and nationalism only intensifies anti-Semitism: the nationalist hatred for ethnic particularity is further inflamed by the nationalist hatred for cosmopolitanism and its representatives. (A, 137-140)

The third political determinant of anti-Semitism had to do with the situation of the Jews themselves. It was a modern version, as it were, of the putative exclusiveness of old; it was nothing other than the failure of Jewish assimilation. “[A]ll the causes which have brought ... about [modern anti-Semitism] ...,” Lazare asserted, “may be reduced to this one only: the Jews are not as yet assimilated; that is to say, they have not yet given up their belief in their own nationality.” Both the Jews and the societies where they have lived are to blame for this state of affairs—the former for their refusal to relinquish their “religious [and cultural] practices,” and the latter for their persistent discrimination and enmity. (A, 176-179) Lazare seemed to be reiterating here his earlier assimilationist views; but the assimilation he had in mind now was utterly different from the denial of selfhood he had advocated before. “The time will come,” he asserted, “when [the Jews] shall be completely eliminated; when they shall be merged into the body of the nations....” The advent of this disappearance, he thought, is already discernible–legal discrimination is a thing of the past, while Jews are abandoning their religious beliefs and cultural practices and embracing the cultures of the countries where they live. Yet, complete assimilation will not be achieved before anti-Semitism itself “run[s] its course.” It is possible only in the era that anti-Semitism’s death will
inaugurate—the time when “the most diverse of races [will be united] in a peaceful Federation of definite entities, ... universal altruism [having replaced] selfish patriotism.” This is the time of global anarchy. (A, 179-181)

Though “not near,” anarchy’s advent was, Lazare thought, very likely. His optimism seemed warranted by the transformations of the nineteenth century. Religious belief was “losing its [strength and] influence;” so were nationalist passions, increasingly superseded by tendencies towards cosmopolitanism and internationalism. These sources of anti-Semitism would be joined on history’s dustbin by the ones rooted in the current economic status quo. The latter were already being undermined by the “struggle between the proletariat and the industrial and financial classes” that, ending in the Revolution, would usher in anarchy and, by destroying its economic causes, conclusively put an end to anti-Semitism. “The bourgeoisie,” Lazare asserted, “which exercises all political power because it holds control of all economic agencies, will draw upon its resources in vain; ... it will not be able to withstand the inflexible laws which day by day are working towards the substitution of communal property for the capitalistic régime.” The already discernible “onward movement of the Revolution” thus made both anarchy and the end of anti-Semitism very “probable.” (A, 180-183)

This, essentially, was the backbone of Lazare’s study of anti-Semitism. A pioneering effort, it has heuristic value even today. As we noted, Lazare perceived in modern anti-Semitism’s virulence, deliberateness and racism a contrast to its pre-eighteenth-century counterpart, but he showed the importance of the hatred’s religious origins and posited a fundamental continuity between anti-Judaism and anti-Semitism.
These two notions continue to shape historical analysis. We saw that the assumption of an historical nexus between earlier religious hatred and the rise of murderous twentieth-century anti-Semitism is a significant idea in the historiography of anti-Semitism. It characterizes general histories of the hatred, and work on Nazism and on anti-Semitism in other contexts, such as nineteenth-century France. Some of Lazare’s arguments thus constitute an historiographical model that is still viable.

While Lazare’s insights into these religious and longue durée aspects of hatred are still valid, his ways of explaining anti-Semitism also showed critical lacunae. These faults were both numerous and grave. But what is as important is that many of them stemmed from the two basic beliefs that made Lazare an intellectual of his time—a representative of the European fin-de-siècle. These were anarchism and anti-Semitism itself. They undermined in crucial ways his foray into historical explanation, afflicted his analysis with flaws, and obstructed his attempt at understanding.

Michael Marrus has observed that, in his book, Lazare “conceded a great deal to the anti-Semitic prejudices of his day ....” Marrus’s remark points to a fundamental flaw—Lazare’s adoption of anti-Semitic stereotypes as tools of historical explanation. This deficiency is evident in his economic explanation of anti-Semitism. The notion of Jewish financial might, exemplified in France by Drumont’s statement that Jews are “the absolute masters of the Banque de France,” was one of the most common nineteenth-century stereotypes, and precisely its use distorted Lazare’s analysis.

Anti-Semitism colored Lazare’s views on medieval Jewry. In the Middle Ages, Jews engaged in money-lending, but they often faced the competition of powerful rivals,
such as Lombard money-lenders; their fortunes also depended on medieval monarchs, who treated them preferentially when they could profit from their wealth and services, but also frequently ordered their expulsion.\textsuperscript{67} The Jews in the Middle Ages, wrote Lazare, “came ... to specialize in the money business, for which they have been so bitterly reproached ever since, and in the fourteenth century they constituted quite a coterie of changers and lenders: they had become the bankers of the world.” (\textit{A}, 60) This was an exaggeration that distorted historical realities, and served as a space for the expression of prejudice. Indeed, Lazare’s emphasis on Jewish financial power was undermined by his own recognition of the Jews’ precarious situation, as he noted that they were exploited by medieval rulers.

Lazare’s exaggeration of Jewish economic might appeared also in his analysis of anti-Semitism after the French Revolution. Historians generally agree that the nineteenth century saw an impressive improvement in the socio-economic status of European Jewry. “By 1900,” as Perry and Schweitzer put it, “many Jews had achieved middle- and upper-class status.” But Jewish success and prosperity were never unqualified and universal. “Even in Vienna,” write Perry and Schweitzer, “where Jews were a major force in the city’s economic and cultural life, in 1880 two-thirds of its 95,000 Jews were classified as destitute.”\textsuperscript{68} These developments must have attracted Lazare’s attention, but, once again, his stress on their magnitude was overdone. After emancipation, he noted, Jews embraced feverishly the opportunities just opened to them. But their entry into the newly accessible societies had a peculiar character: “[a]s conquerors, not as guests,” Lazare asserted, “did they come into modern societies.” The Jews, he
continued, “made the only conquest for which they were armed, the economic conquest for which they had been preparing for some many long years.” Even though Lazare suggested that not the Jews but factors for which they were not responsible, like their experience in money-lending and a reservoir of psychic and intellectual energy accumulated as a result of oppression, encouraged the vigorous pursuit of “commerce and finances,” he conceived Jewish success as an economic “conquest,” a takeover of European societies. (A, 108) This over-emphasis, by now recurrent, amounted to an acceptance of the stereotype of Jewish economic might. It suggested that the Jews were hated for what they were, rather than for what they were made out to be. Lazare’s over-emphasis constituted a de-emphasis on the irrational and paranoid side of hatred, implying that the Jews themselves were responsible for anti-Semitism.

The acceptance of stereotypes was blatant in Lazare’s direct imputation of responsibility to Jews—his view of anti-Semitism as a product of Jewish peculiarities. The claim that Jewish exclusiveness was a key cause of hatred, and the culprits for Jewish misery were the religious leaders who strengthened isolation and enfeebled Jewish spiritual and cultural vigor, echoed well-known stereotypes about the Jewish mentality, Jewish separateness, and baneful Talmudism. In 1862, for example, Ernest Renan declared that “Judaism contained the principle of a narrow formalism, of exclusive fanaticism disdainful of strangers; this is the Pharisaic spirit, which later became the Talmudic spirit.”69 Henri Gougenot des Mousseaux, with whose writings Lazare was familiar, had written that the Talmud is a “savage code, which combines the precepts of hatred and plunder with the doctrine of cabbalistic magic, which professes
high idolatry. ... ...[T]he Jews will remain unsociable beings until the Talmud is destroyed.” Lazare’s emphasis on Jewish exclusiveness and his condemnation of the rabbis’ religious chauvinism betrayed, at the very least, an uncritical acceptance of these prejudices. In fact, he did not even hide his contempt for the “tyranny” of the Talmud and of the “obscuritanists,” who subjected the “flock” to the yoke of “futile talmudic commentaries, idle and mediocre discussions of the Law.” (A, 64-65) Lazare’s hatred, an attitude Stephen Wilson has labeled “Jewish anticlerical anti-Semitism,” helps explain why Drumont thought Antisemitism was “dominated from beginning to end by a fine effort at impartiality.”

Lazare’s acceptance of “anticlerical” stereotypes made him overlook the possibility that, instead of being a cause of anti-Semitism, Jewish exclusiveness and rabbinic chauvinism, provided they existed at all, might be exactly the opposite—a product of persecution. This is the explanation propounded in Léon Poliakov’s The History of Anti-Semitism. Himself noting the “isolating power of Jewish monotheism” and willing to grant the existence of a “Jewish mentality,” Poliakov argued that this “very special Jewish mentality,” characterized by “timorousness” and “narrowness,” “[emerged] in reaction to persecutions,” the persecutions of the eleventh, twelfth and thirteenth centuries unleashed by the Crusades. The new, intense emphasis on the study of the Talmud was a defensive reaction, an escape from hostility that at the same time provided an outlet for accumulated “hatred”—itself engendered by persecutions—towards hostile Christian society. “At all times,” Poliakov asserts, “the rabbis had placed the study of the Law above earthly possessions, above all other things, but never had these
precepts been followed so fervently [as at the time of the Crusades]. It was with real
frenzy that the Jews of Germany and northern France plunged into the Talmud and
pored over it day and night in the synagogues...." Lazare observed correctly that the
"transformation of the Jewish spirit and the victory of the sectarian doctors ... coincides
[with] the beginning of official persecution,” but the causes of this temporal coincidence
were the exact opposite of the ones he perceived. (A, 14) Instead of being the source of
anti-Semitism, as Lazare would have it, the devotion to the Talmud–excessive and
neurotic as it may be considered to be–was a consequence of violent anti-Semitism,
indeed, a vital means of survival.74

While anti-Semitism thus warped at least two of Lazare’s conceptual tendencies,
anarchism damaged his vision of the future.75 His optimism about the Revolution and
end of anti-Semitism was gratuitous, appearing in his last chapter as if ex nihilo.
Nothing in the preceding analysis, which showed anti-Semitism’s gravity, permanence,
and multiplicity of causes, suggested its disappearance. No more warranted was the
evocation of the Revolution as a very probable panacea. Inspired by Lazare’s anarchist
faith, the prediction required a rigorous study of past developments, current historical
conditions, and future prospects. It needed some solid proof that historical changes did
tend towards Revolution and anarchy, and that their advent would indeed mean the end
of anti-Semitism. Such an analysis was absent, and the prognosis was thus unjustified. In
fact, the absence transformed it into an all too anarchist device–a rhetorical bomb,
affirming anarchist ideals in an abrupt, unexpected–and harmful–way. The bomb
contained only wishful thinking, and not dynamite, but its destructive power was still
great, thrown as it was in a study aspiring to precision and “impartiality.”

The Dreyfus Affair, and Its Outcome—Jewish Nationalism

Lazare’s ambivalence to anti-Semitism disappeared soon after the publication of his book, to be replaced by the critical stance he had already enunciated. In an article in December 1894, he again dismissed anti-Semites’ claims as “without value,” while also asserting that anti-Semites themselves are “simple spirits, a little naive and often ignorant,” thoughtlessly considering capitalism a Jewish product and incapable of recognizing it as the “result of a slow economic evolution.” The context for this dismissal was a trend Lazare noticed uneasily—a marked rise of anti-Semitism. It was related to the event that would spark the most serious political crisis of the Third Republic—the trial of Alfred Dreyfus. “Anti-Semitism,” Lazare noted in his article, “has ... taken excellent advantage of the trial of Captain Dreyfus ....”76 When making this observation, he hardly suspected that the Dreyfus Affair would henceforth dominate his activities and influence profoundly his outlook.

The Affair, wrote Alfred Dreyfus in his Souvenirs et correspondences, was “one of the most extraordinary efforts at rehabilitation the world has ever witnessed, an accomplishment that will resound into the most distant future, because it will have marked a turning point in the history of humanity....”77 These words of the officer in the eye of the storm were an exaggeration, but, even if it was not a “turning point in history,” the Affair did shake France’s Third Republic to its foundations. Gordon Wright has called the crisis of the late 1890s a “bloodless ... civil war.”78 From a miscarriage of
military justice, the Affair came to occupy the center stage of French political life towards the late 1890s, compelling increasing numbers of people to take a stand for or against the accused officer. “By 1898,” Wright has noted, “virtually the entire educated elite of France was committed to one side or the other.” 79 The “educated elite” had become divided into two warring camps—those of Dreyfusism and anti-Dreyfusism—and the Affair had evolved into a nationwide conflict between two different visions of France. 80 As Léon Blum put it, “[w]e were no longer for or against Dreyfus, for or against revision; we were fighting for or against the Republic, for or against militarism, for or against the secularism of the State.” 81

Compared to this “civil war” of ideals, the Affair’s beginnings were inconspicuous. Since the late 1880s, the French Intelligence Service had been gathering discarded documents from the German embassy through a cleaning woman, code-named agent “Auguste.” In the early fall of 1894, this “ordinary track” supplied a memorandum—what came to be known as the “bordereau”–to the German military attaché Colonel von Schwarzkoppen, listing several documents containing military secrets that the memorandum’s author had handed over to the embassy. The documents suggested that the traitor could only be a member of the Army General Staff, as only a General Staff officer could have had access to such information. After a brief internal investigation, the suspicion fell on Alfred Dreyfus, a Jew of Alsatian origin whose handwriting resembled that of the bordereau, and whose very background seemed to the anti-Semitic officers at the Ministry of War to warrant suspicion. 82 Dreyfus was arrested on October 15, tried by a Court-Martial, in closed session, and, on very flimsy evidence
and after an illegal secret exchange of evidence between the minister of war and the judges, sentenced on December 22 “to perpetual deportation in a fortified enclosure and to military degradation.” To shouts of “Death to the Jew,” Dreyfus was publicly stripped of his rank on January 5, 1895. In late February, he embarked on his journey to Devil’s Island, where he was to serve his sentence.83

For more than a year Dreyfus’s fate appeared sealed. Any hopes for an annulment of his sentence seemed futile even to his family, while his case attracted almost no public attention. But in 1896 an abrupt change took place. The French Intelligence Service, headed since mid-1895 by Lieutenant Colonel Georges Picquart, discovered evidence identifying another officer, Commandant Walsin-Esterhazy, as the real traitor, and prompting Picquart to decide to fight for justice. Parallel to the discoveries at the Intelligence Service, Alfred’s brother Mathieu was renewing his efforts to save his brother’s honor. Mathieu had not ceased trying to win support for his brother among politicians and intellectuals since the 1894 trial. In the fall of 1897, he too found out that the culprit was Esterhazy, while, by this time, he had already succeeded in rekindling public interest in the Affair and attracting many recruits to the “Dreyfusard” cause. In the beginning of 1898, after Esterhazy had been acquitted by a Court-Martial, convened at his own request to dispel suspicions of treason, no less a figure than Emile Zola forcefully proclaimed his Dreyfusard beliefs. On January 13, he published in L’Aurore his famous “J’accuse,” accusing high-ranking officers of illegalities and calling for the “explosion of truth and justice.” Zola’s intervention precipitated the division of France into the two camps of Dreyfusism and anti-
Dreyfusism. Within a month after the publication of “J’accuse,” the Affair had acquired a “national dimension” and moved to the center of public debate.84

Despite growing publicity and increasing support for the Dreyfusard cause, Dreyfus would remain on Devil’s Island for more than a year, coming back to France only in July 1899. In the beginning of the previous month, the High Court of Appeal had annulled the 1894 verdict, after the minister of war had discovered the forgery of a document committed after Dreyfus’s trial and meant to provide further proof of his guilt. Dreyfus would be tried again, this time by the Court-Martial of Rennes. On September 9, after a month of proceedings, the Dreyfusards saw their worst fears come true—the Court-Martial confirmed Dreyfus’s guilt. Due to “attenuating circumstances,” he was sentenced to ten years in prison. On September 19, the President of the Republic, acting at the prompting of the government of the Dreyfusard Waldeck-Rousseau, pardoned him. Dreyfus was now free, but it would take another seven years before the High Court of Appeal annulled his sentence, on July 12, 1906. On the next day, the Chamber of Deputies adopted a resolution securing a fitting compensation for Dreyfus’s unjust sentence: he was awarded the Cross of the Legion of Honor.85

The person who made the greatest effort to help Dreyfus was his brother Mathieu. From the time of the first Court-Martial until Alfred’s rehabilitation, Mathieu continued to devote most of his energies to the struggle, tirelessly seeking the support of politicians and intellectuals and sparing no expense for the cause.86 But Mathieu was the accused’s brother and his dedication was not surprising. Much more remarkable was the readiness of people outside the Dreyfus family to plunge into the battle with a similar
passion. Foremost among them was Bernard Lazare, the assimilated Jewish intellectual, concerned—at the time of Dreyfus’s trial—about the rise of anti-Semitism.

We have seen that the Dreyfus Affair provided the occasion and the setting for modern anti-Semitism’s first peak eruption in Western Europe. And we also noted that the hatred was the main catalyst of the Affair’s public storms. Observers both at the fin-de-siècle and since, moreover, have also pointed to anti-Semitism’s more specific role in Alfred Dreyfus’s very conviction. “There is little doubt,” writes Stephen Wilson, “... that Dreyfus’s original arrest and condemnation stemmed from the anti-Jewish prejudice of the officer corps, and its attachment, as Joseph Reinach put it, to ‘the legend of the Jew as Judas, of the Jews as the race of Iscariot, the race of traitors.’”87 The recognition of anti-Semitism’s role in the conviction was a major incentive for Lazare’s entry into the fray. In February 1895, he met Mathieu Dreyfus at the request of Joseph Valabrègue, Dreyfus’s brother-in-law. In seeking a meeting, Mathieu was following the advice of the director of the prison where Alfred was held before his deportation, who had suggested that “only two people could take up the cause of Captain Dreyfus: Drumont ... and Bernard Lazare.” The advice proved valuable, for, after meeting Mathieu, Lazare “decided to do everything to get [Alfred] out.” At the time of Valabrègue’s visit, Lazare later recalled, “I expressed to him immediately my sympathy and the conviction that I had ... in the Captain’s innocence. The [anti-Semitic] campaign had enlightened me and, from all the events, followed from day to day, analyzed and discussed, the certainty had been born in my mind that the affair was the result of an anti-Semitic machination.”88

Having decided to help, Lazare set about putting his resolution into practice. In
the summer of 1895, he completed the pamphlet *Une erreur judiciaire. La vérité sur l’Affaire Dreyfus*, aimed at demonstrating Dreyfus’s innocence. Printed in Brussels, the pamphlet appeared in the fall of 1896, after Mathieu had revived public interest in the Affair by the subterfuge of planting an article in the English press announcing Dreyfus’s escape from prison. Its 3,000 copies were then sent in the mail according to plan. “On November 7 and 8,” as Bredin puts it, “all members of Parliament, all the principal journalists of Paris, and numerous personalities of note, received [Lazare’s] pamphlet....”

In the pamphlet, Lazare later claimed, he “took up dogmatically all the charges brought up at the trial, discussed them and established on the basis of the ... documents [he] possessed, logically and irrefutably, Dreyfus’s innocence.” He tried to demonstrate, for instance, that Dreyfus could not have been the author of the memorandum, and protested against the secret exchange of evidence. Historians have since questioned the accuracy of his analysis. Its direct contribution to the Dreyfusard cause was also limited, as it did not enjoy a favorable reception either among its recipients or in the press. But its publication was not without significance. It heightened the anxiety of a General Staff hostile even to the most remote signs of revision. It was also, claims Nelly Wilson, the Affair’s “first J’accuse.” Far from being a purely polemic tract, it “gave the accused the opportunity to tell his side of the story, to defend himself before public opinion, to challenge the official version, the only one then in existence.”

*Une erreur judiciaire* was Lazare’s most substantial, single contribution to the
Dreyfusard campaign. But, apart from it, he played a role that was no less significant. He assumed, for example, the burden of enlisting support by personal visits to prominent people. His recollections of his activities in late 1896 and 1897 convey a determined commitment. “For one year,” he recalled,

I was waiting for every opportunity. I wrote to Berthelot, the senator, and he advised me to see a jurisconsult; I wrote to Lepelletier.... He arranged a meeting; we discussed graphology without any result, although he seemed favorably inclined. I saw Judet; he told me that he was perhaps not as fully convinced in Dreyfus’s guilt as he had been at first, but that it was necessary to provide evidence, proofs.... I saw the late senator Isaac who was convinced but did not do anything. I saw abbé Charbonnel, ... pastors Wagner and Decoppet. I wrote to de Mun who did not want to agree to a conversation....

The list included others as well, such as Zola and Octave Mirbeau, all of whom Lazare tried to convert to Dreyfusism, not always succeeding but not giving up.97 His activities were not limited even to these meetings and he fulfilled other crucial functions. As Nelly Wilson relates, he managed the financial side of “the hiring of lecture halls [and the] printing of posters and brochures....” He also often discussed current developments in the press.98 Lazare “was the first of the Dreyfusards,” according to Léon Blum, “the one from which [sic] would come almost all the others.”99 Indeed, without Lazare, the Dreyfusard campaign would have lacked most of its vigor and coherence of strategy.

And if he was a key inspirer of the Dreyfusard campaign, Lazare also took part in other Affair frays. In the late spring of 1896, he entered into a debate on anti-Semitism with none other than Drumont. The debate consisted of an exchange of articles, some of which were subsequently published as the pamphlet *Contre l’antisémitisme. Histoire d’une polémique*.

The polemic did not occasion a radical redefinition of Lazare’s conceptualization
of anti-Semitism, but it marked important shifts in his attitude towards it. It brought out
three crucial tendencies, which had already appeared in Lazare’s writings and activities
and which, in their combination, would henceforth define his outlook: a repudiation of
anti-Semitism, a pessimistic recognition of its gravity, and an affirmation of a distinctly
Jewish identity.\textsuperscript{100} Already critical of Drumont, Lazare now dismissed the worthlessness
of the anti-Semite and his ideas even more forcefully. “This is a mind,” he affirmed,
“which lacks scientific culture; this is a person who is impassioned, instinctive, but who
is neither a logician, nor a dialectician, nor a philosopher. ... When he begins an article,
he never knows how he will finish it....” \textsuperscript{101} Now actually following the logic of his 1894
book–where he had shown the long history of anti-Semitism, and of its religious
determinants–Lazare claimed: “The causes of anti-Semitism are multiple. Obviously, at
the root, is to be found the age-old and permanent reason, the ancient, \textit{inerradicable}
prejudice, the old hatred ... against the deicidal nation, chased away from the land of the
ancestors ... \textit{[italics mine].}” \textsuperscript{102} Finally, explaining why, as an atheist, he is concerned
about anti-Semitism, Lazare writes: “I have ... to defend my rights as an individual. I
am, and was born, a Jew. I would not like either to change my name, or to become
affiliated with a church, a temple, or a mosque. I have a right to remain that way and I
will uphold that right.” \textsuperscript{103} Intimated already in his compassion for Jewish suffering, this
affirmative stance soon came to dominate Lazare’s thinking.

More concretely, the bold avowal of Jewishness indicated a truly distinctive
perception of the Affair itself. Indeed, Lazare’s attitude towards it differed sharply from
that of other prominent Dreyfusards. For Mathieu, the Affair was a fight for his brother’s
life and honor. For Zola, it was a struggle for “truth and justice.” For Lazare, the Dreyfus Affair was, above all, a Jewish affair, a battle for an accused Jew suffering because of his Jewish background. It was also the personal fight of a Jew increasingly conscious of his ancestry, on behalf of all Jewish people. That Lazare perceived his efforts in this way became clear in his 1899 “Open Letter to Monsieur Trarieux,” published in L’Aurore. “I wish that it be said,” he famously affirmed, “that I was the first to speak, that the first one to rise on behalf of the Jewish martyr was a Jew, ... a Jew who knew to what people of pariahs, of the disinherited, of unfortunates he belonged and who derived from that awareness the will to fight for justice and truth.”

As these words show, the Affair had compelled this now proud defender of the “Jewish martyr” to comprehend differently the meaning of being Jewish. The Affair was, indeed, what transformed Lazare into a Jew. Its events themselves made him feel like a pariah; they made him aware of his roots. Recounting to Joseph Reinach the negative reactions to Une erreur judiciaire, Lazare noted, “I say nothing about ... the attitude of the press, which was closed to me from that day. From that day on, I was a pariah–a long atavism having prepared me for this condition, I did not suffer morally.”

As in the open letter, here again Lazare identified himself as a pariah, one in fact with a very long ancestry. But the most crucial factor in his conversion was anti-Semitism. The whirlpools of hatred that the Affair created affected him very deeply. As he admitted, the anti-Semitic campaign of late 1894 urged him to join the battle. Then the further waves of hate, as Nelly Wilson has shown, disheartened him sorely. Its anti-Semitism exhibiting a strong religious current, the Affair also exposed a perplexing ubiquity of
religious prejudices. Not only religious quarters, but the whole country “viewed ... Dreyfus in terms of Judas.” Lazare was badly disillusioned: these widespread, religious hatreds were what, in fact, prompted his return in 1896—the stress on anti-Semitism’s religious causes, and his pessimism—towards the earlier findings of his book. In the course of these traumatic developments, Lazare realized that a firm, fearless affirmation of his Jewish identity was the adequate response to anti-Semitism. He was a Jew, he declared—contra anti-Semitism; he was happy to be a Jew, and he would do everything he could to remain one. This was a truly radical change. Induced by a critical cataclysm, it placed Lazare at the opposite pole of his earlier, anti-Semitic assimilationism.

A momentous turning point, the Affair thus transformed Lazare into a proud Jew, boldly affirming his Jewish identity. As his open letter showed, a key part of his identity was a solid sense of solidarity with the “people of pariahs.” He was ready to defend this people, to raise a voice of protest on its behalf, to be its champion. He was ready to fight for wretched Jews. From the mid-1890s on, most of Lazare’s activities were guided by two impulses—his firm embrace of a Jewish identity, and his ardent wish for a similar emergence on the part of other Jews. The first of these urges appeared in what became a central concern of his in the last years of his life—the fate of Romanian Jews.

In the early 1900s, Lazare emerged as “an official defender of Romanian Jews.” In February 1902, he published “The Oppression of the Jews in Eastern Europe,” where he examined in detail Romania’s discriminatory laws and regulations, and the deplorable situation of Romanian Jews. He also paid attention to the causes of modern Romanian anti-Semitism. Following the lines of his 1894 book, he argued that
its roots were almost exclusively economic. In 1894, Lazare had contended, as we saw, that anti-Semitism was an outcome of economic competition. He had claimed, further, that Romanian “antisemitism was born with the advent of the bourgeoisie, because this bourgeois class, composed of merchants and manufacturers, came into competition with the Jews who displayed their activity exclusively in commerce and industry, when not in usury.” (A, 103) In 1902, he wrote similarly that “The Romanian bourgeoisie ... demanded from its representatives to be allowed to develop without fear of formidable adversaries. To satisfy its demands, a whole protectionist system was elaborated. ... It consists of ... laws intended to protect the liberal professions, the industry, commerce, ... the crafts, excluding ... the Jews from these various activities.”

Lazare’s engagement with Romania’s anti-Semitism and the situation of its Jewry was thus very much in line with the conceptual positions of 1894. Utterly new, however, compared to Antisemitism, was the sense of solidarity that now went along with his pursuits. During a visit to Romania in May 1902, he told an audience of several thousand in Bucharest: “I feel that I am among my people, among the unfortunates who lead so wretched an existence. I feel that I am among the people of Israel, the people of the psalms, the race that loves liberty, and when I see you so enthusiastic, so eager to lead a more human life, I have no doubt that one day justice will triumph.” Gone now was the prejudice that had once accompanied the attempt to understand anti-Semitism’s history; empathy had taken the place of scorn. But the most intense irony lay behind the contrast between this expression of solidarity and the earlier pitiless contempt for foreign “hordes.”
From the perspective of Lazare’s more recent activities, these contrasts were not as striking. Indeed, by the time of his 1902 visit, he had already become involved in the Zionist movement, and formulated the principles of his own Jewish nationalism. As early as 1894, he had become acquainted with the work of Ahad Haam, a critic of assimilation, and had tried to help with the publication of a collection of Ahad Haam’s proto-Zionist articles. Unsurprisingly therefore, when Theodor Herzl published The Jewish State in early 1896, he found in Lazare a ready supporter. Despite attempts to formulate his own views on Jewish nationalism, Lazare remained committed to Herzl’s Zionism for the next two years. In May 1898, he attended the second Zionist Congress in Basle, where his “[D]reyfusard fame” made him into “the star of the ... [C]ongress.”

The Congress, however, marked the beginning of Lazare’s disaffection with the Zionist movement. Dissatisfied with what he thought were the leadership’s authoritarian practices and refusing to accept the establishment of a Zionist bank to finance colonization, Lazare announced his break with the movement in April 1899.

But notwithstanding his departure, Lazare remained committed until the end of his life to Zionist ideas, in the form of his new conception of Jewish nationalism. He delineated its tenets in lectures and articles in the late 1890s. One of its principal elements was precisely the pessimistic emphasis on anti-Semitism’s gravity and permanence that had surfaced in the debate with Drumont. “Anti-Semitism,” Lazare affirmed now, “springing in part from religious pathology, will exist as long as Christianity exists.” He also stressed strongly the Jewish people’s pariah status, something that had struck him after the publication of Une erreur judiciaire. “We have
the longest history of persecution, ...” he noted. To this people of pariahs, an “acquiescence” to hatred is no longer acceptable. The French Jews “are the best anti-Semitic agents,” Lazare fulminated. “Instead of striking back at their enemies,” he went on, “... they ... make a virtue of their passive acquiescence in the evil and in their own cowardice. They extol the policy of silence and look upon time as a cure-all.” This culpable complacency must be replaced by a new militancy, a readiness to resist hatred and openly fight oppression. Basic human dignity required such a position. “An individual who forswears resistance,” declared Lazare, “and who does not know how to make use of the weapons at his disposal—such an individual abdicates his personality, consents to enslavement, and consequently deserves to disappear.”

The purpose of this new, combative stance would not be merely the overcoming of oppression. Nor would it be employed to foster assimilation: Lazare rejected the latter as a “bastard doctrine,” which ignored the permanence of a hatred that no amount of effacement of self-suicidal in itself—could destroy. The new militancy would be truly revolutionary and its ultimate aim would be to help fulfill a longstanding dream of Lazare’s—the establishment of global anarchy. “I believe,” he proclaimed, that some day mankind will be a federation of free groups, not organized in accordance with the capitalist system; free groups within which the distribution of wealth and the relations between labor and capital will be altogether different from what they are today. ...[T]hese groups must be given a chance to set themselves up and take shape. Why should the Jews not constitute one among them? I see nothing to prevent it, and it is in the development of Jewish nationalism that I see the solution of the Jewish question.
The “development of Jewish nationalism,” therefore, coincided with the trajectory of world history. As in *Antisemitism*, however, and despite his belief in anarchy’s advent, Lazare had no illusions about its nearness. A revolutionary “transformation” along anarchist lines, he noted, “seems to me still far away, alas!” What was necessary in the meantime was precisely to give the Jewish group “a chance to take shape.” This could be achieved through a thoroughgoing regeneration of Jewry, involving the recognition of the value of being Jewish and the proud affirmation of individual and collective Jewish identity. “...[W]e must not seek,” Lazare declared, “what the peoples among whom we dwell might expect of us; we must seek what we can extract from ourselves, and to this end we must not Christianize Judaism but, on the contrary, Judaize the Jew, teach him to live for, and to be, himself.” It was through an open struggle, and not through cowardly complacency, that the freedom to affirm Jewish identity, to embrace and enjoy being Jewish, was to be achieved and defended.

“Nationalism,” Lazare affirmed, “is for me the expression of collective liberty and the condition of individual liberty. I describe as a ‘nation’ an environment in which the individual can develop himself and expand in perfect fashion.” Lazare believed in the existence of a distinct Jewish nationality, one held together by an “identity of [biological] origin” and by bonds of religion, “a common history” and a common culture. Explaining his understanding of nationalism, he argued that the bonds, or “affinities,” within any national group “[create] the personality of the group.... In consequence of the collectivity’s reaction upon the individuals which make it up, the individual ... acquires a personality, and thus serves to augment the traits of the group to
which he belongs.” Lazare’s Jewish nationalism, therefore, was a militant call for the establishment of favorable conditions for this dialectical relationship to take place. Important for such a possibility was the creation of a national Jewish homeland. For Lazare, however, the question of Jewish territorial “autonomy,” as he called it, never overshadowed the priority of greater urgency—the recognition and affirmation of collective and individual Jewish identity, indeed, of basic Jewish dignity.

Based on recognition of Jewish worth, the Jewish identity Lazare envisioned was not to be a static self-perception with a strictly defined content. He had in mind an open-ended identity, an identity in motion as it were. “We call a nation free,” he argued, “when it can materially, intellectually, and morally develop itself, without any external trammels whatever being placed upon that development.” “For a Jew,” he further affirmed, “the word nationalism should mean freedom”—and, therefore, development. A most urgent aim of defenders of Jews should be to secure for individual Jews “the right to develop in their own fashion.” For Lazare, not development *per se*, but a development based on a new appreciation and a new creative use of the Jewish national heritage, would be the most desirable source of Jewish identity. Mechanically “absorb[ing] into himself ... the history, philosophy, literature, and art of the countries of which he became a citizen,” Lazare declared, the Jew “...will be a creator only on the day when he comes again to draw on Jewish sources, those wellsprings into which a Heine could dive so deep.”

Lazare’s Jewish nationalist views amounted to a militant call for a profound transformation of Jewry’s situation and self-perceptions. This call was addressed not to
the assimilated, wealthy Western Jews, but to oppressed Jews everywhere. For the assimilated Jewish bourgeoisie, which had turned its back on its wretched brethren, Lazare had only scathing contempt. The Jewish pariahs, he claimed, should proceed with their fight, ignoring—indeed ridding themselves of—assimilated bourgeois Jews. “What do we care,” he exclaimed, “about some hundreds of thousands of Jews.... They are happy where they are; let them remain there. ... We care nothing about them, on the contrary, we must pluck them from us, cast them aside as the filth which poisons us, which defiles us, which degrades us.” Lazare’s Jewish nationalism constituted above all a call for Jewish self-respect, for a defense of basic Jewish—and human—dignity. Dostoevsky, otherwise a virulent anti-Semite, remarked once: “We [Russians] have little sense of personal dignity, of necessary egoism.” A similar recognition of both the lack and the indispensability of dignity informed Lazare’s views. He did not need to elaborate theoretical proofs of the need for dignity, of the psychological or philosophical necessity of a healthy pride and self-respect, to justify his claim that “it is the duty of every human being who has been attacked to defend himself.” The validity of these words is still self-evident. What is no less certain is that, at a time when frenzied anti-Semites could attack Jewish people in the streets of French cities, voicing a militant call in defense of Jewry required a rare
courage.

A product of enormous courage, Lazare’s Jewish nationalism was far less coherent as a political doctrine. Above all, the theoretical framework of his views showed a badly impairing vagueness. As we saw, anarchists were averse to providing a rigorous outline of an anarchist future, thus making their ideas conceptually hazy. Such haziness, however, was something Lazare embraced. Talking about “the federative concept,” he acknowledged that “in its ideal development this theory conceives that the [groups] which will ... come together will be knit by virtue of affinities not entailed by any ethnological, religious, or national tradition.” Immediately after making this statement, he added, “But this is of little import as long as the theory allows for groups.” Instead of a serious reflection on the implications of a presence of nationalism in a global anarchist order, Lazare offered a casual “as long as the theory allows for groups.” The absence of a rigorous engagement—an all too anarchist gesture—destabilized the theoretical justification of his Jewish nationalism. Because of it, anarchism provided a rather spurious foundation, and the call for the formation of a Jewish group became markedly gratuitous. Its most solid basis remained the self-evident need for self-defense.

If the anarchist framework of Lazare’s views was rather liquid, his demands for Jewish self-assertion jarred with the context of the French Jewish community and its history. Emancipated by the Revolution, French Jews had, in their overwhelming majority, for more than a century accepted assimilation, endeavoring to assume a distinctly French identity. To people bent on assimilation, affirmations of Jewish
national and individual identity were bound to sound foreign, as indeed they did. By far more antagonistic, however, was Lazare’s unconcealed hatred for wealthy assimilated Jews. The cause of Jewish nationalism was not fostered by words such as these: “This Jewish bourgeoisie, rich and not Jewish, is our garbage, our rubbish; we must rid ourselves of it; and if it is unable to protect itself against anti-Semitism, it is not our job to help it, if for this purpose we must forswear higher ends.”

Lazare’s condemnation of wealthy assimilated Jews was not an isolated flourish, but a recurrent refrain of hatred. It amounted to a classist anti-Semitism, one echoing a long-standing socialist hatred of the Jewish capitalist. This prejudice did not only jeopardize the potential popular appeal of Lazare’s Jewish nationalism; it also had a special meaning in his life-long intellectual pursuits. In his youth, he had been a believer in assimilation, advocating the erasure of Jewish selfhood and the adoption of a French identity. His ideal of an assimilationist identity had been deeply defective—it had been linked to, perhaps even premised on, anti-Semitic hatred. The espousal of a French selfhood had involved a wild hatred of whole groups of Jews. This deviant pattern reappeared in Lazare’s Jewish nationalism, marring his inspired hopes. The call for a proud Jewish emergence had a dark side of its own—hatred of assimilated bourgeois Jews. Dignified and noble as it was, Lazare’s vision of Jewish identity was, yet again, linked to, and distorted by, hatred.

This persistence of hostility was compounded by another, more general continuity. In his youth, Lazare had openly expressed a hatred for the “hordes” of Eastern European Jews. Later, he had condemned as vehemently Talmudism, and held
Jews partly responsible for their suffering. Now, having embraced the cause of Jewish nationalism, he was ready to refuse help in the face of anti-Semitism to assimilated bourgeois Jews. Through all the tribulations of rethinking his views on the Jewish question, a hateful Jewish “other” always plagued his beliefs. Despite his moral courage and his genuine capacity for compassion for human plight, Lazare proved incapable of overcoming that other’s presence. The other repeatedly intruded into his engagement with Jewish issues, haunting it, reappearing almost compulsively in it, and critically debilitating it.

Conclusion: Meanings of a Pioneer’s Quest

Encountered for the first time in the early 1890s, the Jewish question remained Lazare’s main preoccupation until his death in 1903. His pioneering engagement with it was a tortuous struggle that lasted for more than a decade and involved many re-definitions of firmly-held convictions. This quest has many, crucial implications for subsequent engagements with the problems of anti-Semitism and Jewish identity, and for the work of the intellectuals examined in this study in particular.

Lazare’s book, *Antisemitism: Its History and Causes*, offered an important contribution to the subsequent study of anti-Semitism. His explanations articulated most of the themes that would occupy later intellectuals—and the ones examined here in particular—in their attempts to explain anti-Semitism. Lazare outlined a problematic, mapped a conceptual terrain that continues to shape scholarly understanding. Some of his insights, like his views on anti-Semitism and the state, are now largely ignored.
Others, like those relating to the psychology of hatred, would be modified and augmented, even beyond recognition, in the work of Proust and the Frankfurt School. Still others, like the perception of anti-Semitism’s religious roots and of the nexus between Christian religious and modern racist anti-Semitism have in part retained their heuristic value.

Also pivotal are the meanings of Lazare’s quest, specific to the intellectuals’ discourse considered here. His writings set a critical stage: they defined the thematic scope and general terms of the later engagements with anti-Semitism and Jewish identity. Generally speaking, Lazare viewed these two problems through historical and psychological lenses. His explanations of them were above all historical and psychological. He considered them in terms of history, and of psychology; he aspired to historical and psychological understanding. The subsequent confrontations with these issues were couched exactly in historical and psychological terms, broadly defined. Proust scrutinized hatred as an emotional enigma; the Frankfurt School struggled with anti-Semitism’s history and the anti-Semite’s psychological profile; Arendt too probed the history of anti-Semitism, while also analyzing the mental deficiencies of Nazis. Lazare’s writings were thus a key kernel. Eventually developed beyond recognition, it defined the basic terms and themes of what followed.

Lazare’s engagement with the Jewish question has even further crucial implications. These show key shifts in the discourse on anti-Semitism and Jewish identity considered here. And insofar as the views of the discourse’s creators were representative of those of European intellectuals in general, they reveal changes in the
latter’s attitudes towards anti-Semitism in the period between the Dreyfus Affair and the aftermath of the Second World War.\textsuperscript{139}

Critical here is the positivity in Lazare’s attitude towards hatred. Sometimes, he accepted anti-Semitic arguments seriously and felt a need to refute them in a rational debate. In an 1899 article, “Judaism’s Social Concept and the Jewish People,” he was ready to agree that anti-Semitic beliefs do not “deserve the trouble of being opposed, or even discussed,” but he still felt it necessary to dispel the equation of Jews with capitalism by showing that Jewish religious traditions encouraged agriculture and manual labor and opposed usury and that the “vast majority” of Jews were poor.\textsuperscript{140} In his book, he also granted truth-value to anti-Semitic stereotypes. Most importantly, he showed no qualms about writing anti-Semitic diatribes in his youth, and, even while formulating his Jewish nationalism, expressed openly his hatred of assimilated bourgeois Jews. What these examples reveal is that, at the fin-de-siècle, anti-Semitism represented an intellectual attitude that was fairly acceptable, that could be tolerated without much fear about its consequences. Indeed, a similar tolerant complacency would also surface in Proust’s work. In sharp contrast, the Frankfurt School treated anti-Semitism as a pathology of modern society, as a socio-psychological disease in urgent need of treatment. In interviews with research subjects, anti-Semitic pronouncements would be viewed as symptoms of an illness. For Arendt, too, tolerating anti-Semitism was unthinkable; she would see it as a tool of the most radical attempt at dehumanization in history. In the 1940s and after, even the most remote sign of tolerance of anti-Semitism became thus unacceptable.
But in Lazare’s case the tolerance—and espousal—of anti-Semitism have another momentous dimension. They were one of the factors that made him a man of his time, a representative of the French fin-de-siècle. Anti-Semitism at the time of the Affair was not a belief held by isolated misfits, but an organized movement with a large following, headed by an intellectual—the journalist and writer Drumont. It was an “intellectual” current that both anchored Lazare in his historical context, and exemplified the anchorage. The other current that made him a fin-de-siècle figure was of course anarchism, the voguish love of many in the French avant garde. What is crucial is that both of these contextualizing forces repeatedly obstructed Lazare’s sustained engagement with the Jewish question, subverting his efforts to formulate a coherent position on anti-Semitism and Jewish identity. We saw Lazare’s failures at three key junctures in his quest. At those points, either anti-Semitism, or anarchism, or both, disorganized his views and positions. He proved unprepared, incapable in crucial ways of confronting adequately anti-Semitism and the dilemmas of Jewish selfhood. And the roots of these failures were ideas that tied him to the context he inhabited—the intellectual and cultural landscape of the French, and European, fin-de-siècle. The forces that connected him to this pivotal setting thus also turned him into an inept interpreter of anti-Semitism and Jewish identity.

From a more general perspective, this pattern of disturbance was actually fateful. It re-appeared in the same disruptive fashion in the work of all the intellectuals examined in this study. “When we find,” observes the narrator in Proust’s Remembrance of Things Past, “that the systems of philosophy which contain the most truths were
dictated to their authors, in the last analysis, by reasons of sentiment, how are we to suppose that in a simple affair of politics like the Dreyfus case reasons of that sort may not, unbeknownst to the reasoner, have ruled his reason?"\textsuperscript{141} The hidden reasons Proust had in mind were a Jewish background, and what he tried to suggest—maliciously—was that Jews involved in the Affair might have been unwittingly driven to participation by their origins. The anti-Semitic overtones aside, Proust was suggesting that the foundation of all rational arguments, no matter how logically rigorous they may be, is ultimately non-rational, that therefore all rational arguments are bound to be inadequate.

Perhaps Proust is right, and what intellectuals say and write is always misguided. Perhaps their ideas and works are always failures. In any case, Proust’s view is certainly applicable to Lazare. Spanning more than a decade, Lazare’s engagement with the problems of anti-Semitism and Jewish identity showed critical, repeated flaws. The difference with him was that not cunning sentiments but firmly-held beliefs—ones also central to his thinking and tying him to his historical context—afflicted his arguments and intellectual positions. But there is, besides, a deep irony behind Proust’s remarks: his perception of the limited truth-value of philosophical insight is also applicable to his own work. And, as in Lazare’s case, not sentiments, but ideas that linked Proust too to the French and European \textit{fin-de-siècle}, as well as the consciously articulated views that made him into an exemplar \textit{par excellence} of modern European art, vitiated his own encounters with Jewish issues.
Notes

3 Denis Boak has compared Jean Barois to the German Bildungsroman.” Denis Boak, Roger Martin du Gard (Oxford: Clarendon, 1963), 30.
5 Ibid., 164.
7 Martin du Gard, Jean Barois, 132.
8 In her biography of Lazare, Nelly Wilson claims that, “Martin du Gard ... used Péguy’s portrait of Bernard-Lazare ... as a basis for creating Woldsmuth....” Wilson, Bernard-Lazare, 335. In a 1916 letter to Mme Henriette Charasson, however, Martin du Gard wrote, “I give you my word that not one of the characters in the book is a portrait.” Quoted in Schalk, Roger Martin du Gard, 41, n., 62. Wilson’s claim should be approached with caution, in that Woldsmuth is not an accurate portrait of Lazare and it is difficult to determine the extent to which Lazare served as a prototype for him. The concern with the plight of the Jews of Eastern Europe, however, was an important preoccupation of Lazare’s and readers of Jean Barois familiar with French politics could have recognized Lazare in the scene after the meeting at Barois’s apartment.
10 Wilson, Bernard-Lazare, 3-6, 8.
11 Ibid., 7, 289, n., 7; Bredin, Bernard Lazare, 21.
12 Wilson, Bernard-Lazare, 7-9.
13 Ibid., 8, 10-11.
14 Ibid., 11.
16 Bredin, Bernard Lazare, 29-30, 37, 67.
19 Wilson, Bernard-Lazare, 47-49.
20 George Woodcock, Anarchism: A History of Libertarian Ideas and Movements (Cleveland: Meridian, 1962), 61. Woodcock points out that historians of anarchism have tried to establish a much longer pedigree for the doctrine and the movement, finding, for example, “anarchist elements” in the teachings of Zeno. Ibid., 38.
21 Ibid., 13, 18, 22-24, 27, 33.
25 Quoted in Sonn, Anarchism and Cultural Politics, 184.
26 Ibid., 17; Weber, France, Fin de Siècle, 116.
Bernard Lazare, anarchiste et nationaliste juif (Paris: Honoré Champion, 1999), 18. Both Wilson and Oriol have emphasized the continuity and stability of Lazare’s commitment to anarchism.

Woodcock, Anarchism, 11-12, 107, 110, 113-115.


Woodcock, Anarchism, 11-12, 107, 110, 113-115.


Woodcock, Anarchism, 11-12, 107, 110, 113-115.


Woodcock, Anarchism, 11-12, 107, 110, 113-115.


Woodcock, Anarchism, 11-12, 107, 110, 113-115.


Woodcock, Anarchism, 11-12, 107, 110, 113-115.


Woodcock, Anarchism, 11-12, 107, 110, 113-115.


Woodcock, Anarchism, 11-12, 107, 110, 113-115.


Woodcock, Anarchism, 11-12, 107, 110, 113-115.


Woodcock, Anarchism, 11-12, 107, 110, 113-115.


Woodcock, Anarchism, 11-12, 107, 110, 113-115.


Woodcock, Anarchism, 11-12, 107, 110, 113-115.


Woodcock, Anarchism, 11-12, 107, 110, 113-115.


The phrase “conceptual tendencies” is a modification of Schorsch’s “conceptual trends,” used to describe the different ways of explaining German anti-Semitism in post-Second World War historiography. Schorsch, “German Antisemitism,” 257.


Wilson makes a very similar claim in her study of Lazare. As she puts it, “Je ne suis ni antisémite, ni philosémite”, wrote Bernard-Lazare in the preface to his controversial history. It would probably be fair to say that he is both.” Wilson, *Bernard-Lazare*, 90.

In general, Lazare claims, “[modern anti-Semitism] is essentially the sentiment of the middle classes,” assuming only the “form of a vague prejudice among the mass of the peasants and the working classes.” (A, 172) This is a claim that, for the French context at least, subsequent research has largely confirmed. Stephen Wilson, for example, has shown that, though present, anti-Semitism was not very popular among members of the peasantry and the working class in France at the time of the Dreyfus Affair. In contrast, anti-Semitism was “strong among [French] aristocrats” (272) and among the middle class. Wilson, *Ideology and Experience*, 270-279, 361, 400-402, 407-408, 426-428, 430-433, 735-737.

Lazare’s insistence on ambivalence in responses to the stranger was reiterated in later psychoanalytical studies. Otto Fenichel, in a pioneering article on the “Psychoanalysis of Antisemitism,” drew attention to the ambivalence evoked by Jewish “peculiarities,” which he thought existed in reality. To account for this ambivalence, Fenichel employed Freud’s concept of the “‘uncanny,’” explaining that what is experienced as uncanny calls up unconscious “impulses” that one has “repressed,” while those same impulses are often imputed to the uncanny person or object, giving rise to accusations of, for instance, “murder and incest.” Otto Fenichel, “Psychoanalysis of Antisemitism,” *American Imago* 1:2 (1940): 28-29, 31-32.


Ibid., 134.

Quoted in Katz, *From Prejudice to Destruction*, 133.


Quoted in Wistrich, “Introduction,” xv.


Anti-Semitism also distorted Lazare’s analysis of the political causes of anti-Semitism. His stress on the lack of assimilation was a modification of his earlier insistence on Jewish exclusiveness, applied to his contemporary context. True, the prejudice was subdued, as Lazare assigned greater responsibility for Jewish exclusiveness to discrimination. But, despite his retraction, the mere mention of Jewish peculiarities—let alone a belief in their importance—in an analysis that viewed them as a key cause of hatred carried anti-Semitic overtones. (A, 176-179)


Anti-Semitism, although not the exclusive reason for Dreyfus’s conviction, played a very important role in it, since, as Bredin has shown, his Jewish background fueled the suspicions of the officers investigating the treason. Bredin, The Affair, 46-47, 59-65. Even Nelly Wilson, otherwise very positive in her evaluation of the pamphlet, says that Lazare “questioned the authenticity of the bordereau” and that “the discovery, a year later, that Esterhazy had physically written the bordereau did not change Bernard-Lazare’s view.” Wilson, Bernard-Lazare, 138-139. Wilson thereby acknowledges both a mistake and an intransigence on Lazare’s part.

Bredin, The Affair, 175; Wilson, Bernard-Lazare, 142-144.

Bredin, The Affair, 175.

Wilson, Bernard-Lazare, 136-137.


Wilson, Bernard-Lazare, 158-159.

Quoted in Bredin, The Affair, 138.

I have borrowed the emphasis on Lazare’s pessimism, as revealed in the debate, from Nelly Wilson. Wilson, Bernard-Lazare, 208.


Quoted in Bredin, The Affair, 139.


Wilson, Bernard-Lazare, 207-208.


Ibid., 55.

Ibid., 55.


Wilson, Bernard-Lazare, 224-246.
Wilson’s discussion offers a brief account of the history of the lectures and articles.


Lazare, “Nationalism and Jewish Emancipation,” 84-88.

Lazare, “Jewish Nationalism,” 69.

Lazare, “Nationalism and Jewish Emancipation,” 82-84.


Lazare, “Nationalism and Jewish Emancipation,” 84-88.

Lazare, “Jewish Nationalism,” 70.

Ibid., 54-60. Lazare rejected the idea of a unified Jewish “race,” but accepted the existence of “several Jewish types,” whose “perenniality,” he claimed, “is beyond dispute.” Ibid., 56.

Ibid., 70-71.

Ibid., 73, 79; Lazare, “Nationalism and Jewish Emancipation,” 99, 105-107.

Lazare, “Jewish Nationalism,” 71, 73.

Lazare, “Nationalism and Jewish Emancipation,” 105-106.

Ibid., 95.

Ibid., 86-87.


Quoted in Marshall Berman, All That Is Solid Melts into Air: The Experience of Modernity (New York: Penguin, 1988), 173. I would like to thank Dr. Harold Mah for bringing to my attention Dostoevsky’s anti-Semitism.

Lazare, “Jewish Nationalism,” 69.

Ibid., 74.


This type of socialist anti-Semitism dates back to Charles Fourier. Poliakov, The History of Anti-Semitism, vol., 3, 364-379.

I owe most of the analysis of the changes in attitudes towards anti-Semitism to Dr. Harold Mah.


Chapter 4

Remembrance, and Lapses Therein: Marcel Proust on the Dreyfus Affair, Anti-Semitism and Jewish Identity

“It may well seem to you that social classes and generations have very little importance, and that what makes truth of character in Jean or in the Duc de Beauvisage consists in a kind of logic of the feelings which is as it were the common essence of humanity across the centuries. You may talk about the aristocrat of 1830, or the journalist of 1880, but like the chemist who knows that sulphur and phosphorous will always combine in the same proportions, you will reach the conclusion that behind and beneath all social differences the only fixed reality is the existence of feelings.”

–Marcel Proust, Jean Santeuil

“He [Proust] draws you into a hothouse atmosphere and keeps you there among the sophisticated orchids whose strange beauty is not nourished in the earth. Then suddenly through this delicious, heavy air darts a luminous arrow, a flash of lightning that, like the ray of the German doctor, is able to pass through bodies. In a flash the poet has penetrated the secret thought, the unavowed desire.”

–Anatole France, “Preface,” Pleasures and Days

Introduction

“He seized upon Du Côté de chez Swann and devoured it in a passion of curiosity and admiration. Here … he instantly recognized a new mastery, a new vision, and a structural design as yet unintelligible to him, but as surely there as hard bone under soft flesh in a living organism.” Thus Edith Wharton, recalling the impression that Proust’s Swann’s Way had made on a fellow writer and friend who had received from her a copy of it soon after its publication in November 1913. Wharton’s friend was no other than Henry James. James went so far as to say, in a letter he sent Proust, that “[Swann’s Way]
was the greatest French novel since [Stendhal’s *The Charterhouse of Parma*].”⁴ James was thus quick to notice the emergence of a powerful new talent on the European literary scene. And in this he would not be alone. Indeed, in 1919, Proust was awarded the Goncourt Prize for *Within a Budding Grove*. He at once became famous throughout France, and admiring French intellectuals acknowledged his genius.⁵ Proust himself claimed that “twenty” members of the Académie Française wrote to him, saying, “[w]hat a pity you have the Goncourt Prize, because we meant to award you our Grand Prix.”⁶

That *Remembrance of Things Past* is a masterpiece of twentieth-century French and European literature goes without saying. As we have noted, the untangling of its artistic and philosophical complexities has preoccupied some of Europe’s foremost intellectuals, and it has also generated a vast exegetical scholarship. Yet, despite this continuing interest, or perhaps because of it, anything approaching an interpretative consensus even about the general scope and intention of the novel has yet to emerge.

One of the phrases most often quoted by critics to describe Proust’s work is Painter’s assertion that it is a “creative autobiography.” As Painter puts it, “*A la Recherche* turns out to be not only based entirely on [Proust’s] own experiences: it is intended to be the symbolic story of his life, and occupies a place unique among great novels in that it is not, properly speaking, a fiction, but a creative autobiography.”⁷ Painter’s argument is perceptive and is warranted by the narrator’s assertion in *Remembrance* that the book is a “history” of an “invisible vocation.” (*RTP* 2, 412; *RTP* 3, 936) However, to describe Proust’s work primarily as an “autobiography,” albeit a “creative” one, is to limit significantly the possibilities for critical interpretation that
Remembrance contains. It is, in fact, difficult to avoid the suspicion that Painter’s claim might have been influenced by a need to justify his own endeavors of a creative biographer.

The best way of approaching Remembrance is to consider the numerous metafictional passages in the novel itself and in Proust’s other writings, which reveal what seem to have been Proust’s own perceptions about the nature and aims of his literary endeavor. One of these comments is found in Proust’s first novelistic experiment—Jean Santeuil—in the chapter bearing as its title the name of Jean’s friend Henri de Réveillon. Despite its title, the chapter narrates the path to social fame of Antoine Desroches and his wife, who is none other than Jean’s Aunt Louise. Before embarking on the description of Antoine Desroches’s social ascendency, the narrator notes, “[t]he chapter now to follow would be just as worthy of a place in a psychological work dealing with different varieties of human ambition or in an historical study of the last years of the nineteenth century as in this far more modest story of Jean Santeuil.” In a somewhat similar vein, in the novel’s last chapter, “History of a Generation,” where he provides a portrait of Madame Santeuil as a representative of middle-class women of her generation, the narrator inserts the following remark: “…you may decide that this chapter, boring though it may be as part of a novel, is amply instructive regarded as a chapter of social history.”

With a view to the place that Jean Santeuil occupies in Proust’s artistic development, André Maurois has compared it to “those early pictures by Cézanne and Van Gogh, which though far removed in manner from those painters’ masterpieces, give us … the pleasure of recognizing the promise that they both so magnificently fulfilled.”
Jean Santeuil is indeed a first study, an experimental adumbration of Proust’s artistic vision whose ultimate product would be Remembrance. At the time of its writing, Proust was clearly aware that a fundamental aim of his future endeavors as a writer would be to understand and portray the historical and social reality of his time, and to probe the psychological determinants of human behavior at the historical juncture of his own age. Even though Remembrance does not contain authorial remarks as explicitly didactic as those found in Jean Santeuil, it is aimed in part at providing a subtle historical, social and psychological analysis of Proust’s France. Proust would have been happy to hear one of his critics praising him in the early 1930s as “the greatest historian of the mores of the Third Republic we have had up to now.”

But while prodigiously perceptive, Proust’s is a peculiar type of history. In his study of Proustian Space, Poulet argues that Remembrance “asserts itself as a search not only for lost time, but also for lost space,” and that its temporality is spatialized, in the sense that Proust conceived of his work as “a series of pictures.” According to Poulet, the novel is not a proper “history” of France, but a “history of France in images.” Towards the end of Remembrance, haunted by the question of whether he will be able to finish writing his novel, the narrator (Marcel) asks himself: “[b]ut was not the recreation by the memory of impressions which had then to be deepened, illuminated, transformed into equivalents of understanding, was not this process one of the conditions, almost the very essence of the work of art as I had just now conceived it?” Bearing in mind this question and speaking metaphorically, I would add to Poulet’s claims that, in Remembrance, Proust creates a history of France in impressionist images and pictures. These, however, also exhibit a strong psychological
dimension, resembling in this way Oskar Kokoschka’s famous expressionist portraits in which the painter probed the innermost psychological worlds of his sitters.17

Contemplating Proust’s pictures, this chapter examines their method of representation and seeks to understand their content, to elaborate some of their meanings. Dissecting those of their aspects that study the Dreyfus Affair, anti-Semitism, and Jewish identity, it tries to uncover the artist’s interpretation of these three issues. More, it attempts to show how the aspects dealing with anti-Semitism and Jewish selfhood represented lapses in Proust’s ideas, points of stumbling in his thinking. They were places of failure, the chapter argues, not ones where the painter’s hand faltered, but ones where his outlook became strangely warped. And the sources of these distortions were parts of Proust’s thought that made him a representative of French and European art, culture, and ideas. They impaired his intellectual vision, transmuting literary genius into a faulty analyst of anti-Semitism and Jewish identity.

Proust and the Dreyfus Affair: Issues of Representation

The major event of fin-de-siècle France that preoccupies Marcel in Remembrance is the Dreyfus Affair.18 And this is not surprising, since Proust did not remain a passive observer but became involved in the crisis. He later boasted that “[he] was the first Dreyfusard” because he had gone “to ask Anatole France for his signature”19 for the 1898 “petition of the intellectuals.” Beginning on 10 January 1898, Marcel and Robert Proust, together with several friends, gathered at the Café des Variétés with a view to organizing a petition in support of Dreyfus. Within a few days, they managed to collect more than one hundred signatures. Within three weeks, the number rose to three
thousand, as many Sorbonne professors and prominent figures like the painter Monet lent their support. Then in February, Proust, carrying coffee and sandwiches, spent every morning at the Palais de Justice witnessing the proceedings of Zola’s trial for defamation of army officers—a result of “J’accuse.”

While the Affair thus preoccupied Proust as an intellectual engaged in French politics, its representation in his novel became for him an important intellectual and artistic problem. Serge Moscovici has pointed out that the Affair represents an integral part of the novel’s plot and that it “is approached in the middle of the novel, one is tempted to say at its core.” To substantiate this latter argument, Moscovici quotes the following excerpt from a 1920 letter by Proust to his friend Madame Straus:

[w]hat bothers me about this Guermantes way is that it looks so anti-Dreyfusard, by chance, because of the characters who appear in it. It is true that the next tome is so Dreyfusard that it will be a compensation, because the prince and princesse de Guermantes are Dreyfusard, and so is Swann, whereas the duc and duchesse are not.

Aside from the Affair’s locus, what the letter shows is that, to put it simply, it mattered enormously to Proust whether his novel would be Dreyfusard or not, what the attitude of his characters towards the Affair would be, and how the latter would be represented to and perceived by his readers. Evidently, Proust regarded the Affair as a central means of “character delineation,” to borrow a term from Seth Wolitz, and, more importantly, considered the exploration of the Affair’s impact on the world of his characters—and its impact on the society of fin-de-siècle France—to be one of his novel’s most significant themes.

At first sight, it appears that Proust’s representation of the Affair is somewhat peculiar. Nowhere in Remembrance does he provide a detailed description of the actual
events of the Affair. Indeed, in Jean Santeuil, the narrator depicts in much greater detail those events, dedicating to their description five chapters of the novel’s fifth section. In contrast, as critics have noted, in Remembrance Proust analyzes primarily the Affair’s political and social effects and its impact on the lives of his characters and on French society at large.

What has gone largely unnoticed by commentators is that this method of representation is not accidental, but is closely related to Proust’s ideas concerning historical and political truth. In the last chapter of the Affair’s description in Jean Santeuil, significantly entitled “The Truth of the Matter,” the narrator depicts a conversation between a count and a general, who has occupied a distinguished political post at the time of the Affair. Contrary to the count’s opinion, who thinks that Dreyfus has been innocent and Esterhazy guilty, the general expresses the view that neither of the two has been guilty of espionage. At the count’s inquiry as to who the culprit has been, the general replies, “That’s a question which I am afraid I can’t answer[..]” ... ‘He has never been mentioned in connection with the Affair, and only I, and the Duc de X, who was President of the Council in the government under which I served as War Minister, know it.’

Ironically, the name of the culprit is never revealed and only the unnamed general and the Duc de X remain in the know. Just before relating the general’s words, the narrator, commenting on the count’s unshakable belief in Esterhazy’s guilt, observes,

But the essential nature of history, what gives it a special and slightly equivocal charm, what makes it different from the merely topical, is that it never derives its authority from appearances, what makes it differ too from truth—which is an outcome of reasoning—because it is not a deductive process and hovers between truth and appearance, what makes of it something which is never to be found readily to hand, nor in the brain of the man of genius nearly so often as in that of the blear-eyed and experienced diplomat–can always demolish such certainties.
For Proust, history hovers between appearances and logical reasoning, incapable of yielding unequivocal truths and dependent on an act of interpretation.

A similar idea, now related to politics, is revealed in *Remembrance*, in the scene of Albert Bloch’s conversation with the diplomat M. de Norpois at the afternoon party at Mme de Villeparisis’s. Bloch is eager to find out the truth about the Affair from the experienced diplomat, who is supposedly acquainted with it. Marcel makes the following remarks about Bloch’s curiosity:

Naturally, Bloch thought that the truth in politics could be approximately reconstructed by the most lucid minds, but he imagined, like the man in the street, that it resided permanently, beyond the reach of argument and in a material form, in the secret files of the President of the Republic and the Prime Minister, who imparted it to the Cabinet. Whereas, even when a political truth is enshrined in written documents, it is seldom that these have any more value than a radiographic plate on which the layman imagines that the patient’s disease is inscribed in so many words, whereas in fact the plate furnishes simply one piece of material for study, to be combined with a number of others on which the doctor’s reasoning powers will be brought to bear and on which he will base his diagnosis. (*RTP* 2, 248-249)

The passage affirms the interpretative nature of truth in politics and denies the possibility of arriving at an irreducible piece of political and historical truth, an objective and “authentic” estimate of the nature of political events. Viewed in this light, the best, perhaps the only, possible way of examining an historical event is to try to understand its effects on people and their society at a particular historical juncture. Proust’s representation of the Affair in *Remembrance* is, thus, the kind of representation that is in the closest possible agreement with his understanding of history, politics, and historical and political truth.

Also relevant to the problem of Proust’s representation of the Affair are his views on, first, the means of obtaining historical and social insight and, second, the nature of
political passions. Commenting on Françoise’s belief in the necessity of always showing politeness in the description of her refusal to stay by the bedside of his dying grandmother, Marcel remarks, “[p]eople foolishly imagine that the broad generalities of social phenomena afford an excellent opportunity to penetrate further into the human soul; they ought, on the contrary, to realise that it is by plumbing the depths of a single personality that they might have a chance of understanding those phenomena.” (*RTP* 2, 342) Probing the psychological determinants of human behavior at a particular historical juncture represents a reliable means of understanding social and historical phenomena. It is exactly by exploring the psychology of his characters that Proust arrives at an understanding of the Affair as an historical event.

Proust’s ideas on political passions emerge in a key passage in *Time Regained.* Ruminating on his realization that the human mind endows objects, and reality in general, with meaning, Marcel goes on to reflect that this is particularly true in the case of love. He then suggests that a similar principle could be seen at work in politics. Commenting on the effect that Charlus’s germanophilia has had on him, he observes that it has shaken his belief in “the pure objectivity” of his own germanophobia. It “had helped,” he states,

to make me think that perhaps what applied to love applied also to hate and that, in the terrible judgment which at this time France passed on Germany—that she was a nation outside the pale of humanity—the most important element was an objectification of feelings as subjective as those which had caused Rachel and Albertine to appear so precious, the one to Saint-Loup and the other to me.

Extending further the simile between love and politics, he continues,

What, in fact, made it possible that this perversity was not entirely intrinsic to Germany was that, just as I as an individual had had successive loves and at the end of each one its object had appeared to me valueless, so I had already seen in my country successive hates which had, for example, at one time condemned as
traitors … those very Dreyfusards such as Reinach with whom to-day patriotic Frenchmen were collaborating against a race whose every member was of necessity a liar, a savage beast, a madman…. (RTP 3, 951)

In both love and hate, the most important principle at work is an objectification of feelings that endows the beloved or hated object with meaning. The mind re-creates the otherwise neutral object in accordance with the dictates of feelings, passions, or desire, and this principle holds true in both the realm of personal relationships and in that of politics. In particular, an individual’s attitudes towards events like the Dreyfus Affair spring from and are determined by conscious or unconscious feelings and desires that have little to do with the “objective” reality of the event. One of Marcel’s primary tasks in Remembrance is to dissect these emotions, to paint a portrait of the psychological and subjective determinants of the political passions unleashed by the Affair.

The Storm and Its Echoes: The Affair in Remembrance

Throughout Remembrance, Marcel shows, explicitly and implicitly, that the Affair has a profound and long-lasting impact both on people’s everyday lives and on French society at large. Virtually everyone in the novel, from the head waiter Aimé at Balbec to the Duc and Duchesse de Guermantes, takes sides and is influenced by the events of the Affair. More, these events occupy the characters’ imagination long after the Affair’s end, the memory of it still lingering even through the First World War.29 As Marcel observes parenthetically in his description of the Duc de Guermantes’s anger at his failure at the Jockey Club election, “the Dreyfus case was long since over, but twenty years later people would still talk about it, and so far only two years had elapsed.” (RTP 3, 32)
On the individual level, the Affair penetrates into the inmost core of the characters’ private universe. A character’s attitude towards it sometimes assumes such an importance as to become a veritable new cognitive standard for determining morality, propriety of conduct, and intellectual worth. At its most extreme, this is evident in Marcel’s description of Swann and his Dreyfusism. At the moment of his visit to the Duc and Duchesse de Guermantes before the reception at the Princesse de Guermantes, Swann is happy to hear that Robert de Saint-Loup is a Dreyfusard. Believing firmly in the Faubourg’s atavistic conservatism and reactionary convictions, Swann praises Saint-Loup’s intelligence. (RTP 2, 604) He is later disappointed to find out that Saint-Loup has abandoned his Dreyfusard convictions, but, having found support for his own Dreyfusism in no less a personage than the Prince de Guermantes, he is quick to praise the latter’s moral integrity, (RTP 2, 738) forgetting, at the same time, the Prince’s anti-Semitism, which he has condemned shortly before. (RTP 2, 603-604.) Similarly, Mme Bontemps, whom he has thought intelligent at the time of his marriage to Odette, becomes a fool, and Clemenceau, denounced in the past as corrupt and even as a British spy, becomes “a voice of conscience.” (RTP 2, 605) Even Swann’s literary tastes undergo a change, compelling him to dismiss Barrès as lacking any talent and praise Clemenceau for his mastery of the language. In short, as Marcel puts it, Swann “[subjects] all his admirations and all his contempts to the test of a new criterion, Dreyfusism.” (RTP 2, 605) For him, Dreyfusism becomes the sole standard of moral integrity and intellectual worth; indeed, it almost acquires the character of a blind prejudice which comes to dominate his attitude towards others.
The passions unleashed by the Affair–partly through their tendency to impose a new standard for judgment–also affect the characters’ everyday lives by altering the pattern of their friendships and intimate relationships. This is evident in the attitudes towards the Affair of members of Marcel’s own family, and in their relationship to Mme Sazerat–a Combray friend of long standing. Marcel’s father is an anti-Dreyfusard and refuses to speak to Marcel for a week after learning about his son’s Dreyfusard opinions. Unwilling to take either’s side, Marcel’s mother “preserve[s] an impartiality which she expresse[s] by silence.” The Affair clearly produces tensions in the family. These strains, however, remain within reasonable bounds and presumably do not last for long. In contrast, Mme Sazerat, who has always cherished “the most profound respect” for Marcel’s parents, returns only very coldly Marcel’s father’s greeting in the street and refuses to offer her hand to his mother at a social gathering. “As soon as she knew my father to be an anti-Dreyfusard,” Marcel remarks, “she put continents and centuries between herself and him.” (RTP 2, 153-154)

Another example of the Affair’s impact on people’s everyday lives is provided in Marcel’s encounter with the two butlers when he is on his way home after Charlus drops him off at his house following the afternoon party at Mme de Villeparisis’s. The Guermantes’s butler is an anti-Dreyfusard, whereas the butler at Marcel’s own house is a Dreyfusard. At the moment when Marcel overhears their conversation, they are arguing and the Guermantes’s butler contends that Dreyfus is innocent, while the other one says that he is guilty. “This was done,” explains Marcel, not to conceal their personal convictions, but from cunning and competitive ruthlessness. Our butler, being uncertain whether the re-trial would be ordered, wanted in case of failure to deprive the Duke’s butler in advance of the joy of seeing a just cause vanquished. The Duke’s butler thought that, in the event of a
refusal to grant a re-trial, ours would be more indignant at the detention of an innocent man on Devil’s Island. *(RTP 2, 307)*

Once again, the Affair breeds tensions in people’s everyday lives. In contrast to the case of Marcel’s family, however, this time its reverberations in society not only sow discord, but also occasion an outburst of malice and cruelty.

While some of the effects of the Affair at the individual level are negative, it also has positive ones. It provides, for example, an occasion for the formation of new friendships and closely-knit political groups. This is most clearly evident in Marcel’s portrayal of Bloch and his Dreyfusard friends, in the scene after Marcel and Saint-Loup make their way through the fog to the café which is the meeting place of both Saint-Loup’s and Bloch’s friends. Bloch and his friends, Marcel informs us, gather in the café to “explore the fugitive emotions aroused by the Zola trial.” To explain their new habit, Marcel remarks,

> [e]very mental excitement creating a value that overrides everything else, a quality superior to the habits bound up in it, there is no taste at all keenly developed that does not gather around it a society which it unites and in which the esteem of his fellows is what each of its members seeks before anything else from life. *(RTP 2, 415)*

The “mental excitement” of the Affair has resulted in the formation of a group of individuals united in their interest and attitudes towards the events of the day. This group is governed by a sense of camaraderie and is glued together by its members’ search for esteem from their fellows.

In addition to exploring the Affair’s effects on people’s everyday lives, Proust examines in even greater detail its impact on society at large. One of the broader effects of the Affair that is briefly considered in *Remembrance* is its influence on the French academic community around the turn of the century. It is not surprising that an
observation of this particular aspect of the Affair found its way in the novel, since, as we saw, Proust’s Dreyfusard involvement contributed to awakening the interest of many French intellectuals and professional academics. Commenting on the failure of some gifted members of the Guermantes set to pursue careers in a profession or in politics because they are regarded either as “men of fashion” or “reactionaries” because of their aristocratic origins, Marcel observes, “[u]nder the cap with its golden tassels, like the high priests in the canonical mitre of the Jews, the ‘professors’ were still, in the years that preceded the Dreyfus case, fast rooted in rigorously pharisaical ideas.” (RTP 2, 476) Marcel’s remark reveals that the Affair helped destroy what Proust perceived to be the musty conservatism of the French academic community and brought about a liberalization of the intellectual climate dominating France’s academic institutions before the last decade of the nineteenth century. The “professors’” rootedness in “rigorously pharisaical ideas” ends, presumably forever, with the political and social turmoil surrounding Dreyfus’s trial.31

The most general, immediate impact that the Affair has on society at large, and one that Proust explores in greatest detail, is that it serves as an occasion for the crumbling of hitherto solid social barriers. In Jean Santeuil, describing the spectacle of a foggy night in Paris and the joy of people who manage to take shelter into brightly lit cafés—a scene which was to find its way in an altered version in Marcel’s description of his visit to the café with Saint-Loup in Remembrance (RTP 2, 412-418)—the narrator observes that “unusual events are great bridgers of social distances.”32 As Marcel himself informs us in Remembrance, the Dreyfus Affair “broke down barriers” in the world of aristocratic society. (RTP 3, 236) Almost two decades after the publication of
the last part of *Remembrance*, Sartre, in *Anti-Semite and Jew*, would commend Proust for showing that “thanks to their hatred of Dreyfus, bourgeois families forced the doors of the aristocracy.” This particular kind of effect of the Affair, I would argue, is most clearly evident within the confines of *gentile* bourgeois and aristocratic society and, moreover, it is both as a “bridger of social distances” and also as a reason for their expansion that the Affair is portrayed in *Remembrance*.

The novel abounds in examples of the Affair’s serving as a “bridger” of social distances. The Duchesse de Guermantes’s contemptuous comment at Mme de Villeparisis’s party is a clear case in point. “I went to see Marie-Aynard a couple of days ago,” says the Duchesse. “It used to be so nice there. Nowadays one finds all the people one has spent one’s life trying to avoid, on the pretext that they’re against Dreyfus, and others of whom you have no idea who they can be.” (*RTP* 2, 245) The contempt and malice of her remarks notwithstanding, the Duchesse’s comment reveals that people not belonging to the aristocracy have been able to obtain access to the social summit of the Faubourg Saint-Germain because of their anti-Dreyfusard convictions. In this instance, anti-Dreyfusism does indeed serve as a powerful “bridger” of social distances.

The behavior of the Prince de Guermantes during the narrator’s second stay at Balbec provides a similar example, with the difference that it is Dreyfusism that brings about a blurring of social distinctions between the aristocracy and the bourgeoisie. The Prince, from being an ardent anti-Dreyfusard, has come to believe in the innocence of the Captain after having been informed of illegalities committed at the time of the trial. At the Balbec seaside, Marcel relates, men from the aristocracy, in the absence of their wives, often disregard social distinctions and the requirements of etiquette and visit
Mme Verdurin’s bourgeois salon at la Raspelière. For the Prince de Guermantes, the absence of his wife is not an incentive lucrative enough to induce him to condescend to pay a visit to the Verdurins’ salon. However, he cannot resist the “magnet of Dreyfusism” which is “so powerful as to carry him at one stroke up the steep ascent to la Raspelière, unfortunately, on a day when the Mistress [is] not at home.” \((RTP\ 2,\ 1078)\)

Once again, the Affair destroys the social gap between the aristocracy and the bourgeoisie, compelling such a distinguished member of the Faubourg as the Prince de Guermantes to disregard social distinctions and honor the Verdurin salon with his presence.

While the Affair contributes to the blurring of distinctions, it also has the opposite effect of increasing social distances. Nowhere is this presented in a clearer fashion than in the attitude of Robert de Saint-Loup. Saint-Loup, chiefly as a result of his love affair with the former prostitute and aspiring actress Rachel, takes the side of the accused Captain and comes to believe in his innocence. The immediate result of his Dreyfusism is the negative attitude of his fellow officers in his regiment at Doncières. \((RTP\ 2,\ 107-108)\) In society, his Dreyfusism instantly erodes his social status and he incurs the severe disapproval of most of the Faubourg’s members. At the party at Mme de Villeparisis’s, the Duc de Guermantes remarks that “when one goes by the name of ‘Marquis de Saint-Loup’ one isn’t a Dreyfusard.” \((RTP\ 2,\ 242)\) Marcel mocks the Duc for the triteness of his remark and derides his unselfconscious exaggeration of the title of Marquis. \((RTP\ 2,\ 242-243)\) But, from the point of view of the Faubourg, the Duc’s obtuse words sound cynically true, since, as he relates himself, when the members of the aristocratic Jockey Club “[hear] of [Saint-Loup’s] goings on … there [is] a fine
gathering of the clans, a regular hue and cry.” (RTP 2, 241) Saint-Loup’s social status is clearly damaged by his Dreyfusism, and while it is presumably helpful to him in the lower milieu of Rachel and her friends, the social distance between himself and the Faubourg increases significantly.

In very general terms, Dreyfusism and anti-Dreyfusism divide France “from top to bottom” into two opposite camps. (RTP 2, 307) The members of those camps are united by their political convictions and disregard the rules of social status. However momentarily, the stance adopted towards the Affair becomes the overriding principle of social inclusion and exclusion, replacing deeply ingrained norms of conduct and social distinction.

As Marcel’s comments mentioned above suggest, probing the psychological determinants of human behavior at a certain historical juncture provides, for Proust, an indispensable means of arriving at historical insight. Understanding those determinants regarding the Affair is certainly one of Marcel’s tasks in the novel. In her analysis of the narrator’s disengagement from the events he portrays, Lynn Wilkinson points out that, in the “milieux depicted [in The Guermantes Way] … race, social position, economic interest, and sexual desire determine one’s always limited and misguided opinion on the subject [of the Dreyfus Affair].” Wilkinson is right in arguing that the characters’ attitudes towards the Affair are “always limited and misguided,” but her contention about the determinants of their behavior is somewhat problematic. Perhaps understandably, since the contention is made in passing, she does not provide an in-depth examination of the characters’ attitudes. The lack of a more detailed analysis, however, is regrettable, as Proust provides a much more complicated portrayal of the
determinants of his characters’ attitudes and views on the central political event of the fin-de-siècle depicted in the novel.

To understand these, we must first note that Proust draws a distinction between what seem to be the “genuine” opinions of some of his characters, and the opinions which other ones overtly adopt but which do not correspond to their inner, presumably true convictions. Indeed, some of the characters, most notably Bloch, Saint-Loup, the Duc de Guermantes, Swann and the Prince de Guermantes, adopt an attitude towards the Affair that presumably springs from firm inner beliefs or is based on sound reasoning. Other characters, such as the two butlers and Mme Swann, proclaim an attitude that is the opposite of their inner, presumably real convictions, which remain unstated and hidden. Usually, these latter characters openly adopt Dreyfusism or anti-Dreyfusism in a manipulative way, and they do so for four main reasons: economic interest, social ambition, envy, malice and cruelty.

We have seen the discrepancy between putatively genuine belief and disingenuous avowal of opinion in the case of the two butlers encountered by Marcel after the party at Mme de Villeparisis’s. The example of the butlers is also instructive with respect to Proust’s idea that economic interest, social ambition, and malice and cruelty represent key psychological determinants of behavior at the time of the Affair. As Marcel himself points out, it is “cunning and competitive ruthlessness” that drive the Dreyfusard butler at Marcel’s house to proclaim his belief in Dreyfus’s guilt and the anti-Dreyfusard Guermantes butler to voice his belief in Dreyfus’s innocence. At the same time, nothing other than malice and cruelty constitute the root of both the desire of the Guermantes butler to deprive his colleague of indulging in just indignation and the
contrary wish of the butler at Marcel’s house to destroy in advance the other’s joy, in itself malicious, of witnessing the triumph of injustice.

The role of social ambition in determining the characters’ disingenuously avowed positions on the Affair is revealed most clearly in Marcel’s portrayal of Mme Swann. Odette, as Marcel remembers at the sight of her at Mme de Villeparisis’s party, “[has] been the first to assure [him] that she [is] convinced of Dreyfus’s innocence.” (RTP 2, 272) Yet, despite her convictions, she prefers to keep her Dreyfusism secret and, what is more, exploits Swann’s Dreyfusism to further her own social ambitions. Afraid “that her husband’s racial origin [may] be used against [her],” she “[beseeches] him never … to allude to the prisoner’s innocence,” and “[professes] the most ardent nationalism” in his absence at social events. (RTP 2, 260) In his presence, through her silence and passivity, she exploits and benefits from Swann’s Dreyfusism. Firm in his Dreyfusard convictions, Swann chooses to disregard etiquette and civility at social gatherings and starts parading his disgust with what he perceives to be the pervasive anti-Semitism of high society. When Odette seeks an introduction to “a nationalist lady,” he cannot help forbidding her openly to be introduced to “anti-semites.” (RTP 2, 774) His conduct turns him into a laughing stock in the Faubourg, but it spurs the curiosity of society people, who “are not accustomed to such pride or to such ill-breeding,” with the result that Odette soon becomes one of the most sought-after ladies. (RTP 2, 774-775) Odette is not in the least disturbed by her husband’s indulgence in socially unacceptable pronouncements. Not abandoning her quest for social eminence, she simply ignores Swann’s blunders and is only too satisfied to notice the bolstering of her social position
and prestige. For Odette, social ambition definitely gains priority over inner convictions and family loyalty.

While economic interest, social ambition and malice and cruelty are the main determinants of the behavior of the characters that publicly adopt opinions in opposition to their convictions, “race,” class and caste prejudice, and sexual desire constitute factors that govern the adoption of “genuine” Dreyfusism or anti-Dreyfusism.\(^{36}\) Bloch and Swann, we might recall, are the two staunchest Dreyfusards in the novel and both are of Jewish origin, Bloch being completely Jewish and Swann a third-generation convert to Catholicism. We have seen that, for Swann, Dreyfusism becomes a new standard for judging moral and intellectual integrity, almost a new prejudice determining his attitude towards people. Yet, Marcel never affirms unequivocally that Swann’s Jewishness is the only source of his Dreyfusism. In contrast, he is much more explicit in suggesting that race is the major factor influencing Bloch’s attitude. In one of the memorable passages of *Remembrance*, Marcel wonders whether what is true of “systems of philosophy” may not also be true of rational arguments behind political opinions, namely, that they are determined by “sentiment.” He then goes on to describe Bloch’s Dreyfusism. “Bloch,” he says, “believed himself to have been led by a logical chain of reasoning to choose Dreyfusism, yet he knew that his nose, his skin and his hair had been imposed on him by his race. Doubtless, the reason enjoys more freedom; yet it obeys certain laws which it has not prescribed for itself.” *(RTP 2, 307)* There is a space of silence and equivocation in Marcel’s initial rhetorical question about the role of sentiment in the formation of political opinions. But his subsequent insistence on the existence of “certain laws”
outside of reason leaves little doubt that ethnic origin exerts a preponderant impact on Bloch’s Dreyfusism.

Another key influence on the characters’ attitudes towards the Affair is class and caste prejudice. This is evident from the meticulous, general picture that Marcel draws of the conflicting attitudes towards Dreyfus’s trial. The aristocratic Faubourg Saint-Germain is predominantly anti-Dreyfusard. With the notable exceptions of Saint-Loup at the time of his liaison with Rachel, the Prince and Princesse de Guermantes after their discovery of the “truth” about Dreyfus, and, later, the Duc de Guermantes’s conversion to Dreyfusism, the majority of the Faubourg’s members are anti-Dreyfusards and remain so throughout. The army is the other main bastion of anti-Dreyfusism, with the majority of the officer corps being firmly convinced of Dreyfus’s guilt. The provincial nobility, represented by the Cambremers, is also anti-Dreyfusard, whereas the haute bourgeoisie salon of Mme Verdurin is the social center of Dreyfusism. The bourgeoisie as a whole adopts an ambivalent attitude towards the Affair, with, as we have seen, Marcel’s own father being an anti-Dreyfusard and the member of the Combray bourgeoisie Mme Sazerat a Dreyfusard. Similarly, as the quarrel between the two butlers reveals, there is no consistency of attitudes among the working classes.

As this general picture suggests, prejudice plays a preponderant role in determining the attitudes of the members of the Faubourg. Saint-Loup’s Dreyfusism creates “a regular hue and cry” at the Jockey Club and there is no other way to explain the indignation of the “clans” than deeply ingrained aristocratic prejudice. Similarly, in his confession to Swann about his conversion to Dreyfusism, the Prince de Guermantes admits that his deep faith in France’s army has prevented him from believing initially in
Dreyfus’s innocence. (*RTP* 2, 734) He refrains from sharing his subsequent conversion with his wife for fear of offending her “nationalistic opinions.” (*RTP* 2, 737) The Princesse, on her part, is “afraid of alarming [his] religious opinions, [his] patriotic sentiments.” When the abbé tells the Prince that, like the latter, somebody else has also asked him to say a mass for Dreyfus, the Prince is unable to believe, at first, that a Catholic can be a Dreyfusard and, then, that the person can belong to the Faubourg. (*RTP* 2, 736-737) Evidently, their common deep-seated nationalism and the Prince’s religious beliefs and faith in the army exert a powerful impact on the Prince and Princesse’s initial anti-Dreyfusism. As Swann’s remarks to Marcel after retelling the Prince’s confession suggest, it is only after “travelling” an enormous distance that the Prince “reach[es] his [Dreyfusard] position.” (*RTP* 2, 737)

Caste prejudice is also the fundamental determinant of the attitudes of the members of the other major bastion of anti-Dreyfusism, the army. At the dinner with the Guermantes, one of those present is General de Beaufreillis. After the Duchesse’s little lecture on Victor Hugo, the Princesse de Parme mentions the name of Zola. Surprisingly, the general’s face remains impassive. “The General’s anti-Dreyfusism,” Marcel explains, “[is] too deep-rooted for him to seek to give expression to it.” (*RTP* 2, 516) The general’s anti-Dreyfusism is a matter of course, and the prejudices of the army make his adoption of an opinion contrary to the one prevalent among the officer corps impossible.

At first sight, it appears that something akin to determinism is at work behind Proust’s exploration of the impact of race and class and caste prejudice on the characters’ attitudes towards the Affair. Indeed, the description of Bloch’s beliefs
suggests what one might call “racial” or “ethnic” determinism. And likewise, “class” and “caste” determinism seems to emerge from his portrayal of the anti-Dreyfusism of the Faubourg Saint-Germain and the army. In both cases, Proust comes close to denying any form of rationality or individual will, and to proclaiming that ancestry irrevocably conditions one’s choices. In fact, a passage from Marcel’s rumination on the future changes in the faces of the “budding grove” of girls at Balbec points even more explicitly to a deterministic explanation of the emergence of Dreyfusism and anti-Dreyfusism. At this particular moment, Marcel is thinking that the now adorable faces of the girls will almost certainly assume the “deplorable” features of some female relative of theirs, the emergence of the defect being determined, without their knowing it, by the force of heredity. The defect’s appearance, “unforeseen, inevitable,” is similar to “a burst of Dreyfusism or clericalism or patriotic feudal heroism, emerging suddenly in answer to the call of circumstance from a nature anterior to the individual himself…. “(RTP 1, 952) Shortly after the simile, Marcel remarks: “[e]ven mentally, we depend a great deal more than we think upon natural laws, and our minds possess in advance … the characteristic that we imagine ourselves to be selecting.” (RTP 1, 953) But it is inaccurate to suggest that Proust was a thoroughgoing determinist. He does stress the role of ethnicity, class or caste, but he is also unwilling to assign to it an all-embracing significance. At the very least, with respect to the Dreyfus Affair, many of his characters escape from the grip of their race or caste and adopt opinions for reasons that have little to do with their origins or ancestry. What is more, as we have seen and as the discussion below suggests, Proust is interested primarily in exposing those factors, which, without their being aware of them, influence the characters’ attitudes and opinions. If his novel is
tinged by determinism, it also exhibits as pronouncedly Proust’s desire to reveal his characters’ unawareness of the origins of their views, political passions and choices.

One of the factors that prevent characters from succumbing to the dictates of their race or caste regarding the Affair is sexual desire. In particular, it constitutes the main reason for the metamorphoses of Saint-Loup and the Duc de Guermantes. In fact, behind the portrayal of their attitudes, there transpires a different kind of “determinism” on Proust’s part, a travesty of determinism as it were, where amorous passion and physical desire become the major factors governing the characters’ political choices.

Saint-Loup, as we saw, is initially the only member of the Faubourg who is a convinced Dreyfusard. His Dreyfusism is the direct result of his love affair with Rachel, who imparts to him her belief in the prisoner’s innocence. As Marcel remarks in the description of their fight about the Boucheron necklace, Robert “[is] indebted to the actress” for his Dreyfusism. (RTP 2, 182) His Dreyfusism disappears with the end of their affair, and he even admits to Swann his regret at ever having gotten involved in this “bad business.” (RTP 2, 724)

The Duc de Guermantes’s sensational conversion to Dreyfusism is also brought about by amorous desire. After the reception at the Princesse de Guermantes’s, the Duc spends three weeks at a spa taking a cure for his bladder. On his return, to the “speechless amazement” of those familiar with his “fanatical” anti-Dreyfusism, he professes his belief in Dreyfus’s innocence. (RTP 2, 766) The reason for his conversion, Marcel explains, is his encounter with “three charming ladies”—“an Italian princess and her two sisters-in-law”—who have shattered his former convictions and turned him into an ardent Dreyfusard. (RTP 2, 766-767) Ironically, having openly condemned Robert for
his Dreyfusard beliefs at Mme de Villeparisis’s party, he finds himself in his nephew’s situation. The difference, of course, is that three ladies take the place of Rachel. But then, to change his political allegiances, a Duc perhaps needs more muses than a mere Marquis.

The final main factor that determines the characters’ convictions on the Affair, and compels them to escape the vise of their caste, is political “truth.” It is perhaps surprising that truth is only one among many determinants of political opinion. But given Proust’s ideas about the possibility of historical and political truth, it is more surprising that truth should have a place at all among the factors behind Dreyfusism and anti-Dreyfusism. Indeed, Proust’s portrayal of the opinions that are supposedly based on truth is one of Remembrance’s most intriguing aspects.

The only character in the novel that seems to arrive at an objective opinion regarding Dreyfus’s guilt is the Prince de Guermantes. Even his wife’s attitude is based on her reading of L’Aurore and not on any irrefutable evidence. (RTP 2, 737) The Prince receives reliable information from General de Beauserfeuil about “culpable intrigues” at the time of Dreyfus’s trial and the two of them soon find out that the “overwhelming proof of his guilt”—the “Henry document”—is a forgery.” (RTP 2, 734) After the discovery, the Prince has no choice but to become a Dreyfusard.

In historical fact, the fraudulent proof was a letter from the Italian military attaché to Colonel von Schwarzkoppen, forged by Commandant Henry to incriminate Dreyfus by identifying him as a spy.42 The forgery was committed after Dreyfus’s original conviction, and its subsequent discovery led to its author’s suicide. The Prince’s Dreyfusism is then based on truth, in the sense that a key piece of evidence against
Dreyfus was fabricated, and exposed as such. But what is crucial to note is that, ultimately, Proust does not provide—within the novel—an unequivocal proof of the veracity of the General’s evidence. It is historical hindsight and familiarity with the events of the trial that enable the reader to determine that the Prince’s Dreyfusism is actually based on truth. Without recourse to the extra-textual evidence of the historical record, it is difficult to determine whether the Prince’s changed attitude is not as misplaced as those of the other characters. Marcel, instead of presenting the Prince’s story directly, chooses to have Swann, for whom Dreyfusism has already become a new form of prejudice, retell the Prince’s confession to him. It is difficult to avoid the suspicion that Swann may not be retelling the story “word for word.” (RTP 2, 731) Even if he is, the Prince’s story and the evidence that he claims to have found out are difficult to distinguish from the story that Aimé relates to Marcel at Balbec and the evidence that Aimé possesses and that is the justification for his own anti-Dreyfusism. Having brought the “latest list of visitors” to Marcel’s room, Aimé, Marcel informs us, “[can] not go away without telling [him] that Dreyfus [is] guilty a thousand times over.” Aimé then explains, “‘It will come out, … not this year, but next. It was a gentleman who’s very thick with the General Staff who told me.’” (RTP 1, 864) Both the Prince de Guermantes and Aimé rely on inside information coming from persons intimately familiar with the conduct of Dreyfus’s trial. The pieces of information that each one possesses are diametrically opposed, one of them revealing Dreyfus’s innocence, the other one proving his guilt. Historical hindsight and familiarity with the Affair show that the Prince’s evidence is more trustworthy, but there is definitely an unresolved tension in Proust’s portrayal of attitudes based on sound evidence and political truth. This tension, this
blurring of distinctions between true and false evidence, reveals, once again, that Proust questions the very possibility of forming political opinions based on truth. He deliberately destabilizes the opposition between genuine and disingenuously adopted beliefs, thereby implying that perhaps all of his characters’ attitudes are misplaced and spring from sources that have little to do with justice, historical and political truth, or personal sincerity. Factors such as prejudice, ethnic background, sexual desire, ambition, malice and cruelty assume much greater importance in determining the characters’ attitudes towards the Affair. Ultimately, Marcel leaves us wondering whether any of those factors may not have influenced the Prince de Guermantes in adopting Dreyfusism and Aimé in espousing anti-Dreyfusism.

Proust and Anti-Semitism

Like the consideration of the Dreyfus Affair, the exploration of the effects and historical and psychological determinants of anti-Semitism constitutes one of Remembrance’s major themes. In the novel, Proust provides a vivid portrayal of anti-Semitism’s rise and effects, and offers a meticulous analysis of its origins. From a biographical perspective, his interest in the problem of anti-Semitism, like his interest in the Affair, is not surprising. As is well known, Proust’s mother was Jewish and the enormity of his love for her is proverbial. Moreover, his coming to terms with his Jewish origins and identity would remain problematic throughout his life. As an intellectual of partly Jewish origin for whom his own Jewish identity was problematic, Proust was directly affected by the rise of anti-Semitism in fin-de-siècle France.
We have seen that, instead of providing a description of the events surrounding Dreyfus’s trial, Proust portrays the Affair’s effects on individuals’ private lives and on French society at large. One of the Affair’s most ostensible effects is that it contributes to the rise of anti-Semitism and serves as an occasion for its eruption. The Duchesse de Guermantes’s indignation at the leveling effects of the Affair also reveals that, at the time of it, anti-Semitism was markedly on the rise. “... I do think it perfectly intolerable,” she proclaims before stating her indignation, “that just because they’re supposed to be right-thinking and don’t deal with Jewish tradesmen, or have ‘Down with the Jews’ written on their sunshades, we should have a swarm of Durands and Dubois and so forth, women we should never have known but for this business, forced down our throats by Marie-Aynard or Victurnienne.” (RTP 2, 245) Before the Affair, it is quite inconceivable to imagine the words “Down with the Jews” written on the sunshades of the characters. At the time of the trial, such a sign has become acceptable; it has actually become an everyday occurrence.

The Duchesse de Guermantes’s malicious remark is also germane to Proust’s portrayal of anti-Semitism’s effects on French society. In particular, like Dreyfusism and anti-Dreyfusism, anti-Semitism too serves as a “bridger” of social distances within gentile society. The Duchesse’s words reveal that people who, prior to the Affair, could never hope to gain access to the Faubourg are able because of their anti-Semitism to penetrate its world. Women whom she “should have never known” become her acquaintances because of the “business” of the Affair and their anti-Semitic convictions. To use Sartre’s language, in Remembrance, “anti-Semitism [brings] the duke closer to his coachman.”45
Anti-Semitism, again like Dreyfusism and anti-Dreyfusism, also has the effect of increasing social distances. But the kind of distance that is most visibly increased is not found within gentile society. Rather, it is the distance between aristocratic society and its Jewish members. Before the outbreak of the “Dreyfus storm,” at the time when Marcel is in love with Gilberte and starts to visit Mme Swann’s home, “some of the more prominent Jews [are] extremely powerful.” In particular, Swann’s aunt Lady Israels uses her enormous influence to prevent Odette from gaining access to the highest circles of Parisian society. In contrast, at the time of the Affair, “[e]verything Jewish … [goes] down, and various obscure nationalists [rise] to take its place.” (RTP 1, 557-558) The social status of the Jews, as a group, is irretrievably damaged by the Affair. From the point of view of acceptance and social success in the Faubourg, they are the ones who suffer the greatest damage, and even the wealthiest among them are gradually excluded from aristocratic society. As Marcel remarks, they are “relegated … to the lowest rung of the social ladder.” (RTP 2, 194)

In contrast to his portrayal of Dreyfusism and anti-Dreyfusism, Proust presents anti-Semitism as an all-pervasive characteristic of almost all classes and castes of gentile society. He does not describe in great detail the attitudes towards Jews of the lower social classes, but he leaves little doubt that the higher ones—the aristocratic Faubourg, the provincial nobility, and the bourgeoisie—are predominantly anti-Semitic.

At the time of the Affair, the aristocratic Faubourg becomes a veritable bastion of anti-Semitism. Charlus, (RTP 2, 297-299) the Duchesse, Duc and Prince de Guermantes exhibit a deeply-ingrained and constant anti-Semitism, and the liberally-minded Saint-Loup himself (RTP 3, 782) cannot refrain from uttering an occasional anti-Semitic
remark. Even the conversion to Dreyfusism of some of the Faubourg’s members, like the Duc and Prince de Guermantes, does not affect their anti-Semitism in the least. The Prince’s anti-Semitism is “founded on principle” (RTP 2, 693) and remains unchanged, while the Duc’s is actually intensified as a result of his defeat at the Jockey Club election. (RTP 3, 34-35)

Like the Faubourg, the provincial nobility is also markedly anti-Semitic. In the scene of the evening at the Verdurins’ at la Raspelière, M. de Cambremer openly admits that a cousin of his is a convinced anti-Semite. M. de Cambremer himself praises a Jewish colonel for his benevolent attitude towards the cousin, but he indulges in praise “out of courtesy” to Marcel, whom he thinks to be a Dreyfusard, and behind his disingenuous praise there seem to lurk opinions very similar to those of his cousin. (RTP 2, 998-999)

The representatives of the bourgeoisie are as firm in their anti-Semitism as those above them on the social ladder. Marcel’s own grandfather, like his neighbor Mme Sazerat, displays a rather strong prejudice. At Combray, he always disapproves of Marcel’s Jewish friends. Even though Marcel insists that his grandfather has nothing against them “on principle,” the grandfather invariably finds his grandson’s friends objectionable, thereby undermining Marcel’s assertion that he is free from prejudice and revealing himself only as less anti-Semitic than Mme Sazerat but quite prejudiced nonetheless. Marcel’s beloved Albertine, irritated by Bloch’s effusive declaration of his plan to visit Saint-Loup at Doncières, on hearing Bloch’s name, exclaims, “I would have betted anything he was a Jew-boy. Typical of their creepy ways!” (RTP 1, 941) Like the prejudices of their aristocratic counterparts, the anti-Semitism of some of the
bourgeois is not weakened by their Dreyfusim, even if they are among the most ardent of Dreyfus’s supporters. At the time of the Affair, the “latent bourgeois anti-semitism” of the convinced Dreyfusard Mme Verdurin “[awakes] and [grows] to a positive fury.” (RTP 2, 260) Similarly, her Dreyfusard convictions do nothing to alter Mme Sazerat’s prejudices. In the days of Marcel’s childhood, she is “so anti-Semitic” as to be “indignant with [his] parents for having young Bloch in the house.” At the time of the Affair, M. Bloch senior is quick to notice that she still “‘has the prejudice.’” (RTP 2, 299)

The primary determinant of the anti-Semitism of many of the aristocrats and bourgeois in Remembrance seems to be inheritance and the long tradition of aristocratic and bourgeois anti-Jewish prejudices. Nothing else can explain the anti-Semitism of the Prince de Guermantes, which he cherishes “on principle.” In his case, being anti-Semitic is synonymous with being one of the foremost aristocrats of his time. Similarly, her “latent bourgeois” anti-Semitism represents an inherent aspect of the outlook of Mme Verdurin. Mme Sazerat’s anti-Semitism is also a given, an integral part of the spirit of Combray as it were, and the same is true about Marcel’s grandfather’s prejudice towards his grandson’s friends. We have seen that, in exploring his characters’ attitudes towards the Dreyfus Affair, Proust comes close to a deterministic elevation of the environment, whether that be class or ethnic origins, as the main factor in the formation of one’s views. But while he is willing to allow some degree of freedom, even if illusory, to some of his characters with respect to the Affair, he is far more deterministic in his portrayal of the anti-Semitism of gentile society. As we shall see below, some characters espouse and display anti-Semitism for a number of reasons, but their inherent and inherited anti-
Semitic prejudice is constantly present, a permanent backdrop as it were, lurking behind their words and actions. Stephen Wilson is thus partly right—partly, as this is not Proust’s only explanation of anti-Semitism—in suggesting that Proust “seems to regard [anti-Semitism] as something perennial, always latent, occasionally erupting.”

Some of the remarks that Marcel makes during his visit to Saint-Loup at Doncières provide a key clue to Proust’s elevation of the environment as the main force behind the transmission and inculcation of anti-Semitism. In the scene at Doncières, one of Saint-Loup’s friends is talking to Marcel about the political convictions of the only other officer, in addition to Saint-Loup, who is a Dreyfusard. To the delight of Saint-Loup, Marcel observes, “[d]on’t you think … that the influence we ascribe to environment is particularly true of an intellectual environment. Each of us is conditioned by an idea.” Presumably, Marcel’s words are intended as a commentary on Saint-Loup’s friend’s Dreyfusism and the latter’s family’s sorrow “at seeing him possessed by such ideas.” (RTP 2, 105) We have also seen that he compares the appearance of Dreyfusism, clericalism, and patriotic heroism—but not anti-Semitism—to the emergence of an invisible physical deformity inherited from previous generations. The remark made at Doncières thus seems to reveal a deterministic emphasis on the role of the environment in the appearance of Dreyfusism. I believe, however, that Marcel’s comment is particularly relevant to Proust’s views on the origins of anti-Semitism, and not Dreyfusism or anti-Dreyfusism. Even though anti-Semitism is missing from the list of beliefs whose emergence resembles the appearance of physical flaws, it is the marked presence of anti-Semitic ideas in society that “conditions” most of the gentile characters’ beliefs, actions and words.
The environment’s role in the inculcation of anti-Semitism is most clearly revealed in the portrayal of Marcel’s beloved Albertine. Albertine, it is useful to recall, is an orphan, without “a penny to her name,” who is raised by her aunt Mme Bontemps. (RTP 1, 956, 997-999) The Bontemps family, in Swann’s words, “is typical of the old-fashioned bourgeoisie, reactionary, clerical, tremendously straitlaced.” (RTP 1, 551) Mme Bontemps does not cherish a genuine parental love for Albertine and is “anxious to be rid of her.” (RTP 1, 997) At one of Albertine’s visits to Marcel in Paris, the latter notices the appearance of new words and expressions in her vocabulary, new words which give him the hope that he might succeed this time in receiving a kiss from Albertine (RTP 2, 367) after the nocturnal fiasco at Balbec. (RTP 1, 995-996) In contrast to the new words, which have been acquired as a result of recent experiences unknown to Marcel, the old expressions, which Albertine has been in the habit of using, are a product of the bourgeois ethos and milieu in which she has been raised. “All these expressions,” Marcel observes, “Mme Bontemps had imparted to her at the same time as a hatred of the Jews and a respect for black because it is always suitable and becoming….” Mme Bontemps has passed on both the expressions and her prejudices “… even without any formal instruction, but as the piping of the parent goldfinches serves as a model for that of the newborn goldfinches so that they in turn grow into true goldfinches also.” (RTP 2, 369-370) In the milieu of Albertine’s upbringing, “hatred of the Jews” is not very dissimilar from certain characteristic expressions or a preference for black. It is an integral and acceptable part of quotidian life, an outlook that is effortlessly transmitted from parents to children. Albertine’s anti-Semitism is thus clearly a product of her environment, an old and deeply ingrained prejudice.47 It is only
fair to suppose that the anti-Semitism of the Prince de Guermantes, Mme Verdurin, Mme Sazerat and Marcel’s grandfather is of the same ancient, innate variety, which has been inculcated in them in a way similar to Mme Bontemps’s easy transmission of prejudice to her niece.

While inheritance and environment play a key role in determining the anti-Semitism of many characters, more so than in influencing their attitudes towards the Affair, Proust acknowledges that other factors also impact their anti-Semitism. In contrast to Dreyfusism and anti-Dreyfusism, however, anti-Semitism remains an inherent and inherited aspect of the gentile characters’ outlook. For the most part, those factors primarily intensify anti-Semitism or precipitate its outbursts, without altering its presence in any significant way.

As with Dreyfusism and anti-Dreyfusism, social ambition is one factor that is linked to anti-Semitic hatred. The conduct of the Princesse de Silistrie before Saint-Loup’s marriage to Gilberte is a case in point. After Gilberte’s inheritance of “a hundred million francs,” she becomes a most attractive match for the young bachelors of the Faubourg. (RTP 3, 677) Both Mme de Marsantes, Saint-Loup’s mother, and the Princesse de Silistrie choose her as a potential bride for their sons. Determined to thwart Mme de Marsantes’s efforts, the Princesse de Silistrie starts “[going] round protesting loudly, expatiating on Saint-Loup’s social grandeur, and proclaiming that if he should marry the daughter of Odette and a Jew then it [is] the end of the Faubourg Saint-Germain.” Her protests, as Marcel observes, are driven by her desire “to keep Gilberte for herself.” (RTP 3, 677) Social ambition—her aspiration for her son—is clearly the
most important source of the Princesse’s anti-Semitic protests: both its furtherance and the fear of its possible obstruction give rise to her hate-filled pronouncements.

The conduct of the Princesse de Silistrie also points to another source of anti-Semitism, namely, social anxieties and fears—both personal and collective—arising out of the real or imagined loss of social status and position. The Princesse’s anti-Semitic protests betray genuine fears and anxieties on the part of the aristocracy as a whole, arising out of the possible loss of status and position to upwardly mobile Jews. As Wolitz puts it, the Princesse “lucidly bewail[s] the plight of her ‘crumbling’ world: marriage of a Jew to an aristocrat destroys the exclusiveness of the aristocracy and its raison d’être.” Importantly, the Princesse’s pronouncements are convincing and very well received in the world of the Faubourg. Indeed, her strategy is so successful that Mme de Marsantes is forced to abandon her attempts to arrange Gilberte’s marriage to Saint-Loup. Evidently, both the Princesse de Silistrie and the other members of the Faubourg are fearful lest the exclusivity of their world should be destroyed forever, and are unwilling to grant wealthy Jews access to their world.

The Princesse’s anti-Semitic protests obviously contain also resentment against the social ascent of upwardly mobile Jews. Resentment itself constitutes another source of anti-Semitism, and is even more clearly revealed in the words of the most liberally minded of Proust’s aristocrats, Saint-Loup. In the scene of the conversation between Saint-Loup and Marcel in war-torn Paris, the two friends are talking about the aesthetic beauty of airplane battles, their conversation turns on the social life in Paris, and they notice that the war has not affected significantly its pace. Saint-Loup then says, “I am sure … that in all the large hotels you would have seen American Jewesses in their
night-dresses, hugging to their ravaged bosoms the pearl necklaces which will enable them to marry a ruined duke.” (RTP 3, 780-782) As Wolitz points out, Saint-Loup’s anti-Semitic remark is suffused with irony as it applies in part to his own situation as the husband of Swann’s daughter Gilberte. His prejudice itself is born out of “helplessness and resentment” at the Jews’ social ascent to the “ramparts of the Faubourg Saint-Germain.”

Resentment and helplessness in Saint-Loup’s remarks are mixed with another key element—envy. A significant measure of envy definitely lurks behind the anti-Semitic acrimony of Saint-Loup’s words and his “resentment” itself is partly a result of his envy at the rich heiresses’ wealth and social ascent. To Saint-Loup, the idea of Jewish heiresses possessing “pearl necklaces” is clearly unacceptable, as unacceptable as the idea of himself belonging to the category of ruined dukes. Unsurprisingly, therefore, all of a sudden the “bosoms” of the rich heiresses become “ravaged” and their actions, which Saint-Loup himself imputes to them, become wretched and abominable.

Resentment against the social ascent of the Jews, envy, and the frustration of social ambition form a determinant of the outburst of anti-Semitism of one of the minor characters in Remembrance, Mme de Gallardon. However, Mme de Gallardon’s malevolent comment on Swann at the social gathering at Mme de Saint-Euverte’s also reveals that, as with the characters’ attitudes towards the Dreyfus Affair, anti-Semitism also arises partly out of personal malice and cruelty. A member of the Guermantes set, Mme de Gallardon is upset that she has never heard from her cousin the Duchesse de Guermantes “since the latter’s marriage.” (RTP 1, 358) At the gathering, she repeatedly tries to induce the Duchesse to come to her house but the latter refuses. Disappointed at
her failure, Mme de Gallardon asks the Duchesse whether she has seen Swann that evening, and when Oriane says that she “must catch his eye,” Mme Gallardon exclaims, “‘It’s odd that he should come to old Saint-Euverte’s,’…. ‘Oh, I know he’s very clever,’ meaning [Marcel explains] by that ‘very cunning,’ ‘but that makes no difference—the idea of a Jew in the house of a sister and sister-in-law of Archbishops!’” (RTP 1, 364) Anger at her inability to induce the Duchesse de Guermantes to come on a visit, but also malice and cruelty lurk behind Mme de Gallardon’s spiteful remark about Swann. Swann himself has little to do with her failure, but her cruelty makes her personal abuse of him quite inevitable.

Wolitz has pointed out correctly that Mme de Gallardon’s type of anti-Semitism “is due in part to the frustration of aristocrats who have not fared well in their own social climb and who use the newcomers, the Jews, as scapegoats.” Wolitz’s comment, in fact, indicates what appears to be a basic psychological mechanism of anti-Semitic hatred as perceived by Proust—the displacement of the frustrations and anxieties produced by the thwarting of social aspirations onto a convenient scapegoat. The operation of this mechanism is evident not only in the conduct of Mme de Gallardon, whose abuse of Swann contains traces of malice and cruelty and has personal overtones, but also in the behavior of the Duc de Guermantes.

One of the foremost aristocrats of France, the Duc de Guermantes is “the senior vice-president of the Jockey Club when [its] president [dies].” (RTP 3, 32) Before the upcoming election for a new president, which the Duc is certain of winning, some obscure members of the Club undertake a campaign against him, claiming that “the Duchess [is] a Dreyfusard … and [entertains] the Rothschilds.” (RTP 3, 32)
of the campaign, the Duc loses the election and the second vice-president of the Club wins. Since his defeat, the Duc becomes visibly upset when anybody mentions the “Dreyfus case” in his hearing and, for no apparent reason, starts using the expression “well and truly.” One of his typical reactions is to blurt out, “‘Dreyfus case, Dreyfus case, it’s easy to say, and it’s a misuse of the term. It’s not a question of religion, it’s well and truly political.’” (RTP 3, 33) At one of Marcel’s visits to the Guermantes household, M. de Bréauté relates to the Duchesse a piece of gossip about a remark about the Zola trial supposedly uttered in the drawing room of M. de La Trémoïlle in the presence of Mme Alphonse Rothschild. On hearing the name, forgetting any notions that the Dreyfus Affair may not indeed be “a question of religion,” the Duc declares that “‘the Alphonse Rothschilds … are Dreyfusards at heart, like all the Jews.’” He then goes on to proclaim his belief in the dishonesty of the Jews, saying, “‘… the Jews will never admit that one of their co-citizens is a traitor, although they know it perfectly well, and never think of the terrible repercussions…’” (RTP 3, 34) The “terrible repercussions,” Marcel notes, are nothing else than the Duc’s defeat at the Jockey Club election. When his wife disagrees with him, the Duc exclaims furiously, “‘That shocking crime is not simply a Jewish case, but well and truly an affair of vast national importance which may bring the most appalling consequences for France, which ought to have driven out all the Jews….’” (RTP 3, 35) At the moment of his fury, the Duc completely disregards any questions of justice and political truth and indulges in a formidable anti-Semitic tirade. He fails to acknowledge that his defeat at the Jockey Club election is at the root of his anger and frustrations. The real “culprits” for his defeat are his fellow members of the Jockey but, instead of blaming them or at least admitting their misdeeds, he vents his
frustrations and anger onto the Jews, going so far as to urge their expulsion from France.⁵¹

In his study of Proust, Wolitz has noted correctly that the Duc is an “unforeseen menace” and that his is a social anti-Semitism, whose intensity depends on popular opinion. Wolitz goes so far as to suggest that, because of its unpredictability, the Duc’s anti-Semitism is “perhaps more dangerous” than that of his brother Charlus.⁵² While correct about the unpredictability of the Duc’s anti-Semitism, Wolitz’s surmise about the magnitude of its danger is overstated. Proust clearly depicts Charlus as the embodiment par excellence of anti-Semitism in the novel and, in its intensity, the cruelty Charlus displays towards Marcel’s Jewish friend Bloch remains unmatched by any of the other characters. We saw that Proust assigns an extremely high heuristic value to individual psychology as a means of arriving at historical and political truth. An eloquent example of this appears in Marcel’s description of the admiration of the proprietor of the restaurant frequented by Bloch and his Dreyfusard friends for a trite remark made by the Prince de Foix. “Historians,” Marcel observes, “if they have not been wrong to abandon the practice of attributing the actions of people to the will of kings, ought to substitute for the latter the psychology of the individual, the inferior individual at that.” (RTP 2, 421-422) Charlus, at his most inferior, certainly provides a useful source of insight into Proust’s views on the psychological genesis and historical significance of anti-Semitism.

Like his brother the Duc, Charlus is also one of the foremost French aristocrats. At the time of Marcel’s first encounter with him at Balbec, Charlus displays an “intelligence and [a] sensitivity” which are in striking contrast to the stern hauteur of his fellow aristocrats, and which succeed in impressing even Marcel’s grandmother,
otherwise very contemptuous of aristocratic pride. (RTP 1, 812) Gradually, however, Marcel discovers that, while certainly intelligent and sensitive, Charlus is potentially the most sinister individual in his world.

One of the features of the Baron’s personality that makes an impression on Marcel at the time of his visit to Balbec is Charlus’s obsession with physical energy and virility and his disgust with effeminacy in young men. (RTP 1, 817-818) Ironically, at the time when Marcel begins to enter the society of the Faubourg, he accidentally witnesses a sexual encounter between Charlus and the tailor Jupien and thus discovers that Charlus is a homosexual. (RTP 2, 623-632) During the War, at the time of his return to Paris in 1916, Marcel makes another important and astonishing discovery about Charlus. Looking for a hotel, he enters a male brothel and sees Charlus being beaten by a soldier. From the small window of one of the brothel’s top-floor rooms, Marcel sees Charlus in a sadomasochistic sexual ecstasy, “chained to a bed like Prometheus to his rock, receiving the blows that [a soldier rains] upon him with a whip … studded with nails….” (RTP 3, 843) Between the time of his meeting with Jupien and the moment of his thrashing at the brothel, Charlus’s sexual proclivities have undergone a radical change and assumed a rather sinister character.

At the moment of Marcel’s visit to Balbec, one of the peculiarities about Charlus that he notices is the strangeness of his eyes. To Marcel, they seem to contain an invisible menace. When looking at them, he observes, “one suddenly [feels] oneself in the path of some hidden weapon which [seems] to bode no good, even to him who … carries’ it within himself in a state of precarious equilibrium and always on the verge of explosion….” (RTP 1, 817) It is not long before Marcel finds himself in the “path of
[the] hidden weapon” and discovers that Charlus possesses an extremely volatile temperament and is prone to momentary fits of frightful rage. In the scene of his visit to the Baron after the dinner at the Guermantes, Marcel makes the following comment after enduring a furious tirade on the Baron’s part: “… whatever the fine words with which he embellished all his hatreds, one felt that … this man was capable of committing murder, and of proving by dint of logic that he had been right in doing it and was still head and shoulders above his brother, his sister-in-law, or any of the rest.” (RTP 2, 577) Many years later, after the end of the First World War and the death of Charlus, Marcel discovers that his presentiment about the Baron’s potentially murderous personality is actually true—he finds out that the Baron has in fact been determined to kill his one-time beloved Morel and only the latter’s fear and cowardice, which have prevented him from visiting the Baron, have helped him to avoid certain death. (RTP 3, 830-833)

A man of strange sexual proclivities and readiness to commit murder, the Baron also becomes at times a virulent anti-Semite. Charlus’s anti-Semitism is partly religious and partly racial in character, a sinister combination of centuries-old anti-Jewish religious hatred and modern racial anti-Semitism. At the moment of Marcel’s encounter with him at Balbec, Charlus openly expresses his severe disapproval of the fact that a house belonging to his family has been bought by the wealthy Israels family. (RTP 1, 820-821) Many years later, on one of their journeys on the little train from la Raspèlière, the Baron’s initial disgust assumes the form of a vicious anti-Semitic tirade, sparked by what he perceives to be the sacrilegious behavior of M. Bloch senior in his choice of a home at Balbec. After Marcel’s en route meeting with Bloch at one of the
stops, the Baron finds out that the Blochs have rented a place in the vicinity called la Commanderie. He is quite appalled and exclaims,

‘All the places or properties called la Commanderie were built or owned by the Knights of the Order of Malta (of whom I am one), as the places called Temple or Cavalerie were by the Templars. That I should live at la Commanderie would be the most natural thing in the world. But a Jew! However, I am not in the least surprised; it comes from a curious instinct for sacrilege, peculiar to that race. As soon as a Jew has enough money to buy a place in the country he always chooses one that is called Priory, Abbey, Minster, Chantry…’ (RTP 2, 1141)

For the Baron, the Jews are a sacrilegious race, one that inevitably profanes with its very presence all that Christian society considers holy.

The nature and psychological origins of Charlus’s anti-Semitism are revealed most clearly in the scene when Marcel and the Baron, walking arm-in-arm, leave the afternoon party at Mme de Villeparisis’s and start talking about Bloch. The Baron starts questioning Marcel about Bloch and advises him that “‘[it] is not a bad idea to have a few foreigners among [his] friends.’” When Marcel insists that Bloch is French, the Baron exclaims, “‘Indeed, … I took him to be a Jew.’” (RTP 2, 297) To the surprise of Marcel, who is left with the impression that the Baron is a convinced anti-Dreyfusard, Charlus says, “‘I believe the newspapers say that Dreyfus has committed a crime against his country—so I understand.’” This widespread opinion, according to him, is erroneous. “‘… [The] crime,’” he goes on, “‘is non-existent. This compatriot of your friend would have committed a crime if he had betrayed Judaea, but what has he to do with France? … Your Dreyfus might rather be convicted of a breach of the laws of hospitality.’” (RTP 2, 297-298) Charlus’s words certainly seem strange and Marcel is justifiably surprised at his argument. The Baron’s irritation at the political tumult around the Affair stems not from a concern with justice but from what he sees as the unforgivable confusion of a Jew
for a Frenchman: to him, even posing the question of a Jew becoming a Frenchman is unacceptable. Ultimately, his disgust at the Affair and his anti-Semitic remarks about Bloch and Dreyfus spring from his conviction that the very doctrine of assimilation is fundamentally fallacious, that it is the root cause of a blurring of distinctions between Jews and Frenchmen that should never have taken place. Charlus’s remarks reveal clearly that, as Wolitz puts it, “[assimilation], to the anti-Semite, is impossible.”

The remainder of the conversation between Marcel and the Baron, the part that immediately follows the latter’s comments on the Dreyfus Affair, shows his anti-Semitism at its most intense. Having expressed his views on the fallacy of accusing Dreyfus of treason, Charlus begins to muse that perhaps Bloch could provide some entertainment for him, such as arranging, for example, for the Baron to attend some religious festival. Or, the Baron goes on, Bloch could perform some “comic exhibitions.” “For instance,” he explains,

’a contest between your [Marcel’s] friend and his father, in which he would smite him as David smote Goliath…. He might even, while he was about it, give his hag (or, as my old nurse would say, his “haggart”) of a mother a good thrashing. That would be an excellent show, and would not be unpleasing to us, eh, my young friend, since we like exotic spectacles, and to thrash that non-European creature would be giving a well-earned punishment to an old cow.’ (RTP 2, 298)

At the moment of uttering “these terrible, almost insane words,” Marcel informs us, right after his sinister tirade, “M. de Charlus [squeezes his] arm until it [hurts].” (RTP 2, 298)

This is the Baron’s notorious, sadistic anti-Semitic harangue, expressing his wish to see Bloch thrash his parents. The scene of the Baron’s confession of his sadistic wish is important, first, in that it reveals Proust’s understanding of the psychosexual dynamics of anti-Semitism. Evidently, at the moment of his confession, the Baron is torn between, on the one hand, hatred and cruelty towards Bloch and, on the other, a simultaneous
attraction to Bloch himself and the barbarian spectacle with his parents. The Baron’s speech is saturated with sheer disgust at the “non-European creatures” of M. Bloch senior and his wife. At the same time, however, Charlus squeezes Marcel’s arm, his gesture being a product of a sadistic sexual attraction to and delight at the imagined spectacle. The Baron’s sadistic anti-Semitic wish here is clearly a product of his deep ambivalence towards Jews, an ambivalence that swings between sexual desire and fierce hatred. Thus, the psychosexual dynamics of anti-Semitism is one of ambivalence, a conflict between simultaneous physical desire and attraction and repulsion and hatred towards Jews.

The scene of the Baron’s anti-Semitic harangue has also crucial implications concerning the psychological genesis of his disbelief in the possibility of assimilation. We saw that, for Proust, desire itself is the hidden determinant of rational arguments, that even “systems of philosophy” arise out of “sentiment.” Viewed in this light, the Baron’s belief in the fallaciousness of assimilation is not merely a conviction derived rationally from logically cogent arguments. Rather, it is the intellectual equivalent, the manifestation in the form of a putatively rational political argument, of the “negative side” of his ambivalent attitude towards Bloch—his feelings of repulsion and hatred.

Finally, the scene also provides a clue to an important aspect of Proust’s views on the psychological genesis of anti-Semitic hatred. This particular part of his stance, however, could be elucidated most clearly by a reference to Sigmund Freud’s notion of the “narcissism of minor differences” and to Proust’s own ideas on the similarities between Jews and homosexuals.55
Freud developed his concept of “narcissism of minor differences” in three of his works—the paper “The Taboo of Virginity,” Group Psychology, and Civilization and Its Discontents—but did not elaborate it in a systematic manner. Essentially, by “narcissism of minor differences,” he understands the appearance of “feelings of strangeness and hostility” between individuals and groups that “are otherwise alike.” For Freud, the emergence of hostility between similar individuals is an inevitable product of an intimate and sustained interpersonal relationship, or, in the case of groups, of a long-term and close contact between them. This hostility is often unnoticed because it usually is and remains repressed. In the case of groups, however, sometimes the hostility between them assumes the form of outright aggression, an aggression that, by satisfying the perennial human “inclination to aggression” of the members of one of the groups, actually contributes to strengthening its cohesion.

The concept of “narcissism of minor differences” in fact provided, for Freud, a psychoanalytic explanation of the origins of anti-Semitism. In Group Psychology, he argued that it explains the “insuperable repugnance” of “the Aryan for the Semite.” In Civilization and Its Discontents, he pointed out that the persecutions of the Jews throughout history provide a clear example of one group serving as a target of aggression for another. But what is important to observe for our purposes is Freud’s insistence on the basic similarity between the two mutually hostile individuals or groups. Equally significant is his stress on the closeness and long-term character of the relationship between individuals, or their contact, in the case of groups. In the case of both individuals and groups, there is a marked ambivalence, oscillating between closeness and hostility, intimacy and repugnance.
Proust, for his part, makes an explicit comparison and establishes a direct parallel between the fate of the Jews and that of homosexuals. He does this most powerfully in Marcel’s memorable rumination on the fate of the two “accursed races” after witnessing the meeting between Charlus and Jupien. Suddenly, Marcel realizes that Charlus has “looked [to him] like a woman [because] he [actually is] one.” He belongs, Marcel goes on, to the “race” of men with a feminine temperament,

upon which a curse is laid and which must live in falsehood and perjury because it knows that its desire, that which constitutes life’s dearest pleasure, is held to be punishable, shameful, an inadmissible thing; which must deny its God, since its members, even when Christians, when at the bar of justice they appear and are arraigned, must before Christ and in his name refute as calumny what is their very life; sons without a mother, to whom they are obliged to lie all her life long and even in the hour when they close her dying eyes; friends without friendship, despite all those which their frequently acknowledged charm inspires and their often generous hearts would gladly feel—but can we describe as friendships those relationships which flourish only by virtue of a lie …, unless they are dealing with an impartial or perhaps even sympathetic spirit, who however in that case, misled with regard to them by a conventional psychology, will attribute to the vice confessed the very affection that is most alien to it, just as certain judges assume and are more inclined to pardon murder in inverts and treason in Jews for reasons derived from original sin and racial predestination? (RTP 2, 637-638) 

Having initially established the parallel between the “races” of “inverts” and Jews, Proust goes on to develop the simile extensively, saying that, like the Jews, inverts “[shun] one another [and seek] those who are directly their opposite, who do not want their company,” or, conversely, they are “brought into the company of their own kind by the ostracism to which they are subjected…. ” Again like the Jews, the inverts “have … been invested … with the physical and moral characteristics of a race, sometimes beautiful, often hideous…. ” (RTP 2, 639) Evidently, for Proust, Jews and homosexuals share a similar unenviable fate, a similar social and political situation. Both are perpetual exiles, homeless undesirables destined to remain scorned by society at large.
Viewed alongside Freud’s concept, Proust’s comparison between Jews and homosexuals assumes an added significance, particularly with respect to Charlus’s sadistic wish about Bloch. With the possible exception of his brother the Duc de Guermantes, none of the characters in *Remembrance* indulges in anti-Semitic remarks as vicious as those of the Baron. And what distinguishes the latter from the rest of the characters is, above all, his homosexuality. It defines him as a member of one of the “accursed races” and places him in the same social, political, even existential position as the Jew Bloch. Charlus and Bloch are very much alike and the hostility that the Baron comes to cherish for Bloch seems to spring from the basic similarity, the closeness, and also the “minor differences” that exist between them. Proust was, of course, not Freud’s follower and was certainly not acquainted with Freud’s concept of “narcissism of minor differences.” But his portrayal of the anti-Semitism of Charlus and the parallel he establishes between the fates of homosexuals and Jews suggest that he would have probably agreed with his contemporary from Vienna that the closeness or intimacy between individuals who are “otherwise alike” gives rise to feelings of hostility which may sometimes assume destructive proportions.

As his sadistic wish suggests, Charlus is the most virulently anti-Semitic of Proust’s characters. But what is curious is that not only the Baron, but even the victim of his desire, Bloch, is not free from anti-Semitic prejudice. Bloch is the narrator’s Jewish friend whose conduct is guided by his ambition for social status and recognition. Coming “from a family of little repute,” Marcel relates, Bloch “[has] to support … the incalculable pressures imposed upon him not only by the Christians at the surface but by all the intervening layers of Jewish castes superior to his own, each of them crushing
with its contempt the one that [is] immediately beneath it.” Instead of seeking to raise
himself socially within his own, Jewish milieu, Bloch has chosen another path—the
pursuit of social success within gentile society, and especially of access to the
aristocratic summit of the Faubourg. (*RTP* 1, 799)

One day during Marcel’s first visit to Balbec, shortly after he has met Saint-Loup
and the two of them have decided “to be great friends for ever,” they go for a walk to the
beach. While “sitting on the sands,” leaning against a canvas tent, they hear a “torrent of
abuse against the swarm of Jews that [infest] Balbec,” coming from inside the tent. The
voice from the tent says, “‘You can’t go a yard without meeting them…. I am not in
principle irremediably hostile to the Jewish race, but here there is a plethora of them.
You can hear nothing but “I thay, Apraham, I’ve chust theen Chacop.” You would think
you were in the Rue d’Aboukir.’” When the anti-Semite who utters these words comes
out of the tent, Marcel and Saint-Loup are surprised to find out that it is none other than
Marcel’s “old friend Bloch.” (*RTP* 1, 790, 792-793) Being Jewish himself, Bloch
condemns what he thinks is the simplicity and linguistic incompetence of the other
Jewish visitors to Balbec.

In *Jewish Self-Hatred*, Sander Gilman provides an astute explanation of what he
perceives to be the psychological mechanism behind the historical phenomenon of
“Jewish self-hatred,” or “Jewish anti-Semitism.” Gilman convincingly demonstrates that
this particular mechanism could be seen at work behind the writings and actions of
Jewish anti-Semites since the Reformation. According to him, Jewish anti-Semitism
arises initially out of the Jews’ “acceptance of the mirage generated by their reference
group—that group in society which they see as defining them—as a reality.”62 Having
once accepted the image of themselves held by their reference group, which is most often gentile society at large, they then “project their anxiety about this manner of being seen onto other Jews as a means of externalizing their own status anxiety.”

Gilman’s model helps explain Bloch’s conduct in *Remembrance*. The denigration of the simplicity and linguistic incompetence of the Jews is a widespread phenomenon within Proustian gentile society, a common form of anti-Semitic abuse. Even Marcel’s mother cannot help mocking the language of Swann’s ancestors when she discusses Gilberte’s marriage to Saint-Loup. “[Can] you imagine,” she asks Marcel, “‘what old Swann … would have felt if he could have known that he would one day have a grandchild in whose veins the blood of old mother Moser who used to say “Ponchour Mezieurs” would mingle with the blood of the Duc de Guise!’” (*RTP* 3, 674) Bloch has evidently accepted the anti-Semitic perception of the corruption of the Jews’ speech common in gentile society. Always in pursuit of recognition and status, he projects his own status anxieties onto other Jews, in this case the Jewish visitors to Balbec. The ultimate source of his abusive remarks is thus his own anxiety. Their function is to help him distance himself from the members of the ethnic group to which he himself belongs. By ascribing to the Jews at Balbec the characteristics which gentile society might, and usually does, ascribe to himself, Bloch perhaps sees himself, at least for a moment, as belonging to the milieu of his own ambitions.

The Issue of Marcel’s Anti-Semitism

In the scene of Bloch’s anti-Semitic deprecations on the beach, he is clearly shown as an anti-Semite, cherishing a strong disgust at what he sees as Jewish simplicity and
linguistic incompetence. But, in a curious twist, the immediate sequel of Marcel’s portrayal of his friend’s anti-Semitism seems to suggest the existence of prejudice in the outlook of the narrator himself, and hence of his creator Marcel Proust.

Immediately after narrating Bloch’s imprecations, Marcel goes on to describe the “Jewish colony” at Balbec, composed of Bloch’s sisters and their “innumerable relatives and friends.” Marcel observes, with palpable irritation, that the colony is “more picturesque than pleasing.” *(RTP 1, 793)* More significantly, after briefly describing the colony’s clannishness and the opprobrium it encounters, he goes on to parody Bloch’s mispronunciation of the word “lift-boy,” which the latter pronounces as “light-boy.” Trying to explain to himself the reason for his friend’s mispronunciation, Marcel recalls that Bloch, on learning about Marcel’s desire to visit Venice a few days before, has exclaimed, “‘Yes, of course, to sip iced drinks with the pretty ladies, while pretending to read the *Stones of Venice* by Lord John Ruskin, a dreary bore, in fact one of the most tedious old posers you could find.’” “Bloch,” Marcel comments, “evidently thought that in England not only were all the inhabitants of the male sex called ‘Lord,’ but the letter ‘i’ was invariably pronounced ‘igh.’” Bloch learns the correct pronunciation of “lift” a few days later, only when Marcel himself uses it in conversation, and is visibly embarrassed by his previous blunder. *(RTP 1, 794-795)*

Marcel’s portrayal of his friend’s mispronunciations is suffused with irony. Its most direct implication is that Bloch, who disparages the linguistic incompetence of Balbec’s Jewish visitors, is actually little different from them. In the eyes of the narrator, he shows a simplicity and an incompetence that are similar to those he thinks the Jews at Balbec display. But the irony of the portrayal of Bloch’s linguistic blunder does not
exhaust the meanings of this episode. The description acquires a dimension that is perhaps deeper when one recalls that Marcel is the creation of the partly Jewish writer Marcel Proust. In mocking his friend’s linguistic incompetence, Marcel himself emerges as little different from Bloch, ridiculing his Jewish friend in a manner that is similar to Bloch’s own disparagement of the corrupt speech of the Jews at Balbec. Perhaps the stress on Bloch’s mistake is a result of a process of projection identical to that giving rise to Bloch’s own anti-Semitism, with the difference that Bloch himself is its “victim” and Marcel, and hence Proust, are those externalizing their anxieties?

It is a fact that, despite his origins, Proust himself occasionally indulged in pronouncements verging on anti-Semitism. As Painter has pointed out, during their visit to Évian—one of Balbec’s originals—in September 1899, Proust and his mother “made [a] … mock-serious show … of shunning the dangers of unwanted society, whether noble …, bourgeois … or, one regrets to notice, Jewish.”64 In the letters that he sent her after her departure, Proust ridiculed what he perceived to be the bad manners and lack of social refinement of some of the Jewish visitors to Évian.65 In the summer of 1908, during his stay at another one of Balbec’s originals, Cabourg, Proust found out that his friend Robert de Billy, who was staying at a nearby villa, wanted to take a room at his hotel. Not willing to be disturbed, Proust told de Billy “that the hotel was full, ‘and with what people!—not a soul you could put a name to—a few Israelite wholesale dealers are the haughty aristocracy of the place.’”66 The sad irony of these incidents is that Proust himself acts like his character Bloch and, like the latter, does not hesitate to disparage the Jews he encounters at the two resorts with a disturbing sarcasm.
Given Proust’s hostile remarks about Jews, Marcel’s mockery of Bloch’s mispronunciations is not surprising. Sonnenfeld has made the compelling argument that *Remembrance* is a “family romance,” a fictional fulfillment of Proust’s “fantasy of assimilation” into the highest circles of gentile society. Proust, Sonnenfeld claims, achieves this fulfillment through the creation of the narrator Marcel—who is markedly non-Jewish and who eventually gains access to the Faubourg Saint-Germain—and through the excision of Marcel’s Jewish traits and their concomitant displacement onto the characters of Swann and Bloch. As Proust’s anti-Semitic remarks suggest, Sonnenfeld’s argument has some cogency. But the difficulty is that it is virtually impossible to ascertain accurately, despite the evidence of the novel itself and of such extra-textual sources as Proust’s correspondence, the actual dynamics of the processes of projection, displacement and excision that determined the creation of Proust’s Jewish characters. Even though projection and displacement were probably involved in the forging of these characters, their reality and exact nature will always remain in the realm of conjecture. Proust’s potential anti-Semitism should be sought and estimated not in putative processes of projection, displacement or self-hatred, but mainly in the degree to which his work participated in and helped perpetuate the matrix of anti-Semitic stereotypes current in the time of its creation. It is, of course, simply wrong to suggest that Marcel Proust was a convinced anti-Semite. This is something he clearly was not. Yet, the presence of anti-Semitic stereotypes in *Remembrance* is perceptible. Marcel may indeed be free from Jewish traits, but he is not entirely free from the prejudice of anti-Semitism.
We saw that Marcel mocks his friend Bloch for the latter’s faulty language. In fact, the view that one of the most salient characteristics of the Jews is the corruption of their language was a common anti-Semitic stereotype in fin-de-siècle Europe. In The Inequality of Human Races, for example, Arthur de Gobineau claimed that the Jews did not possess a language of their own. “Jews,” he wrote, “used the tongue of the country where they settled; and, further, these exiles were known everywhere for their special accent. They never succeeded in fitting their vocal organs to their adopted language, even when they had learned it from childhood.”68 As Gilman explains, one of the stereotypical signs of the Jews’ racial difference in fin-de-siècle Europe was their Mauscheln, their accent-ridden speech, or their Jüdeln, their use of Jewish words.69 Viewed in the light of contemporaneous stereotypes, therefore, Marcel’s mockery of Bloch acquires an added significance. In parodying Bloch’s speech, Marcel becomes similar to the racial anti-Semites of the day, agreeing with and in fact sanctioning their views about the irremediably corrupt speech of the Jews.

The presence of anti-Semitic stereotypes is even more pronounced in Marcel’s portrayal of Bloch’s personality. Towards the last decade of the nineteenth century, the view that Jews were especially prone to diseases of the nervous system such as hysteria and neurasthenia became a standard truth in European medicine, and was also a widespread belief in European culture at large.70 In his 1895 study of neurasthenia, for example, Richard von Krafft-Ebing argued that Jews were particularly given to the disease. According to Krafft-Ebing, the Jewish man is “an overachiever in the arena of commerce or politics;” he is one who “reads reports, business correspondence, stock market notations during meals, for whom ‘time is money.’”71 In 1896, an article in a
popular newspaper argued in a similar vein that Jews “use too much of their brain in a restless striving for profit” and this is the reason for “their higher percent of mental and nervous ailments.”

In *Remembrance*, the young Bloch fits well Krafft-Ebing’s description of the Jewish male neurasthenic. Bloch is certainly an “overachiever,” not in politics or commerce but in aristocratic society. The pursuit of his social ambitions, Marcel suggests, is the overriding principle of his behavior, compelling him to disregard the requirements of friendship and social decorum. In the scene of Saint-Loup’s departure for Doncières, for example, Bloch, despite the coldness of Saint-Loup’s invitation, shows unusual zeal in insisting to Marcel that the two of them should visit the garrison. “All the way home,” Marcel relates, “opposite the gymnasium in its grove of trees, opposite the tennis courts, the mayor’s office, the shell-fish stall, he stopped me, imploring me to fix a day, and, as I did not, left me in a towering rage, saying: ‘As your lordship pleases. For my part, I am obliged to go since he has invited me.’” (*RTP* 1, 927)

Not long after his parody of Bloch’s mispronunciation, Marcel states that Bloch is “ill-bred, *neurotic* and snobbish [*italics mine*],” and it is exactly as such that he is revealed in this scene. (*RTP* 1, 799) He is the stereotypical neurotic Jew, compulsively beseeching the narrator to fulfill his wish and thereby help him in the pursuit of his ambitions, and finally succumbing to a hysterical outburst of mocking abuse. Thus, Marcel’s portrait of Bloch, here and until the final scenes of the novel, could very well be taken from a contemporary textbook on psychiatry or from an anti-Semitic newspaper article on the Jews’ proneness to hysteria or neurasthenia.
Commentators, less willing than Sonnenfeld to see Proust as a potential anti-Semite, have noted that, while the portrayal of Bloch does contain traces of anti-Semitism, that of Swann absolves Proust of possible charges of prejudice. The problem with such an argument, however, is that Marcel’s depiction of Swann’s affirmation of Jewish identity is couched in and constructed through racial anti-Semitic stereotypes about the Jewish body current in the medical discourse and culture of the fin-de-siècle. As Gilman has shown, around the turn of the twentieth century, one of the most widespread racial stereotypes about the Jews was the view that the color of their skin was black. One common belief going back to the Middle Ages was that, to use Gilman’s language, the Jews are born “‘white’ and grow black, like plums.” Another common stereotype—canonized in works on physiognomy of the time—concerned the facial characteristics of the Jews and in particular the Jewish nose. One of the most salient features of the Jews, on this view, was their excessively large aquiline nose. Late-nineteenth-century racial biology also sanctioned the belief that Jews possessed a distinctive smell, a belief that goes back to Roman times. And it also, finally, linked Jews to specific diseases, often emphasizing their proneness to ones like syphilis and cancer.

Marcel’s portrayal of Swann at the time of his illness is couched in terms similar to contemporaneous cultural and medical stereotypes about the Jews. On first catching sight of Swann at the reception at the Princesse de Guermantes’s, Marcel describes his impression of him in the following words,

[w]hether because of the absence of those cheeks, no longer there to modify it, or because arteriosclerosis, which is also a form of intoxication, had reddened it as would drunkenness, or deformed it as would morphine, Swann’s punchinello nose, absorbed for long years into an agreeable face, seemed now enormous,
tumid, crimson, the nose of an old Hebrew rather than of a dilettante Valois. (*RTP* 2, 715)

When Swann, after having seen Marcel, comes to join him and Saint-Loup, Marcel is able to observe in even more detail the signs of Swann’s illness. Swann, he says,

had arrived at that stage of exhaustion in which a sick man’s body becomes a mere retort in which to study chemical reactions. His face was mottled with tiny spots of Prussian blue, which seemed not to belong to the world of living things, and emitted the sort of odour which, at school, after “experiments,” makes it so unpleasant to have to remain in a “science” classroom. (*RTP* 2, 725)

At the Princesse’s reception, Swann thus appears as the diseased Jew, possessing an enormous red nose and a bluish face, and emitting a revolting odor. Swann’s portrait in this scene, like the portrait of Bloch, could have been taken from a *fin-de-siècle* anti-Semitic medical textbook or newspaper.78

In this portrayal of Swann, however, Marcel only seems to emerge as tainted by anti-Semitism. He appears to endorse the anti-Semitic stereotypes of the day, but he also subtly distances himself from them. Immediately after first seeing Swann at the reception and observing the changes of his face, he notes,

[p]erhaps, too, in these last days, the physical type that characterises his race was becoming more pronounced in him, at the same time as a sense of moral solidarity with the rest of the Jews, a solidarity which Swann seemed to have forgotten throughout his life, and which, one after another, his mortal illness, the Dreyfus case and the anti-semitic propaganda had reawakened. (*RTP* 2, 715)

These observations show that Marcel’s portrayal of Swann could have upheld the anti-Semitic stereotypes of the diseased Jew, but for one thing: Swann’s decision to embrace and affirm his Jewish identity is a product of his illness and not vice versa.

Also critical in this respect are several key facts about Swann’s disease. It is, as Freedman puts it, “explicitly linked to Swann’s *Gentile* mother.”79 Even more, in the scene when Gilberte buys an agate marble for Marcel in the Champs-Elysées at the time
of his love for her, Marcel observes that Gilber
te’s father “[suffers] from ethnic eczema
and from the constipation of the prophets.” (*RTP* 1, 436) At that time, Swann is the
completely assimilated Jew, one of the most respected members of high society. For all
intents and purposes, he is a gentile, but a gentile who suffers from “Jewish” diseases.
Shortly before his death, he has become a Jew, but a Jew whose death is brought about
by a “gentile” disease probably inherited from his mother. By complicating the origins
of Swann’s diseases and their links to the changes of his identity, Marcel creates a
distance between himself and anti-Semitic stereotypes about the Jewish body, and
ostensibly frees himself from the taint of anti-Semitic prejudice.

Even though the portrait of Swann’s illness is removed from stereotypes about
the Jewish body, the distance between Marcel and anti-Semitic prejudice is diminished
very shortly after his depiction of Swann’s disease. While Swann is telling Marcel the
story of his conversation with the Prince de Guermantes about the Affair, the two of
them are interrupted by the approach of Charlus and Mme de Surgis. When Swann rises
to greet Mme de Surgis, he cannot help fastening a lascivious look at her bosom.
“[Almost] without concealment,” Marcel relates,

because his advanced years had deprived him either of the will, from indifference
to the opinion of others, or the physical power, from the intensity of his desire
and the weakening of the controls that help to disguise it, as soon as Swann, on
taking the Marquise’s hand, had seen her bosom at close range and from above,
he plunged an attentive, serious, absorbed, almost anxious gaze into the depths of
her corsage, and his nostrils, drugged by her perfume, quivered like the wings of
a butterfly about to alight upon a half-glimpsed flower. (*RTP* 2, 733)

As Gilman has pointed out, the belief that the Jews are “the most sensual of peoples” is a
centuries-old anti-Semitic prejudice. By the late nineteenth century, the view that they
were “fixated at an earlier stage of sexual development” and that their sexuality was
excessive had become a standard truth of European medicine. It is exactly as a sick Jewish lecher that Swann is shown in the moment of his greeting of Mme de Surgis. Despite the approach of death, despite the literal disintegration of his body, he cannot resist the temptation of fastening his gaze “into the depths of [the Marquise’s] corsage.” But what is crucial is that, if Swann cannot resist the temptation of looking at Mme de Surgis’s bosom, Marcel has major difficulties resisting a more morbid temptation—that of succumbing to the anti-Semitic stereotypes about Jewish excessive sexuality.

Proust’s portrayal—through Marcel—of the characters of Bloch and Swann shows that Marcel—and hence Proust himself—is not a pure-bred anti-Semite. His self-conscious undercutting of prejudice in the depiction of Swann’s diseases absolves him of that charge. Yet, in the mockery of Bloch’s speech and in the description of his neurotic personality and Swann’s lasciviousness, Marcel reiterates and thereby endorses widespread cultural and medical anti-Semitic stereotypes. There is certainly a vacillation between prejudice and its opposite in Marcel’s—and thus Proust’s—portrayal of Bloch and Swann, but the moment of endorsement of contemporary anti-Semitic beliefs is still evident.

Marcel’s intermittent anti-Semitism has critical implications for Proust’s general attitude towards anti-Semitism as an historical phenomenon. We have seen that anti-Semitism is endemic in Remembrance. Virtually every gentile in the novel is anti-Semitic at one time or another, and even Bloch indulges in a bigoted tirade. Perhaps most crucially, the narrator himself at times reiterates anti-Semitic stereotypes common in fin-de-siècle science and culture. Proust, therefore, does not regard anti-Semitism’s eradication as an urgent need or a fateful historical necessity. In the Proustian world,
anti-Semitism is an acceptable prejudice, common alike to bourgeois, aristocrat, and even Jew. While giving rise to sadistic wishes and ominous desires for expulsion of the Jews, it hardly possesses the potential for the annihilation of millions.

Proust and the Conundrum of Jewish Identity

Proust’s anti-Semitic pronouncements and Marcel’s reiteration of fin-de-siècle stereotypes suggest that Proust was not fully comfortable with his own partly Jewish origin. In fact, a well-known letter of his to Comte Robert de Montesquiou—the chief original of Charlus—reveals explicitly Proust’s anxieties about his Jewish identity. The letter was written in the middle of May, 1896, a day after the Count had proclaimed his anti-Semitic convictions in a conversation. “Yesterday,” wrote Proust,

I did not answer the question you put to me about the Jews. For this very simple reason: though I am a Catholic like my father and brother, my mother is Jewish. I am sure you understand that this is reason enough for me to refrain from such discussions. I thought it more respectful to write this to you than to answer you in the presence of a third person. But I very much welcome this occasion to say something to you that I might never have thought of saying. For since our ideas differ, or rather, since I am not free to have ideas I might otherwise have on the subject, you might, without meaning to, have wounded me in a discussion. I am not, it goes without saying, referring to any discussion that might take place between the two of us, for then I shall always take an interest in any ideas on social policy which you may choose to expound, even if I have a most fitting reason for not sharing them.82

The attitude towards his Jewish identity that emerges from Proust’s letter is one of deep uneasiness and overall ambivalence. At first sight, it appears that he is wounded by the Count’s anti-Semitic remarks, but, then, he does not unequivocally affirm his Jewishness. Indeed, his letter contains a measure of reticence and concern for public appearances. What is definitely missing from it is a sense of certainty and lack of ambiguity towards his Jewish identity.
This doubt about the possibility of affirming a viable Jewish self transpires also in *Remembrance*, but here the uncertainty in fact becomes an assertion of the impossibility and impracticability of any form of Jewish identity. Around the turn of the century in Europe, there existed three main alternatives for Jewish identity—Zionism, affirmation of individual Jewish identity in the manner of Lazare, and assimilation. In *Remembrance*, Proust explores the possibilities of all of these three forms of identity, and arrives—perhaps deliberately—at an intellectual impasse, an impasse suggesting that none of these options provides a viable personal or political alternative.

Proust, thus, explicitly voices his disapproval, indeed his condemnation, of Zionism as a political doctrine. He does so in Marcel’s reflections on the accursed races of homosexuals and Jews after his discovery of Charlus’s homosexuality. In the case of some homosexuals, Marcel observes, their amatory tastes give rise to a sense of superiority “to the other sex,” and they consequently “look down on women, regard homosexuality as the appurtenance of genius and the great periods of history….” Imbued with this sense of superiority, they seek the company of “those who seem to them to be worthy of it, from apostolic zeal, just as others preach Zionism, conscientious objection, Saint-Simonianism, vegetarianism or anarchy.” (RTP 2, 643) The Zionists, Marcel’s simile suggests, are mock apostles, obsessed by a blind zeal and misplaced sense of superiority in their political activities.

Towards the end of his comparison of Jews and homosexuals, Marcel condemns the Zionist movement even more strongly. Stating his intention to explore further the activities of homosexuals in the course of his narrative, he says, “…I have thought it as well to utter here a provisional warning against the lamentable error of proposing (just as
people have encouraged a Zionist movement) to create a Sodomist movement and to rebuild Sodom.” Even if the project of establishing a new Sodom were to succeed, Marcel notes, its inhabitants would immediately leave it, disperse and resume seemingly “normal” lives outside of it, “take wives” and “keep mistresses,” and “repair to Sodom only on days of supreme necessity.” (RTP 2, 655-656) What the comparison here implies is that, like the project of establishing Sodom, Zionism is an unfeasible political doctrine, doomed to abandonment by its supporters at the time of the creation of a Zion. Zion itself, according to Marcel, can never become a viable polity and, instead of evolving into a desired home, will turn into a last refuge at times of calamity and despair. Zionism, therefore, is incapable of serving as a viable source of Jewish identity. Aspiring towards such an identity is an error, a result of following passions contrary to political, social and psychological realities.

The second fin-de-siècle alternative for Jewish identity was the affirmation of individual Jewish identity, in the manner of Lazare. Proust explores the possibility of this personal-political option most clearly in the character of Swann. In the beginning of Remembrance, during the period preceding and including Marcel’s adolescence and young adulthood, Swann is the completely assimilated Jew, retaining virtually no trace of his partly Jewish origins. He is indistinguishable not only from the members of gentile society but also from those of its summit, the Faubourg Saint-Germain. At that time, as the Duc de Guermantes remarks at the reception of his cousin the Princesse, Swann is “an honourable Jew, a man of the world,” and “all” members of the Faubourg are ready to “vouch” for his “patriotism.” (RTP 2, 703) As we saw, however, his illness, the Affair, and its anti-Semitism compel Swann to remember his Jewish heritage and
reaffirm his Jewishness. At the time of his illness, Swann’s affirmation of Jewish identity earns Marcel’s respect and indeed radiates an aura of holiness. “There are certain Jews,” Marcel observes after describing Swann’s physical transformation, “men of great refinement and social delicacy, in whom nevertheless there remain in reserve and in the wings, ready to enter their lives at a given moment, as in a play, a boor and a prophet. Swann had arrived at the age of the prophet.” (RTP 2, 715-716) Yet, despite Marcel’s admiration, we saw how, despite his prophetic appearance, Swann is also incapable of resisting the urges of physical desire. He resembles a prophet, but of a peculiar kind—one who fixes his all too earthly gaze on Mme de Surgis’s bosom. Adorned with holiness, Swann’s newly found Jewish identity is thus also starkly grotesque, radiating both a sad solemnity and a farcical pathos.

The metamorphosis of Swann’s self also has implications concerning the third alternative for Jewish identity at the fin-de-siècle—the path of assimilation. The trajectory traced by Swann’s identity transformation—from assimilation to affirmation of Jewishness—suggests that the non-Jewish identity adopted as a result of assimilation is one characterized by a profound instability. Disease, political events, or, more specifically, a rise of anti-Semitism are some factors that can bring about its rapid disintegration. Swann’s identity tribulations, therefore, imply that the goal of assimilation is highly problematic, entailing the adoption of an artificial identity suffused with a deep, fatal volatility. As critically, they also indicate that assimilation is perhaps a hopeless road for another reason: the indelible, fateful pull of its very origin. Swann’s Jewish self—long discarded, irrevocably left behind, almost erased out of existence—eventually re-appears and comes to actually define him. Jewishness, his case suggests, is
perhaps always latent: subliminal, concealed, but always ready to emerge and re-assert its presence. Perhaps it is, in fact, a fate, one that may be temporarily ignored and forgotten, but not escaped?

More explicitly than in his portrayal of Swann, Proust explores assimilation in his description of the career of Bloch. Bloch follows a trajectory that is the exact opposite of Swann’s: while Swann is, to use Wolitz’s language, the “assimilated Jew” who ultimately affirms his Jewishness, Bloch is the “assimilating Jew” who relinquishes his Jewish origins and eventually gains access to the Faubourg Saint-Germain. The neurotic and ill-bred Bloch whom we saw pestering Marcel to pay a visit to Saint-Loup at Doncières, becomes, after a period of withdrawal from society at the time of the First World War, a writer of considerable esteem among the youth. (RTP 3, 1002) Having adopted the name of Jacques du Rozier, Bloch is a welcome visitor at the most exclusive social gatherings of the Faubourg. (RTP 3, 995-997, 1002) Bloch has, in fact, undergone such a profound transformation that even his physical appearance is changed. “[An] English chic,” Marcel famously describes,

had completely transformed his appearance and smoothed away, as with a plane, everything in it that was susceptible of such treatment. The once curly hair, now brushed flat, with a parting in the middle, glistened with brilliantine. His nose remained large and red, but seemed now to owe its tumescence to a sort of permanent cold which served also to explain the nasal intonation with which he languidly delivered his studied sentences, for just as he had found a way of doing his hair which suited his complexion, so he had found a voice which suited his pronunciation and which gave to his old nasal twang the air of a disdainful refusal to articulate that was in keeping with his inflamed nostrils. But above all—and one saw this the moment one set eyes on him—the significance of his physiognomy had been altered by a formidable monocle. By introducing an element of machinery into Bloch’s face this monocle absolved it of all those difficult duties which a human being is normally called upon to discharge, such as being beautiful or expressing intelligence or kindliness or effort. (RTP 3, 996)
What is crucial to observe is that, despite Bloch’s amazing transformation, despite his astounding transcendence of his ill-breeding, lack of manners and neuroticism, his appearance and demeanor are still not quite attractive. Rather than a paragon of social grace, Bloch is a caricature, an artificial assemblage of manners and cosmetic artifices. His newly found identity has even transformed him into something not fully human—a partly mechanical being, a dummy of sorts, whose machine components eclipse its humanity.

An even more crucial aspect of Bloch’s new identity as Jacques du Rozier is revealed shortly after Marcel’s description of his physical appearance and demeanor. Ruminating on the changes of Bloch’s social status, Marcel observes:

[a]t close quarters, in the translucency of a face in which, at a greater distance or in a bad light, I saw only youthful gaiety…. I could detect another face, almost frightening, racked with anxiety, the face of an old Shylock, waiting in the wings, with his make-up prepared, for the moment when he would make his entry on to the stage and already reciting his first line under his breath. (RTP 3, 1012-1013)

Despite the profound transformations of Bloch’s self, there still remains hidden in him an “old Shylock” who could at any moment destroy his newly adopted identity, forcing him to become once again the uncouth person of his youth. Even though after the observation about Shylock’s secret presence, Marcel goes on to surmise that, by the end of another decade, Bloch’s prestige in the aristocratic salon will probably have increased even further, (RTP 3, 1013) it seems very unlikely that the cunning demon within Bloch will ever disappear entirely. Despite his strenuous, persistent efforts to adapt to the ways of aristocratic society and to adopt a non-Jewish identity, and despite the high probability of his eventual success, Bloch will perhaps always remain haunted by the danger of a Shylock’s reappearance. His newly forged identity will probably remain
always precarious, never entirely free from the threat of disintegration. And then, ultimately, his changes of self also reaffirm—much more forcefully—the moment of fatefulness transpiring in the identity experiences of Swann. Jewishness emerges in Bloch’s case—now in fact definitively—as something unavoidable, an inescapable fate. Proust presents it as an unwanted, intractable specter, an inexorable destiny that could be ignored and even renounced, but never escaped, never transcended.

Evidently, Proust thus faulted all of the three main alternatives for Jewish identity available at the fin-de-siècle. Neither Zionism, nor affirmation of individual Jewish identity in the manner of Lazare, nor assimilation provided a viable solution. Zionism for Proust is a doctrine at odds with political, social and psychological realities, while an open assertion of individual Jewish selfhood contains the possibility of producing rather grotesque results. Assimilation is also fraught with problems, tending to create caricatures of identity, and ones moreover constantly endangered by imminent disintegration. As a half-Jewish intellectual, Proust himself made commendable choices at the time of the Dreyfus Affair. Gradually, however, he embraced the transcendent vocation of art as the primary source of his own identity. The last pages of Time Regained powerfully and memorably reveal that Proust came to view art as the only stable, meaningful, and genuinely worthwhile source of individual identity. (RTP 3, 1088-1107) Yet, literary art, despite the inhuman, supremely lofty requirements it imposes on its practitioners, could hardly serve as a source of identity, let alone a guideline for viable courses of political action, when historical developments demand urgent decisions about political choices affecting the fate of millions. In the first two decades of the twentieth century, despite the horrors of the First World War, art could
still provide a meaningful source of individual identity. In the era of murderous mass anti-Semitism, evocations of the vocation, power, and sublimity of art could sound only useless, at best.

Conclusion: Fateful Patterns

Proust’s famous apotheosis of literary art in *Time Regained* showed that, for him, literature constituted the only meaningful vocation, the sole pursuit worthy of an unconditional devotion. And, of course, the elevation was also a resolute choice of art as the main source of individual identity. Neither love, nor a life in society, but literature emerged in the pages of *Remembrance* as Marcel’s exclusive passion. Discovered late in his life, it became indeed his religion, absorbing totally his self.

Proust’s unreserved embrace of literary art is obviously the reason why *Remembrance* was written. As such, it was a lofty gesture, a sublime choice in fact—of artistic creation. But the apotheosis of art also has another, less inspiring side, one that has key implications for the discourse on anti-Semitism examined in this study. Perhaps unexpectedly, Proust’s choice of art followed in Lazare’s footsteps, exhibiting a pattern resembling very closely that transpiring behind the latter’s writings. If Lazare’s dream of an anarchist resolution to anti-Semitism and Jewish identity was a form of intellectual escape, Proust’s celebration of art too was an escapist move. His opting *for* art constituted an opting *out* of the issue of Jewish selfhood. It was an epistemological escape from this critical issue, which followed a condemnation of the main options for Jewish identity at the time, without offering a viable alternative. Like Lazare, seeing fully the problem’s complexity and need of a solution, Proust, as if in an unselfconscious
admission of defeat, sought a way out, choosing art and abandoning the question. In his escape, he found a viable self—that of an artist—for himself, but he left Jewish selfhood as confused as he had found it. Indeed, in his encounter with it, he complicated it further, making it more perplexing than before. And his escape, moreover, not only followed the model of Lazare’s pursuits but also foreshadowed the re-appearance of a very similar flight in the work of the Frankfurt School. Uncannily, there would be an escape there too. For the Frankfurt School, the evasion would be a solipsistic leap into theoretical reflection.

Proust’s embrace of art is also linked to an even more fateful pattern: the general one of contextualizing factors transforming the understanding of anti-Semitism and Jewish selfhood into a misunderstanding. His escape into art tied Remembrance solidly to a central principle of modern European literature—an apotheosis of art, centered on the belief that art is a higher, nobler, almost divine pursuit. Characterizing for example landmark modernist works such as James Joyce’s A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man, symbolism, and the movement of “art for art’s sake,” this deifying elevation of art came to define Proust’s novel too. Its adoption thus constituted an act of anchoring the work into a main aesthetic current in modern European literature. And precisely this historicizing force complicated Proust’s encounter with Jewish identity, encouraging and licensing a questionable intellectual escape. Once again, a contextualizing factor, one connecting an intellectual’s work to a defining aspect of European culture and ideas, became a key source of trouble in the author’s engagement with critical Jewish issues.87

And there was another, much more obvious—and much graver—contextualizing force that marred Proust’s work. This was, of course, anti-Semitism. Though
intermittently, Marcel—and hence Proust—nevertheless accepted and expressed widely shared anti-Semitic prejudices. Proust thus came to participate in and in fact perpetuate the matrix of a widespread social and political anti-Semitism, which formed an integral part of nineteenth-century and fin-de-siècle Western European politics and culture, and which was mobilized and found its most blatant culmination in the Dreyfus Affair. Marcel’s articulation of anti-Semitic ideas rooted Remembrance precisely in this anti-Semitic discourse, one of the darkest undercurrents of modern Western European history. The espousal of prejudice did not so much become a hermeneutic obstacle that prevented Proust from understanding anti-Semitism and Jewish identity, confused his views, or made them conceptually incoherent; it directly stained and corrupted his interpretation of the two issues, making it resemble a tract of a hateful anti-Semite—perhaps a young Lazare—mulling over a vexing “Jewish question.”

As becoming, then, an historic masterpiece, Remembrance exhibits deeply complex and complicated meanings. It is a unique, impressionist history of France, but one also containing a strong expressionist, psychological dimension. It is a history built on a distinctive understanding of history and historical knowledge, in which the creative historian painted a truthful, comprehensive picture of his time and his country. It tried to tell of events, but above all by exploring their central effects and repercussions in French society. And it attempted to dissect what its author thought was the vital psychological dimension of fin-de-siècle French politics, society, and culture, mostly by x-raying the psyches of their members, participants, and actors.

As a history, Remembrance could not but focus on the Dreyfus Affair and the related phenomenon of anti-Semitism—two truly key aspects of the French late-
nineteenth century, whose explosive fusion produced perhaps the most acute political crisis of the Third Republic. The Affair and anti-Semitism occupy center stage in the impressionist painting of the novel, constituting one of its focal objects of study. Its events not fully visible, the Affair is nevertheless an unmistakably present fount, radiating influences and effects, and these waves became primary targets of Proust’s historical-psychological dissection. Two effects he scrutinized particularly intensely were Dreyfusism and anti-Dreyfusism, the passions that, in reality as in the novel, tore France asunder. He examined no less meticulously anti-Semitism, the prejudice and hatred that the Affair intensified and that too—again both in reality and in the novel—rent France in two. And he, finally, explored a critical issue closely related to that of anti-Semitism—the problems of, and possibilities for, Jewish identity. Ultimately, Proust’s investigation of Dreyfusism, anti-Dreyfusism, and anti-Semitism constituted an incisive, sensitive, and subtle analysis of these phenomena, and of fin-de-siècle France, the arena where they unfolded. But his analysis—mostly that of anti-Semitism and Jewish identity—was also weakened by the very prejudice he studied, and by his embrace of art as the only meaningful vocation and foundation of identity. Anti-Semitic prejudices percolated into the novel, contaminating its scrutiny of anti-Semitism and Jewish selfhood; its embrace of art, in turn, was a problematic flight from the latter issue. What is crucial is that, in both cases, the sources of trouble were intellectual factors that anchored Proust’s work into vital elements of European culture and ideas. His attempt to understand, untangle, and help find a solution to the problems of anti-Semitism and Jewish identity was obstructed by key aspects of Remembrance that connected it to significant intellectual and cultural contexts he inhabited. In this, the
novel replicated the pattern that characterized the writings of Lazare. And in this, it would itself be followed by the work of the Frankfurt School.
Notes

3 Quoted in Painter, Marcel Proust, vol., 2, 252. Quotation amended. For the original, see Edith Wharton, A Backward Glance (New York: D. Appleton-Century, 1934), 324. Swann’s Way, originally published in French under the title of Du côté de chez Swann, is the first part of Proust’s monumental A la recherche du temps perdu. As is well known, A la recherche du temps perdu was originally published in eight parts with the following titles: 1. Du côté de chez Swann (1913), 2. A l’ombre des jeunes filles en fleurs (1919), 3. Le côté de Guermantes I (1920), 4. Le côté de Guermantes II, 5. Sodome et Gomorrhe I (1921), 5. Sodome et Gomorrhe II (1922), 6. La prisonnière (1923), 7. Albertine disparue (1925), and 8. Le temps retrouvé (1927). The titles of the separate parts of Proust’s novel were originally translated into English as follows: Du côté de chez Swann as Swann’s Way, A l’ombre des jeunes filles en fleurs, as Within a Budding Grove, Le côté de Guermantes as The Guermantes Way, Sodome et Gomorrhe as Cities of the Plain, La prisonnière as The Captive, Albertine disparue as The Sweet Cheat Gone, and Le temps retrouvé as Time Regained. In this chapter, I am using the 1981 Random House edition of A la recherche du temps perdu, under the title of Remembrance of Things Past, which is based on the 1954 Pléiade edition of the novel. Marcel Proust, Remembrance of Things Past, vol., 1, and vol., 2, trans., C.K. Scott Moncrieff and Terence Kilmartin, vol., 3, trans., C.K. Scott Moncrieff, Terence Kilmartin, and Andreas Mayor (New York: Random House, 1981). One of the notable differences in translation between the Random House edition and the novel’s first edition in English is that the part entitled Albertine disparue is translated as The Fugitive. In the analysis that follows, for the sake of clarity and unless otherwise necessary, I shall be referring to Proust’s novel as a whole, rather than to its separate parts. Also, the novel will henceforth be referred to in parentheses as RTP, followed by volume and page numbers.
4 Painter, Marcel Proust, vol., 2, 252.
5 Ibid., 296-298.
6 Quoted in Ibid., 297. As Painter has noted, Proust probably exaggerated the number. Painter, Marcel Proust, vol., 2, 297. It is nevertheless significant that members of the Académie Française acknowledged Proust’s literary achievement.
7 Painter, Marcel Proust, xix.
8 Critics have noted the importance of these metafictional passages for understanding Proust’s Remembrance. Lynn R. Wilkinson, for example, has drawn attention to the narrator’s disapproval, in Time Regained, of theories of literature advocating the necessity for the artist to “leave his ivory tower.” In contrast to those theories, Wilkinson argues, “[t]he narrator’s novel … will emphasize the role of consciousness—Proust’s term for this, le moi profond, emphasizes the opposition between surface and depth—in understanding the evolution of the world in time.” Lynn R. Wilkinson, “The Art of Distinction: Proust and the Dreyfus Affair,” MLN 107 (1992): 976-977. In general, the metafictional and metaleterary aspects of Remembrance have been the subject of numerous critical interpretations. It seems that Paul de Man’s deconstructionist reading of Proust in Allegories of Reading, where he argues that the “allegorical representation of Reading” in the novel “narrates the impossibility of reading,” can be placed in this category of interpretations. Paul de Man, Allegories of Reading: Figural Language in Rousseau, Nietzsche, Rilke, and Proust (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979), 77. A similar thing could be said about Georges Poulet’s Proustian Space, where he argues that Proust’s novel represents an “illustrated space,” or a “series of pictures.” Poulet, Proustian Space, 105-106.
10 Ibid., 735.
13 Poulet, Proustian Space, 12.
14 Ibid., 106.
15 Ibid., 105.
To distinguish Remembrance’s narrator from Proust, as well as for the sake of clarity, I will refer to the narrator as Marcel, in accordance with Marcel’s own disclosure of his name. (RTP 3, 69)

As Nicolas Powell has put it, Kokoschka “had the capacity near to genius for feeling inside the sitter, for demystifying the subject, a process which was in the very spirit of the times.” Nicolas Powell, The Sacred Spring: The Arts in Vienna, 1898-1918 (London: Studio Vista, 1974), 171.

In general, the two major historical events that Proust describes in Remembrance are the Dreyfus Affair and the First World War. In fact, the description of war-torn Paris and the War’s effects on Parisian society, in a similar way to the Dreyfus Affair, constitutes one of the novel’s central themes. The analysis of Proust’s representation of the First World War is beyond the scope of the present discussion. Nevertheless, it is perhaps worth mentioning that, in Time Regained, Proust explicitly draws a parallel between the effects of the Affair and the War on Parisian society. Thus, in describing the fate of Mme Verdurin’s salon during the War, the narrator states, “…to conclude the subject of the duchesses who now frequented Mme Verdurin’s house, they came, though they did not realize this, in search of exactly the same thing as the Dreyfusards had sought there in the old days, that is to say a social pleasure so compounded that their enjoyment of it at the same time assuaged their political curiosities and satisfied their need to discuss with others like themselves the incidents about which they had read in the newspapers. Mme Verdurin said: ‘Come at 5 o’clock to talk about the war’ as she would have said in the past: ‘Come and talk about the Affair,’ or at an intermediate period: ‘Come to hear Morel.’” (RTP 3, 751)

Quoted in Painter, Marcel Proust, vol., 1, 223.

This brief account of Proust’s involvement in the Dreyfus Affair is based on Painter, Marcel Proust, vol., 1, 222-225. A much more detailed discussion of Proust’s involvement in the Affair is to be found in Ibid., 221-255.

Proust’s letter to Mme Straus certainly reveals that Proust viewed the representation of the Affair and its impact upon the world of his characters and the society of Belle Époque France as one of his novel’s central themes. It should be noted, however, that the meaning and significance of the letter could be interpreted in a variety of ways. Thus, during the Affair itself, Mme Straus’s salon was pronouncedly Dreyfusard, the “G.H.Q. of Dreyfusism” as Painter has called it, and it is quite likely that Proust adopted an apologetic tone, being apprehensive lest Mme Straus should find the anti-Dreyfusism of the Guermantes unpalatable. Painter, Marcel Proust, vol., 1, 228. The most obvious implication of such a conjecture, if it is true, is that the letter clearly indicates the lasting impact that the Affair had on French society, as it is revealed as a source of continuing anxiety to Proust more than a decade after Dreyfus’s rehabilitation and after the enormous cataclysms of the First World War.

Proust, Jean Santeuil, 319-360.


Proust, Jean Santeuil, 358.

Ibid., 357.

A similar idea is also conveyed in a passage in Time Regained, where Proust once again uses the metaphor of the X-ray. (RTP 3, 953)

For example, at the time of the reception at the Princesse de Guermantes’s, the narrator remarks: “And as certain facts have a greater power of survival than others, the detested memory of the Dreyfus case persisting vaguely in [the very] young people [present at the reception] thanks to what they had heard their fathers say, if one told them that Clemenceau had been a Dreyfusard, they replied: ‘Impossible, you are making a confusion, he is absolutely on the other side of the fence.’” (RTP 3, 1001)

In real life, Proust’s father did indeed refuse to speak to his sons Marcel and Robert for a week, after finding out that they were organizing a petition in support of the Captain. Painter, Marcel Proust, vol., 1, 223.

The remark also hints at the fact that the Affair provided the first occasion for French academics to become involved actively in politics. As Christophe Charle has shown, it was usually the members of a younger generation of Parisian academics and those on the margins of their profession who were most willing to become publicly involved in the Affair and usually joined the camp of the Dreyfusards. Christophe Charle, “Academics or Intellectuals? The Professors of the University of Paris and Political Debate in France from the Dreyfus Affair to the Algerian War,” in Jeremy Jennings, ed., Intellectuals in Twentieth-Century France: Mandarins and Samurai (New York: St. Martin’s, 1993), 106. The remark
suggests that Proust found the professional ethos and intellectual climate of the French academia before the Affair too conservative and probably approved of the emergence of a new pattern of political involvement among French academics.

32 Proust, Jean Santeuil, 711.
33 Sartre, Anti-Semite and Jew, 29.
34 Moscovici, in his article “The Dreyfus Affair, Proust, and Social Psychology,” provides an insightful interpretation of *Remembrance* in terms of concepts drawn from social psychology. Moscovici argues, among other things, that Proust’s novel describes two “cycles” of “social recombination.” The first cycle consists of the exclusion of members of the Dreyfusard “minority” from the public universe of society at large (the realm of “public sociability”) and their relegation to the private universe of their family and friends (the realm of “private sociability”). The second cycle entails the inclusion in the public universe, because of their anti-Dreyfusard, nationalist, and anti-Semitic beliefs, of individuals who have formerly been confined to the private realm of family and friends. Moscovici, “The Dreyfus Affair,” 23-56.

36 I use the word “race” in the sense of “ethnicity.” To avoid unnecessary redundancy, I have chosen not to place the word in inverted commas in the discussion that follows.
37 I am using the terms “class” and “caste” in the sense that Proust used them, that is, interchangeably, with the difference that “caste” is a word having, for Proust, more derogatory connotations than the word “class.” For example, in his portrayal of his mother as a representative of her generation of middle-class women in *Jean Santeuil*, the narrator states, “But it is no less true that she still had to some extent the prejudices, the manners and the habits of all the middle-class women of her generation, of all those shut-away social castes the members of which know nothing of self-indulgence and the loosening of moral standards.” Proust, *Jean Santeuil*, 735. In a similar way, when describing his mother’s negative attitude towards people from a lower social “station,” Marcel says, “… my mother was too much my grandfather’s daughter not to accept, in social matters, the rule of caste.” (*RTP* 2, 1060) Again, the word “caste” is used as a synonym for social “position,” and presumably “class.”
38 The Faubourg’s general attitude towards the Affair is most clearly revealed in the description of the party at Mme de Villeparisis’s. (*RTP* 2, 239-256)
39 The army officer corps’ attitude is revealed in the scene of the narrator’s visit to Saint-Loup at Doncières. (*RTP* 3, 107-108)
40 A succinct portrayal of M. de Cambremer’s views is presented in the description of the evening at the Verdurins’ at la Raspelière. (*RTP* 2, 998-999)
41 The Dreyfusism of the Verdurin salon is revealed in the narrator’s observations about social changes before his second stay at Balbec. (*RTP* 2, 770-774)
42 For an account of the forging of the letter, see Bredin, The Affair, 170-178.
43 Painter, Marcel Proust, vol. 1, 6.
44 Ibid., 242-243.
45 Sartre, Anti-Semite and Jew, 29.
46 Wilson, “Proust’s ‘À la Recherche du Temps Perdu’ as a Document of Social History,” 240.
47 In his *The Proustian Community*, Wolitz also mentions Albertine’s remark about Bloch and points out that Albertine “had been taught by Mme Bontemps to hate Jews,” but does not discuss Albertine’s anti-Semitism in much detail and does not draw a connection with Proust’s views on determinism. Wolitz, *The Proustian Community*, 159-160. My own interpretation of Proust’s views on anti-Semitism is indebted to Wolitz’s work, particularly for revealing that Proust “offered several different views on the subject [of anti-Semitism].” (159) My analysis departs from Wolitz’s in many significant ways. Both my departures and my agreements with him will be acknowledged either in the text or in the notes.
48 Wolitz, *The Proustian Community*, 162.
49 Ibid.
50 Ibid., 101.
51 In his analysis, Wolitz points out the racial character of the Duc’s anti-Semitism, the Duc’s belief in a Jewish conspiracy—which is somewhat problematic as Wolitz’s evidence is not quite convincing—and the social nature of his anti-Semitism—the fact that “his opinions change as popular opinion changes.” *Ibid.*, 165, 172-173. Wolitz does not discuss the psychological reasons for the Duc’s outburst of anti-Semitism.
52 Ibid., 173.
53 Wolitz, 163-167, also emphasizes the religious and racist character of Charlus’s anti-Semitism. Wolitz, however, emphasizes too strongly the comic element in the Baron’s anti-Semitism. As we shall see shortly, the Baron’s readiness to commit murder makes his anti-Semitic hatred quite dangerous, at least potentially.

54 Ibid., 166.

55 As Milton Miller has noted, it is very likely that Proust was acquainted with Freudian psychoanalysis. Milton L. Miller, Nostalgia: A Psychoanalytic Study of Marcel Proust (Port Washington: Kennikat, 1969), 2-3. After all, his father was a prominent French physician and, together with Gilbert Ballet, wrote a book on neurasthenia. Ibid., 149-152. Yet, Proust could not possibly be described as a disciple of Freud. For a fuller account of Freud’s possible influence on Proust and of some of the similarities between Freud’s and Proust’s views, see Ibid., 143-158.


60 Freud, Civilization and Its Discontents, 114.

61 Numerous critics have pointed to and commented on Proust’s parallel between homosexuals and Jews. One of the most famous is Arendt. In The Origins of Totalitarianism, Arendt argued that, in Remembrance, Proust depicts the transformation of both homosexuality and Jewishness from “crimes” into acceptable “vices,” inherent in the psychological makeup of their possessors. Arendt sees this transformation as an extremely dangerous social phenomenon: the emergence of such an attitude made possible the acceptance of the mass extermination of all of those perceived to be affected with the vice of Jewishness. Hannah Arendt, The Origins of Totalitarianism (New York: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1968), 80-88.


63 Ibid., 11.

64 Painter, Marcel Proust, vol., 1, 242.

65 Ibid., 243. For example, in a letter to his mother from September 22, 1899, Proust made the following remark about the Oulifs, a Jewish couple staying at Évian: “The husband is so polite as to be ridiculous and despite the best of intentions the wife is incapable of unbending.” Marcel Proust, “Letter to His Mother, 22 September, 1899,” in Marcel Proust, Marcel Proust: Selected Letters 1880-1903, trans., Ralph Manheim, ed., Philip Kolb (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), 206.

66 Painter, Marcel Proust, vol., 2, 113.


68 Quoted in Gilman, The Case of Sigmund Freud, 28.

69 Gilman, The Case of Sigmund Freud, 27.

70 Gilman, Jewish Self-Hatred, 288-289.

71 Quoted in Gilman, Freud, Race, and Gender, 95.

72 Ibid.

73 Jonathan Freedman, for example, writes, “One would be tempted to … diagnose the portrayal of Bloch as a clear case of that peculiarly modern malady, self-hatred—in this case, using tactics exactly like Charlus’s or Bloch’s by indicting someone else for something you fear yourself to be accused of—but for one thing: Bloch (and hence Marcel, and hence Proust) possesses another, far less equivocal double in the text: Swann. Even more than Bloch, Swann comes to terms with his Jewishness in such a way as to redefine the potentialities of Jewish character and identity alike.” Jonathan Freedman, “Coming Out of the Jewish Closet with Marcel Proust,” GLQ 7:4 (2001): 537.

74 Gilman, Freud, Race, and Gender, 20.

75 Gilman, The Case of Sigmund Freud, 85-87.
For an analysis of anti-Semitic views on the Jewish body in modern European culture and medicine, and of Jewish intellectuals’ reactions to these ideas, see Sander Gilman, *The Jew’s Body* (New York: Routledge, 1991). Gilman’s is the classic study of its subject. The book, however, offers a problematic reading of *Remembrance*, claiming that, “Proust’s arch-Jew Swann was visibly marked by him as the heterosexual syphilitic, as that which Proust was not.” *Ibid.*, 126. The claim that Swann is shown as a syphilitic Jew is debatable, since Proust never represents explicitly his illnesses as syphilis. Indeed, as the discussion below argues, the writer deliberately complicated and obscured the ethnic character of Swann’s diseases.

Freedman, “Coming Out of the Jewish Closet with Marcel Proust,” 538. Indeed, in the description of his visit to the Duc and Duchesse de Guermantes before the reception at the Princesse de Guermantes’s, Marcel observes, “Swann’s illness was the same that had killed his mother, who had been struck down by it at precisely the age which he had now reached. Our lives are in truth, owing to heredity, as full of cabalistic ciphers, of horoscopic castings as if sorcerers really existed.” *RTP* 2, 601

Freedman is certainly correct in noting that “the passage is one of the most savagely satiric in the book.” Freedman, “Coming Out of the Jewish Closet with Marcel Proust,” 535.

From the perspective of modern Jewish and Western cultural history, Proust’s exalting embrace of art was not unique. In the period since the Enlightenment, as Yuri Slezkine has recently shown, the Jews of Western Europe, the United States, Russia, and later the Soviet Union, increasingly chose the liberal professions, journalism, literature, science, the fine arts, music, and academic careers in the humanities and social sciences as their vocations. Descendants of a Jewish culture which fostered intellectual pursuits, they came to be overrepresented—and to excel—in these fields. Among themselves, they numbered such brilliant figures as Sigmund Freud, Marc Chagall, and Franz Kafka. Yuri Slezkine, *The Jewish Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004). As this thesis argues, the choice of art in the particular case of Proust showed important problematic aspects.
Chapter 5
Challenging Diagnoses: The Frankfurt School and the Disease of Anti-Semitism

“As clinical psychiatrists our endeavor must be first, to diagnose the mental disorder of anti-Semitism by studying its genesis and its manifestations, and secondly, to direct our thinking toward helping the anti-Semite to rid himself of his disease.”

—Ernst Simmel, “Anti-Semitism and Mass Psychopathology.”

Introduction
Commenting in a 1983 interview on the “possibility of elaborating a history of rationality,” Michel Foucault remarked: “… if I had been familiar with the Frankfurt School, if I had been aware of it at the time,”—Foucault had the 1950s and 1960s in mind—“I would not have said a number of stupid things that I did say and I would have avoided many detours which I made while trying to pursue my own humble path—when, meanwhile, avenues had been opened up by the Frankfurt School.” This was a well-deserved tribute paid by a highly prominent thinker to a group of fellow intellectuals whose thought, since the 1960s, has enjoyed a prestige in the academia that is at least as significant as that of the works of Foucault. Commonly known under the name of “Frankfurt School” of social theory, these intellectuals shared an association for major parts of their careers with the Institute of Social Research (Institut für Sozialforschung) and a commitment to what has come to be called “Critical Theory,” a concept that is itself used as another label for their work. Today the names of the
foremost among them, Max Horkheimer, Theodor Adorno, Erich Fromm and Herbert Marcuse, have become indispensable items in the intellectual household of the humanities.

The research on the history of the Frankfurt School during the last four decades has already made the story of these intellectuals’ lives and endeavors familiar. The Institute of Social Research was founded in 1923 in Frankfurt by Felix Weil, the son of the wealthy entrepreneur Hermann Weil who had made a fortune as a grain merchant in Argentina two decades before. In the spring of 1923, Felix Weil sponsored a “Marxist Study Week” (Marxistische Arbeitswoche) in Geraberg, intended to provide an opportunity for young intellectuals to discuss various aspects of “Marxist theory and praxis.” The Study Week became, in fact, the first unofficial meeting of the Institute of Social Research. Attempting to secure a permanent forum for the discussion and study of Marxism, Weil had already approached the Prussian Ministry of Culture, Art and Education in Berlin with a proposal to establish an independent institute within the framework of the University of Frankfurt. The proposal was approved in the beginning of 1923. The “Institute of Social Research,” as it was called, was to pursue its own independent research and also serve as a teaching setting by offering “programs such as lectures, lessons, and talks.” Most importantly, at least for its founder, it was to provide an institutional basis for “the study and broadening of scientific Marxism.”

In accordance with its founder’s wishes for a Marxist orientation of the Institute, its first director became Carl Grünberg, a prominent Austro-Marxist who had been teaching at the University of Vienna. He held the directorship until his retirement in 1929, and Max Horkheimer succeeded to the post. Horkheimer was a philosopher who
had written his Habilitation dissertation on Kant’s Critique of Judgment in 1925 and had been teaching at the University of Frankfurt since then. It was under him that the Institute entered what some scholars have considered to be the most productive period of its history—the decade and a half between 1930 and the mid-1940s. Indeed, an impressive array of scholars became closely associated with the Institute after Horkheimer’s appointment to the directorship: Erich Fromm, Herbert Marcuse, the legal expert and political scientist Franz Neumann, and, most importantly, Theodor Adorno had all become involved actively in the Institute’s work by the mid-1930s. In 1932, the Institute established its Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung [Journal of Social Research], to be renamed in 1939 to Studies in Philosophy and Social Science, which gradually emerged as one of the most highly esteemed journals of social research in Europe and the United States.

As David Held has noted, the Institute’s most productive period “coincided” with the rise of Nazism in Germany. Perhaps the central irony of the Institute’s history is that its period of feverish activity was also the time of greatest tribulation for the intellectuals associated with it. As most of them were of Jewish origin, the rise of Nazism was bound to affect them profoundly. Apprehensive about a possible victory of Nazism in Germany, the leading members of the Institute began to consider the prospect of emigration as early as 1930. After the Nazis’ electoral success in September 1930, when their party became the second largest in the Reichstag, Horkheimer and Weil, as well as Friedrich Pollock and Leo Löwenthal, both of whom had become Institute members in the 1920s, started making arrangements for moving the Institute outside of Germany. After a trip to the United States to explore the possibility of relocating there
and brief negotiations with Columbia University, Horkheimer accepted Columbia’s offer of a building in the summer of 1934, thereby giving his formal approval to the transfer of the Institute’s headquarters to New York. The Frankfurt School’s “exile” in America was to last until the beginning of the 1950s, when Horkheimer, Adorno and Pollock returned to Germany and the Institute was re-established in Frankfurt. The time of emigration, however, did not leave the Institute unchanged. Some of its former associates, as, for example, Marcuse, decided to stay on this side of the Atlantic. Moreover, the intellectual vigor of the period before the 1950s was, arguably, never revived.

This, very briefly, is the story of the Institute of Social Research. Its theoretical orientation under Horkheimer’s directorship—what has come to be known as “Critical Theory”—was elaborated by Horkheimer himself in his inaugural address, “The State of Contemporary Social Philosophy and the Tasks of an Institute for Social Research,” and in his 1937 Zeitschrift article “Traditional and Critical Theory.” Horkheimer’s address represented, above all, a call for the integration of social theory and empirical sociological research. The “view,” he pointed out, according to which the empirical scientist has to regard philosophy as a beautiful yet scientifically fruitless enterprise, and the philosopher in contrast emancipates himself from the empirical scientist because the former assumes that he cannot wait for the latter in his far-reaching quest, is presently being superseded by the thought of an ongoing dialectical permeation and evolution of philosophical theory and empirical-scientific praxis.

Intellectuals and specialists from a wide variety of disciplines, Horkheimer also suggested, should participate both in the formulation of “current philosophical problematics” and in the empirical research arising from those theoretical questions. They would thus be able to “pursue their philosophical questions directed at the big
picture with the finest scientific method, … transform and make more precise these questions as the work progresses, … find new methods, … and yet never lose sight of the whole.”18

In his address, Horkheimer did not dwell extensively on the theoretical tenets of Marxism. When he referred directly to Marxism, it was only to emphasize the theoretical inadequacy of the vulgar Marxist view of culture as a direct product of the economic base of society.19 But he did insist more strongly on the Marxist orientation of Critical Theory in his Zeitschrift article. Its purpose was to compare what he called “traditional theory” and “critical theory.” The former, according to him, originated in Cartesian philosophy and consisted (as Husserl had put it) of “a systematically linked set of propositions, taking the form of a systematically unified deduction.”20 Critical Theory stood in sharp contrast to traditional theory. “… [T]he critical theory of society is, in its totality,” Horkheimer wrote,

the unfolding of a single existential judgment. To put it in broad terms, the theory says that the basic form of the historically given commodity economy on which modern history rests contains in itself the internal and external tensions of the modern era; it generates these tensions over and over again in an increasingly heightened form; and after a period of progress, development of human powers, and emancipation for the individual, after an enormous extension of human control over nature, it finally hinders further development and drives humanity into a new barbarism.21

Critical Theory “has society itself as its object,” and relies on the conceptual apparatus of Marxist theory, on the concepts of, for example, “class,” “surplus value,” or “pauperization,” to examine its object.22 Echoing his own call for the integration of theory and empirical research in his inaugural address, Horkheimer insisted that the findings of empirical research could be useful for Critical Theory.23 But while useful, they could occupy only a subordinate position within the Theory—its fundamental goal,
as Horkheimer conceived it, was not the accumulation of ever more sophisticated, purely theoretical insight, but the reorganization of existing society into a new, “rational” social order.  

Horkheimer’s inaugural address and Zeitschrift article delineated the principles that constituted the core of Critical Theory. It would, of course, be wrong to hyphostatize these notions as a putative essential content. Indeed, Horkheimer emphasized in his article the Theory’s changing character. The Theory’s “existential judgment on society,” he noted, “is conditioned by its conscious relation to the historical practice of society;” transformations of that historical practice would call for corresponding changes in the Theory.  

The evolving character of the Critical-Theoretical stance was, also, reflected in the Frankfurt School’s work itself. As Willem van Reijen and Jan Bransen have pointed out, the work of the Institute’s associates towards the late 1940s, and above all that of Horkheimer and Adorno, showed a palpable de-emphasis on “Marxist terminology.”  

Yet, this de-emphasis did not mean an abandonment of Marxism on Horkheimer and Adorno’s part. It was rather a reflection of their growing awareness that orthodox Marxist concepts no longer explained adequately the historical tendencies of Western society in the twentieth century, that new ones were needed to account for these processes. Horkheimer, for example, became convinced that the view of economics as the fundamental determinant of politics could no longer explain twentieth-century authoritarianism, one of whose main features, he came to believe, was the “dominance [of politics] over economics.”  

But over and above all—and despite the retreat from Marxist terminology—the criticism of existing society and the commitment to a more
rational social organization remained a stable hallmark of Critical Theory until at least the mid-1960s.

While on his trip to the United States, Horkheimer wrote to Pollock: “[o]n the whole, my impression is that this part of the world will be more suited to quiet academic work in the coming years than Europe.” 29 He hardly realized at the time how correct his observation actually was. By the beginning of the 1950s, which marked the end of the period of emigration and the re-establishment of the Institute in Frankfurt, 30 the Institute’s associates had produced an impressive number of works, many of which have become landmark studies in their respective disciplines. Many of these intellectuals were involved actively in the massive research resulting in what has since become a classic in the social sciences—the series *Studies in Prejudice*. The *Studies* represented the most consistent, extensive, and theoretically sophisticated attempt until then to analyze the historical, social and psychological determinants of ethnic prejudice in general and anti-Semitism in particular. And it was, also, during their exile that Horkheimer and Adorno completed the book that is perhaps most readily identified today as *the* representative work of Critical Theory—*Dialectic of Enlightenment*. In it, Horkheimer and Adorno offered an examination of anti-Semitism from the perspective of their own interpretation of the trajectory of Western history.

It is with those two analyses of anti-Semitism that this chapter is primarily concerned. It examines the main conclusions of the Frankfurt School’s dissection of anti-Semitism’s social and psychological determinants and historical roots. But it reveals, also, very real limitations, mistakes, and problems of that dissection. It shows how these errors stemmed, in fact, from two central principles of Critical Theory—the attempt to
integrate social theory and empirical research, and what I call the Theory’s “ideological
dimension.” An unsolved tension, I argue, an unresolved incongruity between theoretical
insight and empirical research undercut the explanatory value of the Frankfurt School’s
analysis of anti-Semitism. More, I also claim, the stance of resolute criticism of
twentieth-century Western society, whether or not relying on the concepts of orthodox
Marxism, produced a debilitating bias. As importantly, the analysis was damaged too by
a major contradiction between that very attitude of criticism and a dissection of anti-
Semitism not founded on a similar perspective. Speaking more figuratively, the
Frankfurt School intellectuals made a historic effort to examine and diagnose what they
considered to be a dangerous pathology of modern society. Their efforts did produce
solid research on the disease. But their diagnoses—for there was more than one—were
also partly flawed. And the sources of the lapses were fundamental elements of the
diagnosticians’ very expertise.

Studies in Prejudice: The Empirical Dissection of Anti-Semitism

The principles of interdisciplinarity and integration of theory and empirical research that
Horkheimer had outlined in his inaugural address were put into practice in the
collaborative work that produced the most significant study of the Institute before the
period of emigration—the 1936 Studien über Autorität und Familie [Studies of Authority
and the Family]. The study was aimed at investigating what its authors considered one of
the most fundamental features of their contemporary society—the widespread
acceptance of authority as a fact of social and cultural reality, or as the authors put it, the
generally accepted “belief that there must always be a superior and an inferior and that
obedience is a necessity.”31 The family, as the “[most important] institution[…] which make[s] the individual receptive to the influence of authority,” was the main focus of analysis.32

The study was divided into three main parts. The first consisted of three essays by Horkheimer, Fromm and Marcuse, which tried to outline the Studien’s central theoretical problematic.33 Horkheimer’s, for example, was aimed partly at examining the changing pattern of relationships of authority in Western society since the Middle Ages.34 The Studien’s third main part consisted of a collection of essays—“Einzelstudien,” or “Special Studies”—on different aspects of the family institution in Germany, France, Belgium, and Austria. The subject of one essay, for instance, was “Authority and the Family in German Literature after the World War.”35 And the second main part reported the results of research that the Institute had carried out since the early 1930s. One of its sections represented a report on research conducted in 1930 and 1931. Aiming to delineate possible types of “psychological structure” to be found among German “skilled workers” and “clerical employees,” the Institute had distributed three thousand questionnaires among potential research subjects, asking for information on many aspects of the individuals’ lives, including personal tastes, and factual information about, among others, “occupation,” “marital status,” and “origins.”36 On the basis of the information from seven hundred questionnaires, the authors distinguished three types of psychological structure: the “authoritarian character,” the “revolutionary character,” and the “ambivalent character.”37

The Institute’s dissection of prejudice in the mid-1940s would follow the Studien in its research techniques—such as the questionnaire. But besides methodology, some of
the conceptual tools employed by the Studien’s contributors would also play an important role in the later work. Consequential in this way were Fromm’s inquiries. Fromm wrote the so-called “sociopsychological” part of the Studien with the aim of exploring the “psychological dynamics of acceptance of authority.”38 His analysis was based on Freudian psychoanalysis and, to explain the individual’s internalization of authority, he employed in particular Freud’s division of the psychical apparatus into id, ego, and superego. At the same time, however, he also emphasized the social factors influencing the formation of the individual’s psyche, factors which, he claimed, Freud had neglected in his writings.39

During the Oedipal phase, Fromm pointed out, agreeing with Freud, the small child internalizes the “commands and prohibitions” [Gebote und Verbote] that the father imposes on the child’s impulses, such as the prohibition against the sexual desire for the mother. This internalization results in the formation of the superego.40 At the same time, since the father is also the representative and bearer of the law and morality of the patriarchal society—Fromm assumed that his contemporary society was patriarchal—the child also internalizes, through the father, the authority of society itself with its own set of “commands and prohibitions.”41 The social authority and its “internalized representative,” the superego, repress the unconscious impulses that are disruptive to authority. This repression is facilitated by the individual’s fear of authority and the need to be loved by it.42 It entails an expenditure of psychic energy, and, at the same time, as the repressed impulses are not destroyed but “remain in the unconscious” and the ego cannot effect their repression on its own but relies for it on authority and the superego,
the ego gradually becomes dependent on this repression. The negative result of these two processes is a diminution of the ego.43

Having outlined the psychological dynamics of acceptance of authority, Fromm examined the traits of what came to be known as the “sadomasochistic character.” This conception formed a part of the theoretical background and foundation of the mid-1940s analysis of prejudice, and was deployed in the later investigation. According to Freudian psychoanalysis, Fromm pointed out, “character” represents a psychological complex, a “structure,” of interconnected traits.44 “[T]he character structure,” he claimed, “that exhibits masochism [as one of its traits], also necessarily contains sadism.”45 The sadomasochistic individuals show “sympathy” with the “powerful” and “aggression” against the “defenseless.”46 According to Fromm, “fear stands at the basis of [their] attitude towards the strong and powerful.” The fear, however, is “relatively little recognized consciously as such” and “an encounter with power transforms it almost automatically into reverence and love.”47 On the other hand, these individuals’ attitude towards the weak is one of “contempt and hatred.” They thus enjoy “making the weak suffer,” the “cruelty” only increasing their own sense of power.48

Such concepts, methods and principles of investigation made the Studien a fitting preparation for the research that produced Studies in Prejudice. The Studies’ five volumes were published at the end of 1949 and the beginning of 1950 and were the product of several years of work. In 1939, Horkheimer and Adorno had drafted a project for the study of anti-Semitism, but it had not attracted the attention of potential sponsors.49 In 1943, the American Jewish Committee (AJC) agreed to provide funding for one year of research on anti-Semitism, suggesting also the possibility of extending
the support further. The research began immediately after the grant was received. One area of investigation, for instance, was “psychological research,” whose purpose was the construction of a scale for the measurement of anti-Semitic attitudes. This kind of research was carried out in Los Angeles by R. Nevitt Sanford, Else Frenkel-Brunswik and Daniel Levinson.50

Work on the project continued until April 1944, when the AJC’s financial support came to an end. In May, the AJC held a conference on anti-Semitism in New York. One of the subjects discussed was the establishment of a scientific department, as a part of the AJC, which would assume the responsibility for organizing future research on anti-Semitism.51 In the summer of 1944, the Committee announced its decision to provide further funding for the anti-Semitism research. At the same time, it established a Scientific Department and Horkheimer became its director.52 As he explained it later, his “task was to organize the study of the nature and causes of anti-Jewish feeling in America.”53 “To this effect,” he stated, “I proposed to stimulate the organization of scholarly teams at American universities devoted to research into our problem.”54 This research would consist of separate studies of different aspects of anti-Semitism. “Most” of the “fundamental studies,” as Horkheimer described them,

were patterned according to a general methodological conception: the integration of modern psychiatric and psychological insights on the one hand and of sociological research techniques on the other hand. This meant the adaptation of various forms of interviews, tests, content analyses, genetic and phenomenological research and statistical procedures, and furthermore the cooperation of scholars of various branches of science and various traditions.55

The final form in which the results of the research were published was the series of five books comprising Studies in Prejudice: Paul Massing’s Rehearsal for Destruction: A Study of Political Anti-Semitism in Imperial Germany, Leo Löwenthal and Norbert
Guterman’s *Prophets of Deceit: A Study of the Techniques of the American Agitator*, Bruno Bettelheim and Morris Janowitz’s *Dynamics of Prejudice: A Psychological and Sociological Study of Veterans*, Nathan Ackerman and Marie Jahoda’s *Anti-Semitism and Emotional Disorder: A Psychoanalytic Interpretation*, and the most substantial of all, *The Authoritarian Personality*, by Theodor Adorno, Else Frenkel-Brunswik, Daniel Levinson, and R. Nevitt Sanford. The scrutiny of these is what the rest of this section pursues.

Massing’s *Rehearsal for Destruction* was an historical examination of the rise of political anti-Semitism in Germany from the 1870s until the outbreak of the First World War. Horkheimer and Flowerman’s foreword to the *Studies* suggested that the two main factors contributing to the existence and outbursts of prejudice were “elements in the personality of modern man that predispose him to reactions of hostility to racial and religious groups,” and, also, “the social situation itself, i.e., the external stimuli to which the predispositions within the individual have reacted and continue to react.” Massing’s study examined the latter determinant of prejudice—those aspects of the “social situation” in Imperial Germany which encouraged the rise of political anti-Semitism.

*Rehearsal for Destruction* was among the first studies on the subject to relate the rise of anti-Semitism in Imperial Germany to the socio-economic disturbances of the period. Massing demonstrated that “the greater the disorganization within society, the more numerous the elements of discontent attracted to the finality of racial ideology, by its claim to a total critique of society and dogmatic guidance.” The socio-economic background to the rise of anti-Semitism, Massing pointed out, was the severe economic depression of the early- and mid-1870s. Anti-Semitism drew its support primarily from
the ranks of the economically insecure *Mittelstand*. At the same time, it was frequently used by German parties, other than the Social Democrats, and by the Imperial government as an instrument for gaining political support. (*RD*, 5-6, 47, 65) For example, from the late 1870s until the mid-1880s, the aristocratic Conservative Party tolerated, and in fact encouraged, the growth of the Berlin anti-Semitic movement, supported by economically insecure members of the *Mittelstand* and headed by the Protestant pastor Adolf Stoecker. The Reich chancellor Bismarck, bent on curbing the political strength of the liberals who had resisted his repeated attempts at checking the power of the Reichstag, was also willing to tolerate the spread of anti-Semitism, as long as it increased the strength of the parties that opposed the liberals and supported the Reich government. Towards the late 1880s, however, when the National Liberal Party declared its wholehearted support of the Imperial government, both the Conservatives and the government withdrew their support from the Stoecker movement and, in early 1889, Stoecker was forced to abandon his political activities. (*RD*, 21-59) According to Massing, the emergence of anti-Semitic organizations, their concomitant tapping of *Mittelstand* discontent, and the willingness of established parties and the Reich government to manipulate anti-Semitism resulted in the latter’s establishment “as a quasi-automatic group reaction as well as a consciously used instrument of power.” Thus, Massing claimed, the political developments of the last quarter of the nineteenth century foreshadowed the pattern of anti-Semitism’s uses and political role in Germany during the 1930s and 1940s. (*RD*, 109)

Mastering an impressive body of evidence, Massing produced a study that remains a classic in the historiography of anti-Semitism. Yet despite the solidity of its
analysis, *Rehearsal for Destruction* showed also a truly focal fault. And this was related directly to a central principle of Critical Theory.

In a 1970s historiographical review, Ismar Schorsch claimed that Massing’s “analysis … remains basically a refined socialist exposition of the events.” Massing, said Schorsch, provided an essentially “socialist” interpretation of the rise of anti-Semitism, “[d]espite his disenchantment with communism during the Stalin purges and his foolhardy act of withdrawal from party membership on a visit to Moscow in 1937….”

Massing had indeed been sympathetic to the Soviet Union and a member of the German Communist Party (KPD) in the 1920s, but had then become disillusioned with the Stalinist regime and had traveled to Moscow to announce his decision to discontinue his membership in the KPD. Schorsch was thus right in noting Massing’s “disenchantment with communism.” And he was also right in proposing that the conclusions Massing drew were similar to the *fin-de-siècle* socialist view on anti-Semitism. Around the turn of the twentieth century, as Jacob Katz has pointed out, the theory of the genesis of anti-Semitism prevalent among European socialists suggested either that anti-Semitism erupted in times of crises of the capitalist system when Jews became targets of accusation as capitalism’s representative figures *par excellence*, or that anti-Semitism was “engineered” by defenders of the status quo in order to divert the public’s attention away from capitalism’s inherent flaws. Massing emphasized both the importance of the socio-economic disturbances in Imperial Germany and the manipulation of anti-Semitism by the Conservative Party and the Reich government.

It is, of course, wrong to infer from Schorsch’s stress on the ironic discrepancy between Massing’s political beliefs and his book that the latter provided a hopelessly
biased interpretation. Schorsch himself was unsparing of generosity, describing Massing’s study as “penetrating” and “judicious.” And it is as wrong to question Massing’s scholarly integrity or doubt the heuristic value of Marxist, materialist, or socio-economic explanations of historical events. Yet Schorsch’s sense of irony points to what is a real problem of focus in Rehearsal. In particular, the length at which Massing examined the attitude of the German labor movement towards the rise of anti-Semitism in Imperial Germany was not fully justified. He devoted one quarter of his study—the last one out of four parts—to examining the German Social Democratic Party’s attitudes and policies towards the anti-Semitic movements. The last part of a study that might have benefited, as Schorsch himself suggested, from a more detailed analysis of the fate of anti-Semitism among broad strata of German society after the political decline of anti-Semitic organizations in the mid-1890s, resembled too much an internal party evaluation of the mistakes and achievements of the Social Democrats vis-à-vis organized anti-Semitism. And the chief source of this focal skewing was Massing’s adoption of a Marxist perspective. In his case, one of Critical Theory’s main currents produced a distorting self-reflexivity.

Of the other four volumes of Studies in Prejudices, Prophets of Deceit analyzed the manipulative techniques of the anti-Semitic agitator, using as examples the political activities, speeches and public pronouncements of American agitators during the 1940s. The other three books—The Authoritarian Personality, Dynamics of Prejudice, and Anti-Semitism and Emotional Disorder—probed the psychology of prejudiced
individuals. What was common to all of these studies was a marked reliance on Freudian concepts.

To those familiar with the work of the Institute during the 1930s and early 1940s, the use of Freudian psychoanalysis in the Studies would not have come as a surprise. After all, Adorno and Horkheimer had acknowledged their interest in psychoanalysis in the late 1920s, and Horkheimer had helped with the establishment of the Frankfurt Psychoanalytic Institute in the spring of 1929, receiving two letters of gratitude from Freud himself. But what was unusual was the extent of the Studies’ theoretical preoccupation with the psychology of the prejudiced personality. Anticipating the possible surprise of the series’s readers, Horkheimer and Flowerman noted: “[i]t may strike the reader that we have placed undue stress upon the personal and psychological rather than upon the social aspect of prejudice.” They justified the approach by pointing out that one of the Studies’ chief aims was to “help in [the] eradication [of prejudice].” The most trustworthy means of such an abolition was “re-education, scientifically planned on the basis of understanding scientifically arrived at. And education in a strict sense is by its nature personal and psychological.”

The deployment of psychoanalytic concepts to explain, and thus help eradicate, prejudice was not an entirely new endeavor. In the course of the 1930s and early 1940s, numerous intellectuals had already used Freudian concepts to probe the genesis of anti-Semitism. In fact, one irony in the history of psychoanalysis is that some of its basic concepts, which, to follow Sander Gilman, were developed by Freud in response to the anti-Semitic prejudice he encountered, came to be increasingly used during the 1930s and 1940s in a direct attack on anti-Semitism.
concepts to theorize anti-Semitism had been Otto Fenichel, who, like many of the members of the Institute of Social Research, had emigrated from Germany in the 1930s and established himself in the United States.  

In 1940, Fenichel published his article “The Psychoanalysis of Antisemitism,” where he used the concept of projection to explain the psychology of anti-Semitism. In Freudian psychoanalysis, projection means an individual’s ascription of thoughts that he or she is incapable of admitting to another person, or, as Fenichel put it, the tendency “to see in others what one does not wish to become conscious of in oneself.” The Jews, Fenichel argued, possess cultural peculiarities that distinguish them from the gentile cultures they live in—they have retained their ancient customs and, importantly, have also “retained peculiarities of their hosts, which these hosts [have] themselves long since given up.” Like the Jews, the human unconscious also represents something archaic and foreign, the repository of repressed impulses and wishes that an individual has persistently struggled to repress throughout his or her life. To the anti-Semites, therefore, the Jews come to represent their own repressed instincts. The accusations against the Jews, for example of murder or of sexual debauchery, are the projections of the anti-Semites’ own unconscious instincts; anti-Semitic hatred is thus the anti-Semites’ hatred against their own unacceptable unconscious instincts.  

Prominent among these pioneering inquiries was also *Anti-Semitism: A Social Disease*, a collection of essays edited by the psychoanalyst Ernst Simmel, another émigré intellectual. It grew out of a symposium on anti-Semitism organized by the San Francisco Psychoanalytic Society in the summer of 1944, and contained a modified version of Fenichel’s article. It also included contributions by Horkheimer, Adorno,
Else Frenkel-Brunswik and R. Nevitt Sanford. At that time, all were already engaged actively in the work on the *Studies*, and their papers were based partly on the Institute’s research on anti-Semitism accumulated to date. The purpose of Horkheimer’s contribution was to paint in broad strokes what he conceived to be the “sociological background” to the psychoanalytic study of modern anti-Semitism—“the world of monopoly”—and to outline a tentative research problematic for the scientific study of anti-Semitism in light of it. Adorno’s part offered a brief examination of the content, goals and psychology behind American fascist propaganda, and Frenkel-Brunswik and Nevitt Sanford’s chapter provided a preliminary sketch of the anti-Semitic personality that would be elaborated in much greater detail in *The Authoritarian Personality*.

The publication of these path-breaking inquiries marked a critical shift in many European intellectuals’ theoretical, political, and personal attitudes towards anti-Semitism. Before the Nazis’ rise to power, intellectuals, such as Proust for example, could in good faith show a tolerant complacency towards anti-Semitism and treat it as a fairly acceptable, albeit potentially dangerous, common prejudice. *Remembrance*’s narrator even indulged occasionally in anti-Semitic statements. In contrast, at the time of the rise of Nazism and in the immediate aftermath of the Second World War, the intellectuals who used psychoanalysis to dissect anti-Semitism almost unanimously conceived it as a dangerous pathology of modern mass society. Anti-Semitism was, as it were, medicalized: these intellectuals employed the language of medicine to describe it, and started considering it a social and personal disease in urgent need of scientific study, indeed almost in need of medical treatment. The very title of the collection that Simmel edited reveals this shift. In his own contribution, he also asserted: “[a]s clinical
psychiatrists our endeavor must be first, to diagnose the mental disorder of anti-Semitism by studying its genesis and its manifestations, and secondly, to direct our thinking toward helping the anti-Semite to rid himself of his disease.”

The language of the authors of Studies in Prejudice did not abound in medical terminology, but they certainly shared the new assumption. As Horkheimer and Flowerman wrote in their general introduction, “… a social disease has its periods of quiescence during which the social scientist, like the biologist or the physician can study it in the search for more effective ways to prevent or reduce the virulence of the next outbreak.” But while the Studies shared the view of anti-Semitism as a disease, they exhibited a notable change in thinking about anti-Semitism that also distinguished them from the earlier psychoanalytic analyses. The latter, as Simmel noted, “challenge[d] the old idea [shared most frequently by anti-Semites] that anti-Semitism is a problem concerning Jews only,” and assumed that anti-Semitism is, above all, a problem of anti-Semitic society. The earlier analyses also paid some attention to what I call the referent of anti-Semitism. They assumed that a Jewish character type actually existed and, in fact, played some role in the outbursts of prejudice. Fenichel’s interpretation of the psychology of anti-Semitism, for example, was based on the assumption that Jewish peculiarities of character existed in reality. In contrast, the authors of the Studies not only “challenged” the idea that “anti-Semitism is a problem concerning Jews only,” but completely abandoned it. They would have agreed wholeheartedly with Sartre’s emphatic statement, “… anti-Semitism is not a Jewish problem; it is our problem.” What is more, the Studies showed a fading into insignificance of the referent of anti-Semitism. Their authors repeatedly insisted that the possible existence of “Jewish”
peculiarities or character traits plays, if any, a very insignificant role in anti-Semitism. The authors of *The Authoritarian Personality*, for example, held “the view that anti-Semitism is based more largely upon factors in the subject and in his total situation than upon actual characteristics of Jews, and that one place to look for determinants of anti-Semitic opinions and attitudes is within the persons who express them.” In fact, the *Studies* represented an attempt to subvert radically the anti-Semitic practice of defining and labeling the Jews and their putative character, and to utilize that same practice, but in a profoundly different form, against the enemies of the Jews. The *Studies* constituted a consistent scholarly attempt, based on psychological and sociological research, to define the personality of the anti-Semites themselves.

The one volume, of the four psychoanalytically oriented ones, that was not aimed at dissecting the psychology of the anti-Semites was Löwenthal and Guterman’s *Prophets of Deceit*. Its primary aim was to provide a content analysis of the propaganda of American fascist agitators. “Self-appointed popular spokesmen,” such as Charles E. Coughlin and Gerald L. K. Smith, had gained some sporadic popularity in the Western half of the United States before and during the Second World War. “Most of these [agitators],” as the authors pointed out, “openly expressed admiration for Hitler and Mussolini, were ratably anti-Semitic, and indulged in intensive vituperation of our national leaders.” (*PD*, xv) Charting the contents of this type of fascist propaganda was the study’s first goal. Its second one was the analysis of the techniques of psychological manipulation employed (whether consciously or not) by these agitators, and of the psychological determinants of the agitators’ popular appeal. The study’s basic theoretical premise was the claim that the propaganda “constitute[s] a kind of secret psychological
language … [whose] essential meaning—that which attracts the followers—cannot be reached by means of the usual methods of logical inquiry, but [is] a psychological Morse Code tapped out by the agitator and picked up by the followers.” *(PD, 140)* The study itself was an attempt to uncover “the psychological content and significance of [the agitator’s] behavior,” “to translate the secret code of agitation into a language accessible to all.” *(PD, xi, 140)*

If the study’s purpose was a complex translation of the propaganda’s meaning, what did the translation say in the “language accessible to all?” The authors claimed that the agitator is “a specific type of ‘advocate of social change,’” whose propaganda resembles the political discourse of social reformers and revolutionaries. But this resemblance is only superficial. Unlike reformers, whose activities are aimed at achieving specific, or “circumscribed,” social changes, or revolutionaries, who aim at a comprehensive transformation of society on the basis of rational explanations of the causes of societal ills, the agitator does not provide a rational and logically consistent political platform to gain popular support. Instead, “the explicit content of agitational material is … incidental” and its “primary function … is to release [temporarily] reactions of gratification or frustration whose total effect is to make the audience subservient to [the agitator’s] personal leadership.” Like the reformer or the revolutionary, the agitator also identifies “an enemy,” but while the former regard the overcoming of the enemy as “a means to an end,” a prerequisite for the achievement of an improvement of society, the agitator conceives the enemy as one or several persons and the pursuit of this personalized enemy becomes “an end in itself.” In contrast to the reformer or revolutionary, who propose genuine programs of social change and hence
offer the prospect of alleviating permanently the adherents’ dissatisfactions with the status quo, the agitator merely intensifies these emotions and, at most, provides a temporary release of them. The ultimate practical aim of the agitator, in contrast to the goal of the revolutionary, is not a societal transformation, but, in fact, the preservation of “the existing social structure;” at their most radical, the agitators envision a change in the current government’s personnel. (PD, 6-7, 9, 38, 101)

These, according to Löwenthal and Guterman, were the main goals and political character of the agitator’s activities. Since the study’s primary purpose was to analyze the content of fascist propaganda, the authors examined in detail the agitators’ self-portrait and the portrayal of their alleged enemies and followers in their public addresses. What is crucial for our purposes is the portrayal of the purported enemies. In fascist propaganda, the authors claimed, the agitator paints a world on the brink of “total disaster,” an apocalyptic situation brought about by the sinister machinations of a fearful enemy. (PD, 33, 38) The enemy is simultaneously all-powerful and weak, the ambivalence itself suggesting the possibility of the enemy’s defeat despite its formidable power. Often, the enemy is also portrayed in terms of filth or as a parasite whose very existence poses a threat to the social and biological health of society. The enemy has many incarnations, be they communists, international “plutocrats,” the “corrupt government,” or “foreigners.” Significantly, these different, and often contradictory, incarnations converge on the figure of the Jew who becomes the ultimate referent of the agitator’s list of multiple enemies. (PD, 38-64, 88, 103)

Löwenthal and Guterman employed, of course, Freudian psychoanalysis to understand the agitators’ psychological appeal to and impact on their audiences. They
explained, for example, the association of the agitator’s enemies with filth through the mechanism of projection and the psychoanalytic conception of the child’s “education for cleanliness.” This education, according to psychoanalysis, “is one of the most difficult experiences a small child ever encounters.” As a result of numerous prohibitions and threats on the part of parents, the child suppresses his or her instinctive attraction to dirt and develops a repulsion to it. Sometimes, however, the “suppressed infantile instincts reassert themselves in later life through neurotic symptoms—among other ways, as delectations in the forbidden sphere of dirt.” Through the association of the enemy with filth, the fascist agitator thus plays upon the audience’s ambivalent attitudes towards dirt. The association is a projection of the agitator’s and the audience’s suppressed desire for dirt onto a convenient screen. This projection, by bringing such a desire to the surface, enables the members of the audience to indulge in and enjoy temporarily their long-suppressed instincts, while “remind[ing] [them] that there is something shameful and disgusting about such desires.” The agitator and the audience, in effect, both enjoy the agitator’s vituperative verbal wallowing in filth and reject its purported symbols. (PD, 103)

As we indicated, the “foreigner” is designated by the agitators as one of their main enemies. Very often, the authors argued, the refugee becomes “the most fearsome version of the foreigner,” and the refugee is, in turn, “[u]ltimately … identified with the ancient figure of the outcast, a man cursed by the gods, an exile who does not deserve a better fate.” (PD, 50-51) To explain the psychological appeal of this frequent identification of the enemy with the refugee and the outcast, the authors employed concepts very similar to those already used by Fenichel, ones that, as we shall see, re-
appeared in a different guise in Horkheimer and Adorno’s reflections on anti-Semitism in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. “The refugee and the outcast,” Löwenthal and Guterman wrote,

become symbols of vague unconscious urges, of the repressed contents of the psyche, which, mankind has learned in the course of history, must be censured and condemned as the price of social and cultural survival…. The refugee’s homelessness becomes the psychological equivalent of the audience’s repressed instincts. Such an equation prepares for a release of banned instincts against banned people. (*PD*, 51)

Thus, as the refugee, the Jew incurs hatred because, to his or her enemies, he or she appears to possess archaic characteristics that the members of his or her enemies’ society have discarded as the psychological price for societal development.

As Jay has pointed out, to explain the appeal of fascist propaganda, the authors “also introduced the work of another refugee, Erik Erikson, to supplement Freud’s seminal insights.” In a 1942 article in *Psychiatry*, Erikson had argued that Hitler played the psychological role of “a glorified older brother, who replaces the father, … without over-identifying with him: … a gang leader who ‘keeps the boys’ together by demanding their admiration, by creating terror, and by shrewdly involving them in crimes from which there is no way back.” At the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century, according to Erikson, the predominant structural pattern of the German family exhibited a sharp contradiction regarding the role of the German father. The German father’s authority in the home was unquestioned, but he lacked “true inner authority”—the authority that a Frenchman or an Englishman had acquired long before as a result of their acceptance and internalization of the concept of the self-reliant “free man,” after England and France’s early “democratic revolutions.” While many adolescents in Weimar Germany, like many of their fathers before them, resented and
desired to transcend this contradiction in the German family structure, the possibilities for such a transcendence in pre-Nazi Germany were virtually non-existent.⁸⁹ Most adolescents’ attempts to overcome this pattern resulted in an escape into solitary intellectual or mystical pursuits or in the joining of “small bands” of youths experiencing similar emotional tribulations.⁹⁰ Hitler’s outspoken rejection in Mein Kampf of his father and all he stood for, and his simultaneous insistence on German youth’s ability to “shape its own destiny,” possessed an enormous appeal to all those who had failed to achieve meaningful solutions to the conflicts of their adolescence.⁹¹ Löwenthal and Guterman utilized Erikson’s idea of Hitler as an older brother and leader of a gang of rebellious adolescents to explain what seemed a basic logical contradiction in fascist propaganda. As we saw, the “Reds” and the “plutocrats” were two of the agitator’s favorite enemies. The contradiction consists not in their identification as enemies, but in the agitator’s frequent identification of communism with capitalism and simultaneous attack against both. For example, an idea found often in fascist propaganda was that a clique of international financiers—most frequently Jewish—controls the destinies of both capitalist and socialist societies. (PD, 44)

To explain this aspect of the propaganda of male agitators, Löwenthal and Guterman gave Erikson’s original insight an imaginative twist. The banker, they claimed, is “a father image,” “who enjoys the forbidden fruit and preaches abstinence to others…. ” The “‘marriage’ of banker and communist,” on this view, “seems ‘natural’ to the unconscious, which in a sense considers every marriage forbidden because the mother grants the father sexual rights denied to the child.” Through his propaganda activities, the male agitator becomes a “substitute father image who reminds his listeners
of the incestuous marriage,” and, “at the same time[,] mobilizes resentment against both
parents who deny sexual gratification to the follower and force him to look for it
elsewhere—in a community of ‘brothers.’” (PD, 45) The male agitator, thus, represents
both a father figure and the leader of a gang of potentially rebellious brothers, resentful
of the incest of their symbolic parents.

These were some of the main psychoanalytic explanations of the appeal of fascist
propaganda that Prophets of Deceit delineated. The study showed considerable
theoretical imaginativeness and analytical acumen. As Wiggershaus has pointed out,
however, one of its problematic aspects was the lack of any concrete empirical research
on the audiences’ actual reactions to the agitators’ propaganda. Despite Adorno’s
suggestion that Löwenthal and Guterman attend actual meetings, the latter never
followed his advice and focused instead on a close reading of agitators’ speeches.92 As a
hermeneutic exercise, their analysis revealed much about the psychological effects and
appeal of the propaganda. But without concrete research on audiences’ reactions, the
exercise remained too detached from actual social and psychological realities—it could
not reveal clearly whether audiences did indeed experience the appeal of the “prophets
of deceit” in the way it described. Here, then, a key precept of Critical Theory had
disabling effects. The idea of combining theory and empirical research led to a study in
which they did not illuminate and reinforce each other, but appeared in discord. Here
interpretation displaced research, eliding an indispensable inquiry into fascist agitation.

Another crucial defect of Prophets stemmed even more directly from a vital
principle of Critical Theory. Gravely problematic was Löwenthal and Guterman’s
identification of the ultimate social and psychological source of fascist agitation.
According to them, this breeding ground was the “fundamental condition of modern life[,] malaise.” And this malaise of modern life, they specified, reflects the stresses imposed on the individual by the profound transformations taking place in our economic and social structure—the replacement of the class of small independent producers by gigantic industrial bureaucracies, the decay of the patriarchal family, the breakdown of primary personal ties between individuals in an increasingly mechanized world, the compartmentalization and atomization of group life, and the substitution of mass culture for traditional patterns.

The malaise takes the form of a general and omnipresent sense of “distrust, dependence, exclusion, anxiety, and disillusionment,” and it is these emotions of profound discontent that fascist agitation taps and exploits. (PD, 14-15)

The identification of the malaise of modern life as the ultimate fount of fascist agitation harmonized with Horkheimer’s earlier sketch of the sociological background of modern anti-Semitism, and thus seems to possess a lot of intuitive truth. But the veracity of Löwenthal and Guterman’s contention is mostly apparent. The emphasis on the general modern malaise as a source of ominous discontent constituted an unjustified theoretical leap, which did not precisely attend to the immediate and concrete context of fascist propaganda. Their contention, for example, did not explain much about the fact that many of the agitators’ vituperations were aimed at concrete government policies, such as, for instance, the New Deal’s measures against big business, complaints that seem to have tapped much more specific sources and types of discontent. (PD, 48) It also left unanswered important sociological and historical questions, such as the obvious one of why did fascist agitators gain popularity in the United States immediately before and during the Second World War and not at any other time. Indeed, the logical rejoinder to Löwenthal and Guterman’s argument is the question of why, given the
supposed presence of a sense of malaise among the majority of the population, did the fascist propaganda not enjoy a much larger following. It is difficult to avoid the conclusion that the authors’ reluctance to abandon a critical stance towards Western society, and their—all too uncritical—readiness to identify its negative social and economic tendencies damaged the heuristic value of their claims.

The other three of the psychoanalytically oriented Studies explored, as we noted, aspects of the prejudiced personality itself. Surprising as it may sound, the three studies constituted a very Proustian attempt—Proustian with respect to their fundamental aim—to fathom the psychological determinants and dynamics of anti-Semitism. Unlike Proust, of course, their authors did not rely solely on penetrating personal insight, but deployed both psychoanalysis and the research techniques of mid-twentieth-century social science.

In terms of its impact on subsequent research, the most significant of the three studies was The Authoritarian Personality. This mammoth work of close to one thousand pages inspired countless further sociological and psychological studies of prejudice in the United States and has since become a classic in the field.93

The book’s purpose was to examine the characteristics of “the potentially fascist individual, one whose structure is such as to render him particularly susceptible to anti-democratic propaganda.” Its central concept was that of a relatively stable personality, a psychological organization that determines the individual’s responses to his or her economic, social and political environment. Personality, the authors wrote, “is a more or less enduring organization of forces within the individual;” it is “these persisting forces” that “help to determine response in various situations, and it is thus largely to them that consistency of behavior—whether verbal or physical—is
attributable.” The study’s initial goal was a theoretical and empirical analysis of anti-Semitism, but the authors were then led to hypothesize that anti-Semitic prejudice is “but a part of a broader ideological framework,” and that the individual’s susceptibility to that, in turn, “depends primarily upon his psychological needs.” Anti-Semitism was conceived as a particular example of a host of other anti-democratic ideas, such as, for instance, hostility against other minority groups. The study’s main theoretical hypothesis thus became the claim that anti-Semitism constitutes but one aspect of a potentially fascistic psychological predisposition. (AP, 1, 3, 5, 9) Accordingly, rather than profiling the anti-Semite in particular, the book attempted to outline a portrait of the fascistic individual in general, who is potentially receptive to various kinds of anti-democratic ideas.94

The psychological theory that guided the authors’ scrutiny of the potential fascist was, again, Freudian psychoanalysis. But they also utilized developments in “academic psychology.” “For theory as to the structure of personality,” they wrote, “we have leaned most heavily upon Freud, while for a more or less systematic formulation of the more directly observable and measurable aspects of personality we have been guided primarily by academic psychology.” (AP, 5) The “academic psychology” the authors alluded to (although they did not discuss it extensively) was the burgeoning field of ego psychology.95 In a later assessment of The Authoritarian Personality, Frenkel-Brunswik explained that the work of Heinz Hartmann, one of the founders of ego psychology, had been an important theoretical basis of the study. Ego psychology, as Frenkel-Brunswik pointed out, while having its roots in Freudian psychoanalysis, differed from it in its conceptualization of the ego as a relatively independent agency within the psychical
apparatus. In Freudian psychoanalysis, “the development of the ego is ascribed mainly to the necessity of delaying gratification” and “ego development is seen as occurring under the supremacy of the id.”\textsuperscript{96} In contrast, Hartmann’s work “stress[ed] explicitly the relative independence of perception, learning, and thinking from the instinctual processes.”\textsuperscript{97} The utilization of ego psychology was the result of the authors’ realization that “a complete picture of personality must refer to both the pattern of basic motivations and to the manner of manifestation of the [unconscious] tendencies involved.”\textsuperscript{98} The picture would include both the prejudiced individual’s openly expressed “opinions, attitudes, and values,” and those deeper psychological tendencies that “reached the surface only in indirect manifestations” or remained hidden in his or her unconscious. (\textit{AP}, 11-12)

To achieve their conceptual goals, the authors launched an extensive campaign for the collection of empirical data and, in the course of more than one year, amassed an impressive amount of information. From the beginning of 1945 until the fall of 1947, scholars and researchers associated with the project managed to gather information from more than two thousand people living mainly on the West Coast of the United States. The final number of research subjects on whom the study was based came to 2,099. The subjects came from a variety of backgrounds, including students at the Universities of California and Oregon, members of trade unions and of service clubs, such as the Rotary, psychiatric patients of the Langley Porter Clinic of the University of California, and prison inmates at the San Quentin State Prison. Students, younger people and members of the middle class were over-represented in the sample. The authors were
themselves aware of these limitations and cautioned that the sample provided “a rather inadequate basis for generalizing about the total population of this country.” (AP, 19-23)

The techniques employed in the collection of data were several. A main one was the use of questionnaires. These contained three types of items: first, factual questions, whose answers provided information, for example, on the subject’s group membership, vocation, and political preferences; second, opinion-attitude scales, which asked the subject to “express his agreement or disagreement” with statements about different economic, social, political and cultural issues; and, third, projective questions, which allowed the subjects to express freely their opinions or personal preferences regarding a personal or political issue. An actual projective question, for instance, was, “What great people, living or dead, do you admire most?” (AP, 13, 545) The authors also used clinical techniques for intensive study of particular subjects, important here being interviews. They lasted between two and three hours and were divided into an ideological section, whose aim was to allow the subjects to express freely their opinions on “broad ideological topics,” such as “politics, religion, minority groups, income, and vocation,” and a clinical-genetic section, intended to enable them to talk with the least possible restraint about their “contemporary situation” and about their attitudes towards their childhood. (AP, 16-17)

In chronological order, the first technique the authors employed was the questionnaires. They were distributed to potential subjects and, after the information was collected, the individuals were assessed and ranked according to the level of their ethnocentric prejudice. Subjects from the highest and lowest quartiles on ethnocentrism, i.e., prejudiced and unprejudiced individuals, were then selected for intensive clinical
study. The interviews that were conducted were “approximately one hundred”—the authors did not specify exactly how many—the number of high- and low-scoring men and high- and low-scoring women being approximately equal. \((AP, 295)\) With the accumulation of information and insight from the different research techniques, the latter were continuously revised and refined and their revised versions were re-applied in the further collection of data, as the authors persistently attempted to improve the techniques’ precision and reliability. \((AP, 13)\)\(^{99}\)

Perhaps the most ingenious technique used in the effort to profile the potential fascist were the opinion-attitude scales. The authors developed them specifically for the study, and they included: the Anti-Semitism (A-S) Scale, designed to measure susceptibility to anti-Semitic ideas, the Ethnocentrism (E) Scale, developed to assess the subjects’ degree of ethnocentrism, the Politico-Economic Conservatism (PEC) Scale, intended to determine the character of their “politico-economic ideology,” and the Fascism (F) Scale, devised to gauge their susceptibility to antidemocratic ideas in general. \((AP, 151, 223)\) The scales constituted a crucial aspect of the questionnaires. Their importance is shown by the fact that the A-S and E Scales were used as the basis for the selection of subjects for clinical study. \((AP, 294)\)

Of the four Scales, the F emerged as the most important instrument for measuring antidemocratic tendencies within the personality. Chronologically, the first to be developed was the A-S, followed by the E and PEC Scales. Statistical analysis showed that the A-S and E Scales were highly correlated, in other words, that people who scored high on the A-S also scored high on the E Scale. \((AP, 122-123, 145-150)\)\(^{100}\) The correlation between E and PEC, conversely, was found to be “significant” but
“imperfect,” or, as the authors put it, “[t]he more conservative an individual is, the greater the likelihood that he is ethnocentric—but this is a probability and not a certainty.” Since empirical analysis showed that an individual’s susceptibility to anti-Semitism was correlated to his or her level of ethnocentrism, the authors then deemed it appropriate to design a scale that would reveal a subject’s susceptibility to antidemocratic ideology in general. In contrast to the A-S and E, the new Scale was to include items that did not refer openly to any particular minority groups, and would thus have the advantage of “measur[ing] prejudice without appearing to have this aim.” The result was the F Scale. The authors hoped that the scale, because of its apparent freedom from ideological statements, would provide a “better estimate of antidemocratic potential.” (AP, 180, 222-223)

The construction of the F Scale, as the authors themselves noted, was based on the empirical data and the conclusions concerning the prejudiced personality already accumulated during the research. The Scale was revised three times, the number of items being gradually reduced from thirty-eight to thirty. (AP, 242-262) Its all-important feature was not, of course, the content of its items, but the aspect of the subject’s personality it was intended to determine. In the course of their research, the authors had identified a number of deeper psychological tendencies within prejudiced individuals which accounted for the subjects’ susceptibility to antidemocratic ideology. These tendencies, in other words, determined, for example, the subject’s ranking on the A-S or E Scales. The authors then assigned statistically measurable variables to each of the psychological trends and it was these variables that the F Scale was constructed to measure. (AP, 224-228) The variables were:
a. **Conventionalism.** Rigid adherence to conventional, middle-class values.

b. **Authoritarian submission.** Submissive, uncritical attitude toward idealized moral authorities of the ingroup [i.e., the group to which the subject sees himself or herself as belonging \(^{101}\)].

c. **Authoritarian aggression.** Tendency to be on the lookout for, and to condemn, reject, and punish people who violate conventional values.

d. **Anti-intraception.** Opposition to the subjective, the imaginative, the tender-minded.

e. **Superstition and stereotypy.** The belief in mystical determinants of the individual’s fate; the disposition to think in rigid categories.

f. **Power and “toughness.”** Preoccupation with the dominance-submission, strong-weak, leader-follower dimension; identification with power figures; overemphasis upon the conventionalized attributes of the ego; exaggerated assertion of strength and toughness.

g. **Destructiveness and cynicism.** Generalized hostility, vilification of the human.

h. **Projectivity.** The disposition to believe that wild and dangerous things go on in the world; the projection outwards of unconscious emotional impulses.

i. **Sex.** Exaggerated concern with sexual “goings-on.” (AP, 228)

According to the authors, these tendencies “form a single syndrome, a more or less enduring structure in the person,” and their presence in the individual’s personality structure—in various combinations and to different degrees—“renders him receptive to antidemocratic propaganda.” (AP, 228) This, in essence, was the general psychological profile of the potential fascist.\(^{102}\)

The clinical material gathered in the course of the study seemed to provide evidence that the profile of the prejudiced personality was sound both theoretically and empirically. (AP, 473-486) In fact, on the basis of the interviews, the authors attempted to elaborate the potential fascist’s profile further. The study’s fourth part represented a series of “qualitative” analyses, involving an “element” of theoretical speculation, which aimed at theorizing further the psychological dynamics and mechanisms of prejudice. (AP, 603-604) It was Adorno who wrote the study’s qualitative part. In it, he isolated a variety of syndromes and, utilizing these, constructed a typology of prejudiced and
unprejudiced individuals. The personality syndromes of potentially fascistic subjects included: “surface resentment,” the “conventional’ syndrome,” the “authoritarian’ syndrome,” the “rebel and the psychopath,” the “crank,” and the “manipulative’ type;” those of unprejudiced subjects: the “rigid’ low scorer,” the “protesting’ low scorer,” the “impulsive’ low scorer,” the “easy-going’ low scorer,” and the “genuine liberal.” (AP, 744-783) Adorno pointed out that, among the syndromes of prejudiced subjects, the “authoritarian syndrome” “comes closest to the over-all picture of the high scorer.” The individual “diagnosed” with this “disorder” would exhibit, in different combinations, some of the personality traits identified by the F Scale, most prominent among which and most likely to occur would be authoritarian submission and aggression, the readiness to submit to authority figures and the “tendency” to “condemn, reject, and punish people who violate conventional rules.” (AP, 759-762)

Adorno’s delineation of personality syndromes included also an attempt to examine their genesis in the life histories of those exhibiting them. The theory that informed his effort was, again, Freudian psychoanalysis. In the case of the “authoritarian syndrome,” he argued that it is closely related to the psychological dynamics of social adjustment and traced its etiology to an unsuccessful resolution of the Oedipus complex. This “syndrome” was in fact an alternative designation for the condition that Fromm had labeled the “sadomasochistic’ character.” (AP, 759) Adorno utilized Fromm’s “theory,” from Studien über Autorität und Familie, that “external social repression is concomitant with the internal repression of impulses. In order to achieve ‘internalization’ of social control which never gives as much to the individual as it takes, the latter’s attitude towards authority and its psychological agency, the superego,
assumes an irrational aspect.” (AP, 759) On the one hand, hatred against the father is only imperfectly transformed into love, part of the original aggressiveness being turned into masochism and part of it into sadism. On the other hand, the “internalization” of social control is also imperfect, and thus both the Oedipal conflicts and the forces of external social repression contribute to producing the aggressiveness whose sadistic component finds an outlet into hatred of outgroups. Because of these sadistic and masochistic tendencies, the authoritarian individual “achieves his own social adjustment only by taking pleasure in obedience and subordination,” and is ready to vent the repressed sadism onto convenient outgroups. “The Jew,” for example, “frequently becomes a substitute for the hated father, often assuming, on a fantasy level, the very same qualities against which the subject revolted in the father, such as being practical, cold, domineering and even a sexual rival.” (AP, 759)

Adorno’s analysis of the etiology of the authoritarian syndrome was part of a broader concern of the authors to examine the genesis of prejudice. One main theoretical assumption of The Authoritarian Personality was that a fundamental determinant of the development of the individual’s character structure was the family environment. As Frenkel-Brunswik put it, “[m]any of the attitudes and underlying needs discussed in this volume must be assumed to originate, as far as the individual is concerned, in the family situation.” (AP, 337) The authors thus focused their attention on those features of the family conducive to the formation of authoritarian character patterns.

To examine the relationship between the family environment and the etiology of prejudice, the authors analyzed the material from the interviews, paying particular attention to the subjects’ attitudes towards different aspects of their family, such as their
parents, childhood environment and siblings. \textit{(AP, 338-384)} Frenkel-Brunswik was the one who wrote the chapter on the interviewees’ attitudes towards and conceptions of their families. The general picture of the family favorable to the formation of authoritarian character tendencies that emerged from her analysis revealed a family marked by ungentle discipline and a lack of consideration for the child’s emotional drives and needs. “Prejudiced subjects,” Frenkel-Brunswik concluded,

\begin{quote}
tend to report a relatively harsh and more threatening type of home discipline which was experienced as arbitrary by the child. Related to this is a tendency apparent in families of prejudiced subjects to base interrelationships on rather clearly defined roles of dominance and submission in contradistinction to equalitarian policies. … Family relationships are characterized by fearful subservience to the demands of the parents and by an early suppression of impulses not acceptable to them. \textit{(AP, 385)}
\end{quote}

The suppression of the impulses against the parents’ commands and discipline, impulses that are not destroyed and slumbering beneath the child’s outward submission, could then be transformed into ethnic prejudice against weaker outgroups. \textit{(AP, 385)}

The analysis of the kind of family environment likely to incubate the authoritarian psychology supplemented well the profile of the potential fascist. The study suggested that authoritarian individuals show features such as “conventionalism,” “authoritarian submission,” “authoritarian aggression,” “anti-intraception,” “superstition and stereotypy,” and, moreover, a particular family structure characterized by discipline and relationships of dominance and submission tends to foster the development of authoritarian character traits. These two types of analysis seemed to provide a systematic portrait, a clear-cut psychological and social diagnosis of the problem of prejudice. The diagnosis given, \textit{The Authoritarian Personality} seemed to imply that the cure would not be long in coming. But a closer inspection of the book’s socio-psychological analysis of
the illness reveals that the diagnosis itself was not, after all, as precise as the diagnosticians probably hoped it would be.

All too questionable, given its general psychological and sociological focus and direction, are *The Authoritarian Personality*’s implicit ideological assumptions, stemming ultimately from the Frankfurt School’s theoretical orientation. A problematic gap emerges between a commitment to a Critical Theory of society and the scholarly effort to uncover the psychological traits of the potential fascist, a gap that the study never bridged and that gives rise to an ideological bias that is analytically detrimental. It is not accidental that this bias comes out most clearly in the chapters written by one of the two most prominent members of the Institute of Social Research—Adorno.

One commentator to notice a bias—a Marxist one—in *The Authoritarian Personality* was Edward Shils, in an early assessment of the study. Shils argued that the authors, despite the evidence of their empirical data, do not delineate the personality structure of the authoritarian of the Bolshevik type, the potential supporter of Stalin, as consistently as they theorize that of the potential fascist. To Shils, this failure stems from the authors’ uncritical acceptance of a dichotomous conception of politics, which classified political activities as “left” and “right,” the left component including socialism and, at its extreme, anarchism, and the right one conservatism and, at its extreme, reaction. According to Shils, around the turn of the twentieth century, this conception of politics had “a certain descriptive truth,” but the rise of Stalinist authoritarianism destroyed its heuristic value. *The Authoritarian Personality*’s authors’ inability to acknowledge the presence of authoritarianism on the left prevented them from theorizing the Bolshevik type of authoritarian personality; they failed to notice, for example, the
presence of potentially authoritarian individuals among the low scorers.  

Shils’s criticism was well-taken, but only in part. The authors did not, indeed, theorize the personality structure of the Bolshevik authoritarian as consistently as they did the potential fascist’s. As Adorno pointed out in a 1953 letter to Marie Jahoda, he made an effort in this direction by delineating the syndrome he called the “‘rigid’ low scorer.” In the book itself, he claimed that the personality showing this syndrome is very similar to the personality structure of prejudiced subjects, and that its lack of prejudice is “accidental” and not “integrated within the personality.” (AP, 771-772) “The accidentalness of their total outlook,” Adorno wrote, 

makes [the “rigid low scorers”] liable to change fronts in critical situations, as was the case with certain kinds of radicals under the Nazi regime. They may often be recognized by a certain disinterestedness with respect to crucial minority questions per se, being, rather, against prejudice as a plank in the fascist platform; but sometimes they also see only minority problems. (AP, 772)

Shils was therefore right, insofar as Adorno’s delineation of the “rigid low scorer” was the closest the authors came to a conceptualization of left authoritarianism.

Adorno himself acknowledged this shortcoming of the study in his correspondence. But according to him, it was not a result of a dogmatic unwillingness to recognize Bolshevik authoritarianism. In the same letter to Jahoda, he explained:

[t]he fact that less attention was given in the volume to the authoritarian communist party-liner than to the potential fascist is solely due to the historical situation. At the time the questionnaire and interview schedules were set up and the material was gathered (1944-1945), the National Socialists were our enemies and the Russians our allies. In the atmosphere then prevailing, the common denominator of anti-Nazism did not yet allow the difference between autonomous thinking and its perversion by the communist dictatorship to crystallize as clearly as later on.
The difficulties imposed by the exigencies of war, then, were the main determinant of the analytical deficiency. If a bias played a role, it was primarily that of anti-Nazism.

But another kind of bias did play a grave role in *The Authoritarian Personality*. This was not an inability to find fault with the Soviet regime, but an all too uncritical readiness to include concepts from Critical Theory in the psychological and empirical study of prejudice. We saw that Horkheimer and Flowerman identified the general social situation as one of the two most important factors determining the existence of anti-Semitic prejudice. As we also saw, Horkheimer identified “the world of monopoly” as the general sociological background of modern anti-Semitism. Adorno’s main contribution to *The Authoritarian Personality* was its fourth part, where he provided a “qualitative” study of antidemocratic ideology, based on the material gathered from the clinical interviews. In the beginning of his discussion, he pointed out that the “‘uniqueness’ of the Jewish phenomenon and hence of anti-Semitism could be” explained definitively by “nothing less than a theory of modern society as a whole.” Adorno admitted that such a theory “is beyond the scope of [the] study”—in fact, the attempt to develop one, as we shall see, was the central task of *Dialectic of Enlightenment*—but, judging from his analysis of the interview material, one basic assumption of such a missing theory that Adorno had apparently adopted was that mid-twentieth-century Western society, and American society in particular, exhibited ominous fascistic tendencies. (*AP*, 608)\(^{111}\)

For *The Authoritarian Personality*, such an assumption had a detrimental analytical consequence. One of the dark tendencies, the belief in whose existence informed Adorno’s qualitative analysis, was the standardization of the American
“cultural climate.” Adorno noticed in the interview material the presence, among both prejudiced and unprejudiced subjects, of a common “ideological pattern,” including such characteristics as, for example, “general ignorance and confusion,” or “resentment of unions.” Aside from the problem of whether these tendencies in themselves could be classified as fascist, Adorno argued: “[i]f our cultural climate has been standardized under the impact of social control and technological concentration to an extent never known before, we may expect that the thinking habits of individuals reflect this standardization…. (AP, 655) The idea of standardization of the cultural climate of Western society would become, as we shall see, a main theme of Dialectic of Enlightenment, where it appeared as an insightful philosophical concept. But, in The Authoritarian Personality, it was neither developed consistently nor tested empirically. In a study that attempted not only to delineate the psychological structure of the prejudiced personality but also to ground it in and support it with empirical evidence, the insistence on the standardization of culture bordered on an empty theoretical posture.

Adorno’s belief in the existence of fascist tendencies also often contradicted some of the main conclusions of the study. In his chapter on the construction of the A-S Scale, Daniel Levinson emphasized that “[e]xtreme prejudice of a violent and openly antidemocratic sort does not seem to be widespread in [the United States], especially in the middle class.” The “prevalent forms” of anti-Semitism were of a “‘garden variety’” and did not entail “active hatred” or “violence.” (AP, 60) In his qualitative explorations, Adorno delineated what he called the “pseudoconservative” ideological outlook, characterized by a surface belief in “capitalism in its liberal, individualistic form,” combined with a hidden psychological predisposition to submit to powerful political
authorities or economic interests and accept discrimination against minorities. Claimed Adorno: “[i]t is one of the unpleasant results of our studies, which has to be faced squarely, that [the] social acceptance of pseudoconservatism has gone a long way—that it has secured an indubitable mass basis.” (AP, 675-676) Adorno’s conclusion stood in marked contrast to Levinson’s view that intense anti-Semitic prejudice lacks a mass basis in the American middle class. Given the limitations—self-confessed ones—of the study’s sample, the suggestion that essentially fascistic tendencies had acquired a mass basis in the 1940s United States was clearly unwarranted. What was at least as striking, the study’s conclusion, which, judging by its style, was most likely written by Adorno, affirmed that “the majority of the population are not extreme [ethnocentrists] but, in our terminology, ‘middle.’” (AP, 976) Adorno’s earlier insistence on the mass spread of the pseudoconservative outlook therefore betrays an unconsidered readiness to overestimate the social presence of fascistic tendencies. This alarmist insistence, actually recurrent, skews the study’s sober empirical conclusions.

In his 1950s assessment of The Authoritarian Personality, Nathan Glazer noted, correctly: “Professor Adorno believes that we ‘are living in potentially fascist times.’” This assumption, he pointed out, which transpires not only in Adorno’s own analysis but throughout the study, is erroneous, unsupported as it is by the empirical findings of the book, whose authors moreover acknowledged explicitly that the examination of the broader social and political reality is beyond its scope. It is pretty clear that Adorno’s unjustified emphasis on the spread of fascistic ideological trends and the strengthening of fascistic social tendencies in America stems from a theoretical condemnation of his contemporary society, inspired ultimately by the conceptual tenets of Critical Theory.
This kind of analytical skewing of *The Authoritarian Personality* emerged most clearly in its conclusion. We saw that a fundamental aim of *Studies in Prejudice* was to make a contribution to the eradication of ethnic prejudice. It was thus all too appropriate for *The Authoritarian Personality* to offer practical guidelines in that direction. Its conclusion supported the adoption of legal measures against ethnic discrimination, the designing of programs aimed at encouraging parents to raise their children in a friendlier and warmer manner, an increased participation of psychologists in discussions and studies of prejudice, and the refinement of psychological techniques for overcoming prejudice in individuals and groups. (*AP*, 973-976) The conclusion, however, made it clear that all of these measures would help alleviate some of the “symptoms” of the “disease” of ethnic prejudice but will not provide a “cure” for the disease itself. (*AP*, 974) Such a remedy would be supplied by a total reorganization of society. As the conclusion stated, “[t]he task [of modifying the potentially fascist personality structure] is comparable to that of eliminating neurosis, or delinquency, or nationalism from the world. These are products of the total organization of society and are to be changed only as that society is changed.” (*AP*, 975)

The change the conclusion envisioned was undoubtedly a societal transformation along the lines prescribed by Marxist theory. The problem was that the call for such a change, and its potential to eliminate the fascist personality structure, was not warranted at all by the findings of the study. No part of the analysis of prejudice justified the concluding call for an undefined social transformation. The call was, ultimately, the result of either a rather dogmatic belief in a future “rational” social order, or the consequence of wishful thinking. The cogent question of why only a profound social
transformation, and not, say, concrete educational measures, could provide the ultimate remedy for the disease of ethnic prejudice remained unanswered. One is reminded here of Lazare’s gratuitous evocation of a revolution, to do away with anti-Semitism and usher in the anarchist dream of tolerance. But even more crucial than these concerns, the closing call contrasted sharply with the conclusions of another volume of Studies, Bettelheim and Janowitz’s Dynamics of Prejudice.

Dynamics was “a study of war veterans, their anxieties about adjustment in a postwar world, and how they related to [ethnic] intolerance….” Its aims and scope were determined by the belief of the authors and those associated with the work on Studies in Prejudice that veterans’ “readjustment to a peacetime economy would be difficult” and that, moreover, they “might become a group of much social import.” Unlike The Authoritarian Personality, therefore, Dynamics was inspired by an effort to solve concrete social problems and the description of its aims did not imply a potential questioning of American society’s fundamental principles of social and economic organization.

Dynamics’ research subjects were 150 veterans living in Chicago. Unlike the methodology of The Authoritarian Personality, its main research technique consisted of long interviews—most of them lasting between four and seven hours—which, provided “good rapport [was] established,” would “[offer] the veteran the opportunity … to express his personal views on the problem of civilian adjustment and a chance to recount his wartime experiences.” On the basis of the interview material, the veterans were then divided into four “types […] designated as intensely anti-Semitic, outspokenly anti-Semitic, stereotyped anti-Semitic, and tolerant toward Jews.” The individuals in the first
category expressed freely their hostility towards Jews and called for “restrictive action;” those in the second also expressed anti-Semitic hostility but did not call for restrictive action; the third type held many “stereotyped notions about the Jews;” and the tolerant veterans expressed neither hostility nor “elaborate stereotyped beliefs.” (DP, 10, 12-13)

At the beginning of their study, Bettelheim and Janowitz outlined three major hypotheses that were to be tested by the research findings. These were the propositions that anti-Semitism in particular and ethnic intolerance in general are a result of “the hostile individual’s feeling that he has suffered deprivations in the past,” or of his “anxiety in anticipation of future tasks.” (DP, 2-3) They could also be the result “of a lack of ego strength and of inadequate controls,” “controls” meaning the individual’s ability to “store [psychological] tension internally, or to discharge it in socially constructive action,” by submitting to external authority or to his superego, or by controlling these tensions rationally, i.e., through his ego. (DP, 2-3, 94, 96)

The interview material obtained largely confirmed the initial hypotheses. The authors found that factors such as age, educational level, political affiliation, composition of the veteran’s and his parents’ family, nativity of parents, reading and listening habits, and socio-economic status at a particular time were unrelated to anti-Semitism. (DP, 48-50, 52-57) Factors such as stability of religious convictions and acceptance of army discipline were closely related to anti-Semitism. For example, a veteran with consistently stable religious convictions and willing to accept ungrudgingly army discipline was more likely to be tolerant towards Jews. (DP, 50-51, 97-99) However, “the five attributes most highly associated with anti-Semitism” were, in order of importance: “feelings of deprivation,” “social mobility,” “rejection of controlling
institutions,” “economic apprehensions,” and “general optimism.” Also, like the authors of *The Authoritarian Personality*, Bettelheim and Janowitz found that ethnic tolerance was closely associated with “the recollection of love and affection on the part of the parents.” (*DP*, 105, 148) Thus, the most intolerant among the veterans were usually individuals who manifested feelings of deprivation—economic, military, social or emotional—had experienced downward social mobility, probably grew up in a family environment marked by a lack of emotional warmth, rejected societal institutions and authorities, and exhibited pessimism and fears about their economic prospects.

In contrast to *The Authoritarian Personality*, then, *Dynamics*’ aim was not the delineation of a profile of the potential fascist but the more modest one of uncovering the social and psychological factors potentially related to prejudice. *Dynamics*’ authors did not aspire to examine in detail the cognitive traits of the authoritarian individual. The more limited scope notwithstanding, the portrait of the intolerant veteran that emerged from the study exhibited features very similar to the potential fascist’s. Although not characterized according to the categories of *The Authoritarian Personality*, the intolerant veterans certainly manifested “authoritarian aggression” against Jews, a whole group of them exhibited “stereotypy,” and the hostility of many of the “outspoken and intense anti-Semites” indicated a considerably high level of “destructiveness.” (*DP*, 13, 36-39, 110-112)

From a more strictly psychoanalytic angle, many of the intolerant veterans’ attitudes were also often characterized by “projectivity.” Bettelheim and Janowitz, however, used the category of projectivity in a sense different from the one assumed in *The Authoritarian Personality*. The category was defined in the latter as “[t]he
disposition to believe that wild and dangerous things go on in the world; the projection outwards of unconscious emotional impulses." Adorno et al. did not distinguish between projections arising from superego demands and those stemming from id tendencies. They usually assumed that projections originated in the id. As they put it, “[p]rojection is thus a device for keeping id drives ego-alien….” (AP, 228, 240) In contrast, Bettelheim and Janowitz distinguished between the two types of impulses and noted that projection entails the ego’s “externaliz[ation]” of impulses from either the id or the superego in an attempt “to eliminate all conflicts between id and superego….” Despite this conceptual difference, Dynamics’ authors were firmly convinced that projection played a significant role in the genesis of anti-Semitic intolerance among the veterans. One of the study’s conclusions was that anti-Semitic stereotypes frequently represented projections of rejected superego demands. The Jews, for example, were often accused of “helping one another,” a clear “superego demand.” (DP, 42-43, 156-159)\(^\text{118}\)

Despite the general similarity between the portraits of the potential fascist and the intolerant veteran, there was one crucial veterans’ quality that, though striking, was not examined in sufficient detail by the authors of Dynamics. As we saw, “authoritarian submission,” or, strictly defined, an “uncritical attitude toward idealized moral authorities of the ingroup,” was the second most important character trait of the authoritarian personality according to its profilers. In the 1964 edition of Dynamics, which also contained an assessment of the original findings, Bettelheim and Janowitz voiced their disagreement with The Authoritarian Personality’s attempt to delineate an abstract psychological “entity [such] as the prejudiced, or authoritarian, personality.” At the same time, however, they acknowledged that “one essential finding of The
Authoritarian Personality has been adequately documented in extensive replication studies, leaving little doubt that ‘authoritarian submission’ is mildly related to strong prejudice.”¹¹⁹ What is striking in light of such a recognition is Bettelheim and Janowitz’s finding that most of the veterans in their sample exhibited a general attitude that could easily be characterized as “authoritarian submission.” As they put it,

[a]s varied as religious and political institutions are and as varied as the men’s reactions to them were, most of the men viewed them as relatively immutable. Only a very small minority felt that they could influence existing political parties to any extent or that their vote would make much difference. Although some men felt that they could protect themselves against the impact of another depression, none believed that their efforts (either alone or combined) could prevent its arrival. Political and economic systems, in themselves, seemed to them overpowering. (DP, 96)

A submissive and passive attitude towards existing institutions and political realities, a lack of confidence in one’s own ability to influence them, and a sense of being “overpowered” by the political and economic status quo—these were traits that the authors of The Authoritarian Personality would have regarded as manifestations of submission to authority. An Adorno, with his preoccupation with the standardization of culture, would have seen Bettelheim and Janowitz’s findings as an empirical confirmation of his views and as a symptom of the malignant tendencies of his contemporary society. In contrast, Bettelheim and Janowitz did not elaborate extensively on this critical finding and did not think it worrisome.

What the lack of interpretation belied was a divergence between the general theoretical orientations of The Authoritarian Personality and Dynamics, an irreconcilable discord that undermined considerably the scientific and practical value, conceptual consistency, and credibility of Studies as a whole. We saw that a critique of
its contemporary society (problematic in itself) operated behind the conclusions of *The Authoritarian Personality*. Not only was such a critical orientation absent in *Dynamics*; the study was actually founded on an unquestioning acceptance of the social and political status quo.

The presence of such an assumption surfaced most clearly in the study’s longest chapter, “Tolerance: A Function of Control.” The chapter’s aim was to examine “the relationship between controls and intolerance.” The authors distinguished between three types of control: “external control,” or “control [of the individual’s psychological tension] through outside institutions;” “superego control,” or control of tension as a result of restrictions stemming from one’s superego; and “ego control,” or the self-conscious, rational control of one’s tensions or impulses. According to the psychoanalytic theory adopted by the authors, the structure of an individual’s controls is largely the result of the particular pattern of internalization of societal values during the individual’s early experiences. (*DP*, 95-97, 104) Bettelheim and Janowitz found that acceptance of central institutions, such as religious ones and the army, was positively related to tolerance. The analysis itself was based on the assumption that acceptance of societal institutions signifies the presence in the individual of “adequate controls,” a combination of the three types of control that allows him or her to store and discharge tension in socially acceptable ways. Therefore, adequate controls were positively related to tolerance. (*DP*, 95-106)

The analysis of the link between tolerance and control was clearly problematic in terms of its theoretical logic. The assumption that acceptance of societal institutions is indicative of presence of controls was questionable. The authors pointed out that they
were not able to discover a relationship between ego strength and tolerance, primarily because of a general lack of ego strength among the veterans. \(DP, 102-103\) However, acceptance of authorities could well have reflected a lack of ego strength, or another psychological factor, different from presence of controls.

But more problematic, in light of the stance adopted by Adorno et al., were the practical implications of *Dynamics’* findings. Bettelheim and Janowitz claimed that, “in actuality, the three types of control are nearly always coexistent” and admitted that it was impossible to examine accurately the relationships between different types of controls and tolerance with the existing statistical methods. \(DP, 96, 106\) On their analysis, however, even the exclusive presence only of external controls could conceivably warrant the disappearance of anti-Semitism. In other words, their analysis potentially condoned submission to societal authorities, or increasing the power of institutions. However remotely, their very language sometimes suggested such a possibility. Discussing the character of different types of controls, they pointed out that “acceptance of an authority in the shaping of which the individual exercises a relatively high degree of autonomy, (such as when changing party affiliation on purely rationalistic grounds), is radically different from submission to authority.” \(DP, 95-96\) But, despite the insistence on this “radical difference,” and despite their claim that tolerant veterans exhibited a greater ability to accept army discipline in a rationalistic manner, the authors concluded their examination of acceptance of army discipline by noting: “[i]n summary, an analysis of the men’s attitudes toward army discipline indicated that the individual’s ability to deal with institutional demands by self-control or submission is associated with tolerance [[*italics mine*]].” \(DP, 100\) The rhetorical conflation of rationalistic acceptance
of, and submission to, authority, makes it difficult to avoid the conclusion that submission to authority itself is conducive to ethnic tolerance, and that the analysis in fact represented an implicit call for such a submission in reality.120

Perhaps the most significant contradiction between The Authoritarian Personality and Dynamics stemmed from their respective analyses of the relationship between acceptance of authority and ethnic tolerance, or intolerance. Glazer was the first to note this discord, in his 1950 evaluation of Studies. He pointed out that while the authors of Dynamics conclude that acceptance of societal authorities is positively related to ethnic tolerance, those of The Authoritarian Personality argue that the exact opposite is, in fact, the case: acceptance of authority is related to prejudice and nonconformity leads to freedom from prejudice.121 Glazer was justifiably surprised by the conflict and offered two main hypothetical solutions. The source of the contradiction, he reasoned, might have been the difference in the respective samples of the two studies, the fact that the sample of The Authoritarian Personality was overwhelmingly middle-class and that of Dynamics’ veterans belonged mostly to the working and lower-middle class. On this hypothesis, “non-conformity in the middle class might be considered the expression of a rational outlook toward the world that sees through conventional values as inconsistent, harmful, and irrelevant…. ” On the other hand, working- and lower-middle-class “non-conformity might be the sign of a resentful personality … and the resentment here would tend to well up and spill over on institutional authorities and all other conspicuous targets.”122

The second hypothesis that Glazer offered was the suggestion that the two studies might have “tap[ped] different layers of the personality.”123 Dynamics’ authors,
According to him, reveal the presence of hostility in the subjects of their research and “believe[...] that [the] aggression is released directly against both ethnic groups and ‘controlling institutions’....” Conversely, “the California group believes that the aggression and hostility are inhibited by fear of the power of the father, first, and then of the controlling institutions; this produces surface conformity, but underneath uncontrollable violence and hostility ... can be found.”

In the 1964 edition of *Dynamics*, Bettelheim and Janowitz accepted both of Glazer’s hypotheses as offering valid suggestions for resolving the contradiction. To support the first hypothesis, they referred to a 1953 doctoral dissertation, which found that the “authoritarian syndrome” is related to prejudice in the middle class but not in the “lower class,” and agreed that their analysis examined a different personality level. The problem, however, was that the authors of *The Authoritarian Personality* would hardly accept Glazer’s, and Bettelheim and Janowitz’s, proposal. In fact, in his 1953 letter to Jahoda, Adorno implicitly rejected the idea that class differences could account for the contradiction between the two studies. Agreeing with criticisms that the “qualitative analysis” in *The Authoritarian Personality* was “too 'psychologistic,’” he noted that “the psychological interpretation of the data seems ... [warranted in part] ... by the result that social stratification of the interviewees makes comparatively so little difference with regard to the attitudes which we have studied.” The *Authoritarian Personality*’s authors did not discuss extensively the value of the second hypothesis. But it is more likely than not that, had they considered it in earnest, they would have criticized Bettelheim and Janowitz for assuming a too direct—and simplistic—relationship between underlying hostility and ethnic intolerance, and for thus
disregarding the operation of the complex mechanisms of repression revealed by psychoanalysis. Conversely, in *Dynamics*’ 1964 edition, Bettelheim and Janowitz straightforwardly rejected the “assumption” of the authors of *The Authoritarian Personality* that “tolerance is only or mainly an expression of nonconformity.”\textsuperscript{127} The source of that assumption was most probably the unjustified belief—indeed the bias—on the part of Adorno et al. that only a profound disagreement with their contemporary society could give rise to freedom from ethnic prejudice. In the last analysis, this fundamental contradiction, so fundamental that it offered radically different conclusions about the authoritarian personality, remained unresolved. It is ironic that, on Glazer’s second hypothesis, the conclusions of *The Authoritarian Personality* would have seconded the implicit call for submission and reinforcing societal authorities discernible in *Dynamics*. If “aggression and hostility are [indeed] inhibited by fear of … the controlling institutions,” the logical recommendation for social action would be an increase in the power of those institutions.

These fundamental contradictions between *The Authoritarian Personality* and *Dynamics* emerge clearly from a comparison of their two conclusions. We saw that *The Authoritarian Personality* contained a critique of its contemporary society, and, for its authors, a profound social re-organization was the only remedy for anti-Semitism, and ethnic prejudice in general. No such suggestion found a place in *Dynamics*’ conclusions and recommendations for social action. Bettelheim and Janowitz offered a list of such recommendations. “An adjusted annual wage to do away with fears of seasonal employment, stabilization of employment, and an extension of social security,” were the measures proposed to remedy “feelings of deprivation” and “downward social mobility,”
the two factors most closely related to ethnic intolerance. \((DP, 174)\) Given the relationship between acceptance of authority and tolerance, the further “task … [was] to change the complexion of [the] external controls.” Since the most important of those controls, according to the authors, is the legal system, they recommended changes in legal norms and practices aimed at promoting ethnic tolerance. \((DP, 176-177)\) Social action intended to provide “more adequate outlets for the discharge of tension,” through, for example, sports, and educational approaches directed at “influenc[ing] ‘basic’ personality traits, such as tendencies to view life experiences as rewarding rather than deprivational,” were two other main recommendations. \((DP, 178, 182)\) Finally, the authors called for parental attitudes seeking to secure a gratifying family atmosphere for the growing child. “Only then,” they asserted, “will the child learn to recognize that he can master his own inner tensions by integration [i.e., by accepting them into his or her personality], and that hostile discharge is not only unnecessary but also undesirable, since it interferes with a highly valued interpersonal relationship to a parent.” \((DP, 179)\)

All these measures, though in accordance with the study’s findings, stood in sharp contrast to The Authoritarian Personality’s call for a fundamental reordering of society. As Glazer pointed out, the “difference” between the two conclusions is one of “conviction” and “boils down to a judgment as to the kind of society we live in.” And the difference, as he also observed, remained unbridgeable.\(^{128}\) In light of Horkheimer and Flowerman’s emphasis that the practical aim of Studies was to “help in [the] eradication of prejudice,” the clash between the two studies’ concluding recommendations constituted a major analytical flaw.
But the discord between the two sets of practical recommendations constitutes only one deficiency of the studies’ conclusions. Another and more important one is the implausibility of both conclusions. We saw that *The Authoritarian Personality*’s call for a radical social transformation was not warranted by its findings. *Dynamics*’ conclusions, for their part, collapsed on themselves, and even more, its authors showed a surprising awareness of their invalidity.

Having outlined their proposals for social and economic reforms, Bettelheim and Janowitz go on to write that the goals they have set “seem remote at the moment.” They also express pessimism about the possibility for long-term effects of changes in the legal system, since, as they themselves point out, “legal norms are essentially negative and minimal in import.” The prospects of providing more channels for discharging tensions are bleak too, as the main such means that is socially acceptable is “successful competition.” Even sporting activities do not offer an outlet, since the professionalization of sports “discourages the public at large from personal efforts.” *(DP, 176-177, 182-183)* With a surprising straightforwardness, Bettelheim and Janowitz almost reject their own recommendations. They do not discard as explicitly their call for new educational approaches and parental attitudes, but the proposals’ vagueness undermines significantly their practical value. The insistence that education “must influence ‘basic’ personality traits” remains merely an isolated suggestion. *(DP, 178)*

The same is true of the call for new parental attitudes, and the only promising tendency toward improvement of the family environment that the authors refer to is the increasing number of parents who follow the “natural leads given by the [children]” when feeding them. *(DP, 179-180, 184)* And even this relatively insignificant trend is uncertain. It will
“produce some effects,” the authors point out, “if society does not [increase] the [psychological] tensions … faster than the efforts to shape more integrated personalities are proceeding” and only if “these changes … truly reach the large masses of the population….,” (DP, 185) As Bettelheim and Janowitz are aware, the fulfillment of the first condition is unlikely and the second, even if less uncertain, does not lie in the near future.

The authors’ pessimistic awareness of the unfeasibility of their suggestions surfaces most clearly in a strange comment following immediately their remarks about the changes in child-rearing practices. In a paragraph consisting of one sentence only, they write: “In any case it seems simpler, and more feasible, to influence parental attitudes towards children, when compared with the efforts needed for assuring a stable economy free from fear of war and unemployment.” (DP, 185) The statement follows all of the recommendations for social action outlined in the concluding chapter. There is here more than a trace of resignation. It amounts to an admission of an inability, ultimately of a failure, to offer a workable practical solution to the problem of prejudice.

Critical deficiencies also emerge in what was the shortest study of the prejudiced personality—Ackerman and Jahoda’s Anti-Semitism and Emotional Disorder. Like The Authoritarian Personality and Dynamics, this book was aimed at uncovering the psychological determinants of anti-Semitism. As the authors noted: “the purpose of [the] study [is] to seek an answer to the question” of “Why … a person [is] anti-Semitic.” (ASED, 10) Unlike the two longer studies, Emotional Disorder examined the manifestation and factors behind anti-Semitic prejudice among individuals seeking psychoanalytic treatment.
Freudian psychoanalysis, yet again, provided the theoretical basis for Emotional Disorder. However, the authors adopted “certain specific modifications” of it that Ackerman espoused. In particular, like Adorno’s team, they were willing to accept the notion of the greater independence of the ego suggested by ego psychology; unlike the former, they also “stress[ed] … the role of [psychological] defense [mechanisms] in social adaptation.” (ASED, 3) Ackerman and Jahoda hypothesized that anti-Semitism “plays [a] central … role in the [social] adaptation of certain individuals” and, therefore, they devoted considerable attention to the analysis of the defense mechanisms operating in cases of manifestations of anti-Semitism. (ASED, 3)

To achieve their objectives, the authors gathered information on forty individuals living in the New York City metropolitan area who had undergone psychoanalytic treatment and who had manifested anti-Semitic prejudice during analysis. Information on twenty-seven such cases was collected from professional psychoanalysts, and on another thirteen people from social workers at two social-welfare agencies. The data were obtained in the course of several interviews between a member of the research team and each psychoanalyst or social worker; the aim of the interviews was to accumulate as comprehensive information as possible regarding each case. (ASED, 15-18) “The development of [the main] concepts … was based exclusively on the material obtained from psychoanalysts” and the cases from the agencies were used primarily for the purposes of illustration. After the collection of data, the material was repeatedly discussed by the research team before the final formulation of the study’s conclusions. (ASED, 16)

On the basis of their analysis of the forty case studies, Ackerman and Jahoda
concluded that anti-Semitism was not related directly to a specific symptom, type of psychological disorder, or diagnosis. (ASED, 25) Rather, it was related to “the common presence of certain emotional predispositions.” Foremost among these “predispositions,” or “character tendencies,” was “anxiety.” The authors found that “all” of their research subjects suffered from a “diffuse,” “pervasive,” “relatively unorganized” anxiety that could take, for example, the form of fears of “diverse forms of authority, of being hurt or becoming impotent, [or] of being imposed upon in their professional fields…. (ASED, 27-28) The second most important trait was the absence of a clear concept of self or personal identity. The anti-Semitic individuals, the authors pointed out, “do not seem to know who or what they are, what they desire, and what they can forego.” (ASED, 29) This lack of a coherent sense of self was related to the anti-Semites’ third main characteristic—their inability “to achieve satisfactory interpersonal relationships,” most of which remained “immature and incomplete.” (ASED, 32) “Conformity” and “fear of the different” constituted another key disposition. The prejudiced try to fill the psychological vacuum of their lack of meaningful relationships by seeking acceptance and approval by society. They thus strive to conform to the norms and standards of the social groups to which they belong, or wish to belong, and individuals who appear different, such as the Jews, become sources of irritation and anxiety. (ASED, 33-34) The anti-Semitic patients displayed, also, an inability to “establish a satisfactory relationship to external objects.” Their overriding interest seemed to be economic success, but even that interest was an end in itself—rather than providing lasting satisfaction, their professional “routine” “gives them the emotional support that they lack in themselves.” (ASED, 36-37) Finally, the anti-Semites manifested a lack of “a consistent value
system,” or “conscience.” They were incapable of experiencing feelings of guilt, some of their actions violating “even the most elementary standards of decency.” The authors cited the example of a “wealthy businessman who cheats his newspaper dealer out of small change.” (ASED, 38)

To fathom the genesis of these predispositions among the anti-Semites, Ackerman and Jahoda examined the structure and atmosphere of their families. The authors found that, in their overwhelming majority, the families in which the subjects grew up were characterized by a lack of family cohesion and warmth between the parents. (ASED, 43) In fact, open hostility between the parents was not uncommon among the families. Very often, the child was rejected by one or both of the parents; frequently, the child was also subjected to harsh discipline. The result of the lack of warmth in the family and the severe parental attitudes, the authors claimed, is a permanent damage to the child’s “self-esteem,” whose main consequence is the disorganized sense of identity in the adult. (ASED, 44-48) Most of the children growing up in such an atmosphere never resolved their Oedipal conflicts. The conflict’s successful resolution depends on an identification with the parents which leads to the internalization of “parental images,” and thus to the development of conscience. (ASED, 48-49) In the absence of any possibility for “genuine love-identification,” the “formation of conscience remains incomplete.” (ASED, 49-50) The lasting effect of these features of the patients’ family milieu is the development of the personality traits that, according to the authors, contribute to the presence of anti-Semitic prejudice.

While the family environment represented the main determinant of the appearance of anti-Semitism in adult life, anti-Semitism itself served the purpose of
preserving the otherwise frail psychic integrity of the prejudiced person. Its overt manifestations were, in the authors’ view, inextricably related to—indeed a product of—“a variety of defense mechanisms” utilized by the anti-Semitic individuals to prevent a dissolution of their selves. As the authors put it, “[a]t the psychic level [it] can be viewed as a profound though irrational and futile defensive effort to restore a crippled self.” (ASED, 55)

In line with the other psychoanalytically oriented analyses of anti-Semitism in Studies, Ackerman and Jahoda claimed that the mechanism of projection was widely present in the manifestations of their subjects’ anti-Semitic hostility. (ASED, 56-61) They found that another defense mechanism—denial—was also a determining factor of anti-Semitism. Unconscious denial, “repression,” and conscious denial, “suppression,” they noted, represent “attempts to rid the self of those of its constituent parts which are unwanted.” One individual’s attempt to deny his own emotionality, for example, resulted in accusations that the Jews are emotional. (ASED, 61-62) A third key defense mechanism stressed by the authors was the substitution of aggression for anxiety. Unable to face their own fears and emotional paucity, many patients indulged in aggressive outbursts in the futile hope of avoiding their own inner conflicts. (ASED, 63) The “displacement” of hostility originating from a source that has nothing to do with Jews onto them represented another defense mechanism. The anti-Semitism of one African-American woman from the social-welfare agencies stemmed from her prejudice against “white culture,” which she could not admit to the white social worker and subsequently displaced it onto the Jews. (ASED, 66) The pronounced desire for economic success among the majority of patients also drove them to employ two other mechanisms:
reaction formation and introjection. The “tendency to express overtly the exact opposite of the original attitude,” or reaction formation, led some of them to adopt attitudes of submission to Jews, if the latter belonged to groups to which the anti-Semites themselves wished to belong. (ASED, 66) Conversely, introjection, or the incorporation into the self of “desirable” qualities or traits of others, compelled some of the anti-Semites to adopt norms or opinions accepted in the social group to which they wished to belong. (ASED, 68-69)\(^\text{129}\)

These defense mechanisms, together with the emotional predispositions and family milieu, constituted three of the most fundamental forces that, for Ackerman and Jahoda, determined the presence and manifestations of anti-Semitism. In addition to them, the authors stressed repeatedly the importance of social factors contributing to the existence of anti-Semitic prejudice. (ASED, 9-11, 73) Accordingly, their analysis suggested that the context of their contemporary American society was, in crucial respects, related closely to the presence of anti-Semitism. In fact, they devoted the last chapter of the book to outlining broader social tendencies that, they thought, contributed to anti-Semitism. On the basis of their case material, the authors proposed that some of the main characteristics of their (American) culture and society were: their competitiveness, “a progressive alienation from the satisfactions of work,” atomization and isolation of individuals from one another, the “[debasement] of friendship for its own sake” and a related tendency to use people merely as tools; with respect to the family, they discerned a tendency to view marriage as “a hard social and economic contract, [entered into] for [the purpose of] convenience or prestige.” (ASED, 88-92) All of these general social trends, according to the authors, created anxiety and “mass
discontent” that “disturb[ed] intergroup relations in American society,” in general, and facilitated the existence of anti-Semitism, in particular. (ASED, 93)

Ackerman and Jahoda’s evaluation of more general social tendencies amounted to an indictment of American culture and society. While the case material and interpretation suggested that this censure was, at least intuitively, justified, a closer inspection reveals how the authors’ assessment was in fact misguided. Instead of discussing the social tendencies on the basis of sociological, economic, or political analyses of American culture and society and then relating those characteristics to the concrete manifestations and determinants of anti-Semitism in their sample, they adopted an opposite procedure. They outlined what they considered ominous social tendencies conducive to the existence of ethnic prejudice, as these trends were revealed in the case material itself. The lack of references to rigorous analyses of “alienation from the satisfactions of work,” “atomization,” or instrumental thinking about interpersonal relationships jeopardized the heuristic value of the analysis.

The indictment of America exhibited another crucial flaw. A study emphasizing the relationship between family atmosphere and the genesis of anti-Semitic prejudice would have benefited from the inclusion of a more detailed analysis of the composition and changes in the structure of the American family. The absence of such an analysis was a conspicuous lack in the authors’ concluding remarks. Their brief reference to the tendency to view marriage as a practical contract and as an arrangement for convenience or prestige was left unconnected to their preceding investigation of the family disturbances leading to anti-Semitic prejudice. Indeed, the lack of a discussion of the
composition and structure of the American family made the reference resemble a free-floating condemnation.

The unjustifiably grim portrait of America aside, Ackerman and Jahoda’s analysis of the emotional determinants and genesis of anti-Semitism and the defensive mechanisms related to it also showed key methodological inadequacies. Despite their inconsistencies, *The Authoritarian Personality* and *Dynamics* possessed an analytical and theoretical rigor that *Emotional Disorder* clearly lacked. In contrast to the other two studies, *Emotional Disorder* was not based on direct interviews with patients, but used the psychoanalysts’ and the social workers’ information about each case. Nor did Ackerman and Jahoda employ a sophisticated statistical apparatus, such as the ones used in *The Authoritarian Personality* and *Dynamics*, to establish relationships between personality variables and these and anti-Semitic prejudice. In effect, the exactitude of the analysis approached, at best, the “qualitative” sections of *The Authoritarian Personality*, which, as we saw, contained a strong measure of speculation. Finally, the authors were well aware that their material was “selective” in “character.” (*ASED*, 17-19) And they were right in noting that the analysis of the “interaction between intrapsychic needs and social forces is independent” of the representativeness of their sample. (*ASED*, 18) But it remains a fact that the conclusions of the study were based on information about forty people living in the New York City metropolitan area and the data about thirteen of them were not used extensively for the development of the study’s main concepts and interpretations. What this meant was that the sweeping indictment of American society and culture in the concluding remarks was based on information about forty individuals.\(^{130}\)
Dialectic of Enlightenment: Anti-Semitism and the Philosophy of History

In the early 1940s, while both their negotiations with the AJC about the possibilities for implementing the anti-Semitism research and the research itself were under way, Horkheimer and Adorno were working on the drafts of what is probably the most important philosophical work produced by the Institute of Social Research: Dialectic of Enlightenment. In 1941, the two friends had moved to California and settled in the vicinity of Los Angeles, where they wrote the book. It appeared initially in mimeographed form in 1944 under the title of Philosophische Fragmente [Philosophical Fragments], and the Fragments were then published “as a proper book” (as Wiggershaus puts it) in 1947 by the Amsterdam publishing house Querido. The title was changed to Dialectic of Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments.131

In very broad terms, Dialectic constituted nothing less than an attempt to lay the foundations of a new philosophy of history.132 It was aimed ultimately at examining the roots of the West’s regression to “barbarism” in the twentieth century.133 Anti-Semitism, as Horkheimer and Adorno saw it, represented a central manifestation, and an outcome, of this “reversion” to barbarism.134 Accordingly, Dialectic’s last chapter was devoted to analyzing the nature and roots of anti-Semitism, to offering what the authors called a “philosophical prehistory of anti-Semitism.”135 The authors, however, did not adopt the conceptual tools and methodology developed and employed during the research for Studies in Prejudice, but interpreted the problem of anti-Semitism from the perspective of their views on the history of the West. In this, they built on Horkheimer’s own attempt, in the late 1930s, to tackle the question of anti-Semitism.
Horkheimer had attempted to deal with the question of anti-Semitism in a 1939 article in the *Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung*. Entitled “The Jews and Europe,” it examined the origins and nature of anti-Semitism in its destructive Nazi form. Horkheimer in fact suggested that twentieth-century mass anti-Semitism was inextricably related to the peculiarities of the system of economic, social and political organization imposed by the Nazis. As he asserted, “[w]hoever wants to explain anti-Semitism must speak of National Socialism.” Significantly, “The Jews and Europe” contained the statement that has since become one of the most frequently quoted of Horkheimer’s thoughts: “…whoever is not willing to talk about capitalism should also keep quiet about fascism.” This assertion alone shows the line of Horkheimer’s argument. Indeed, his analysis was reminiscent of the Comintern’s attitudes towards the rise of fascism in Europe in the 1930s, formulated by Georgi Dimitrov in his 1935 report to the Seventh Congress of the Comintern. “[F]ascism,” Dimitrov had written, “is the open terroristic dictatorship of the most reactionary, the most chauvinistic, the most imperialistic elements of finance capital.”

Horkheimer eschewed the crude conceptualization of fascism as finance capital run rampant. Nevertheless, to him the link between capitalism and Nazism was unmistakable. Nazism represented a new system of social, economic and political organization, what Horkheimer, prefiguring Hannah Arendt’s much more extensive theorization, called a new “totalitarian order.” The new order, he claimed, was the product of liberal capitalism, and the latter had already contained the seeds of totalitarianism. Totalitarianism was in fact the logical consequence of the collapse of liberal capitalism, and represented a phase following liberal capitalism’s later form of
“monopoly capitalism.”

Liberal capitalism had produced “extreme class differences,” as predicted by Marxist theory’s “law of surplus value.” Its consequences had proven disastrous: an “amorphous mass” of proletarians, “along with farmers, whose methods of production and forms of consciousness have lagged far behind technological development…. Liberal capitalism was unable to cope with these “demoralized” and “amorphous” masses. Their control and domination was the historical function of Nazism. The “practice” of National Socialism, Horkheimer asserted, “springs from the … political necessity [of] preserv[ing] control of the means of production for those groups which already own them, so that the others are subject to their direction at work.”

If Nazism was the product of the contradictions of capitalism, the fate of the Jews was also inextricably related to the logic of capitalism’s development. In the phase of liberal capitalism, the Jews were directly involved in the “sphere of circulation,” which was both “the site of their livelihood and the foundation of bourgeois democracy.” The monopolistic tendencies within capitalism gradually eroded the economic basis of the sphere of circulation and the result is that “[t]he Jews are stripped of power as agents of circulation…. “They are the first victims,” Horkheimer claimed, “of the ruling group that has taken over the canceled function.” He conceived anti-Semitism as primarily a political tool used by the leaders of the totalitarian order for consolidating their control of the state and society. “Anti-Semitism,” he wrote,

will come to a natural end in the totalitarian order when nothing humane remains, although a few Jews might. The hatred of the Jews belongs to the ascendant phase of fascism. At most, anti-Semitism in Germany is a safety valve for the younger members of the SA. It serves to intimidate the populace by showing that the system will stop at nothing. The pogroms are aimed politically more at the spectators than the Jews.
Anti-Semitism as a tool is used by the new totalitarian leaders not only for intimidation at home but also for gaining political support abroad. Horkheimer was convinced that there existed “prospective fascist masses” outside of Germany and it was their psychological predispositions that the Nazi anti-Semitic propaganda was aimed at tapping. Horkheimer was convinced that there existed “prospective fascist masses” outside of Germany and it was their psychological predispositions that the Nazi anti-Semitic propaganda was aimed at tapping. There was nothing surprising about the existence of this psychological fertile ground—it was the product of the contradictions of the antagonistic capitalist society whose other result was fascist totalitarianism itself. “The rage produced by misery,” Horkheimer asserted, “the deep, fervent, secret rage of those dependent in body and soul, becomes active where opportunity presents itself, that is, against the weak and dependent itself.” Anti-Semitic propaganda, thus, not only fails to produce indignation, but is in fact “appreciated” by those suffering from the vicissitudes of capitalism.

Horkheimer’s interpretation of Nazism and anti-Semitism was much more sophisticated than the dicta of the Comintern. Its complexity notwithstanding, it was still based almost exclusively on the conceptual apparatus of classical Marxism. Indeed, Horkheimer himself stated that, “[n]o revision of economic theory is required to understand fascism.” In contrast, the inquiry into anti-Semitism that he and Adorno provided in Dialectic transcended irrevocably the conceptual tools of Marxism. Their inquiry was, once again, filtered through the perspective of their views on the fundamental trajectory of Western history.

The main problem that Dialectic attempted to tackle was revealed on its very first page. “Enlightenment,” the authors began, “understood in the widest sense as the advance of thought, has always aimed at liberating human beings from fear and
installing them as masters.” “Yet,” they asserted, “the wholly enlightened earth is radiant with triumphant calamity.” 156 This fundamental paradox—“the self-destruction of enlightenment” as the authors called it—constituted the main question of theoretical investigation. 157 Horkheimer and Adorno were convinced that “freedom in society is inseparable from enlightenment thinking.” 158 At the same time, however, they emphasized what they considered to be the moment of “regression” in the project of Western enlightenment. They conceived the enlightenment project as including both “the concept of [enlightenment] thinking,” and “the concrete historical forms, the institutions of society with which it is intertwined.” 159 This project, they claimed, “contains the germ of the regression which is taking place everywhere today.” 160 It was the dark, regressive and pathological side of enlightenment and its “historical forms”—and not enlightenment thinking itself—that Horkheimer and Adorno set out to examine.

Perhaps the main theme of their inquiry was the investigation of the changing relationship between nature and human beings. The book’s central argument, as the authors explained, was contained in two related “theses: Myth is already enlightenment, and enlightenment reverts to mythology.” 161 Dialectic’s first chapter, “The Concept of Enlightenment,” was intended to provide both an elaboration of these two theses and a general analysis of the relationship between nature and human beings in the history of the West. The trajectory of the nature-humans relationship, the authors suggested, has pointed in the direction of increasing, indeed, ever more unbridled, domination of nature by human beings. This tendency was epitomized in the writings of Francis Bacon. They reveal that “[w]hat human beings seek to learn from nature is how to use it to dominate both it and human beings. Nothing else counts.” (DE, 2)
Horkheimer and Adorno argued that, far from being merely a characteristic of recent history, this tendency had been present ever since the dawn of Western civilization—the contemporary period witnessed only its culmination. The chapter entitled “Elements of Anti-Semitism” suggested that, during the initial phase of human history, fear of the power of nature represented a fundamental component of humans’ attitude towards nature. (DE, 149-150) The phase itself was one of “organic adaptation to otherness,” or nature, on the part of human beings. Human conduct was characterized by what the authors called “mimetic behavior,” or simply “mimesis,” understood as humans’ attempts to mold their behavior in a way that fostered their survival and adaptation. (DE, 148) To provide a simple example: if the cry of a wild animal produced fear, that fear would manifest itself as a cry of horror, imitating the source of fear and at the same time expressing the fear itself. In “Concept,” the authors proposed that this initial stage of history was then followed by one characterized by the practice of magic. The relationship between human beings and nature in this phase was still one of adaptation, or, more appropriately, of proximity, where the primeval adaptive closeness was no longer present. (DE, 6-7) Magic was a means employed, again, with the aim of adaptation to nature, but it was a rudimentary attempt to control the threatening power of nature. The attempt was still pursued through the practice of mimesis, but the mimesis, as the authors noted in “Elements,” contained an element of manipulation. (DE, 7, 148) “The magician,” Horkheimer and Adorno stated in “Concept,” “imitates demons; to frighten or placate them he makes intimidating or appeasing gestures.” (DE, 6) The era following that of magic, was that of myth. Unlike magical practice, which had been founded on a symbiotic imitation, myth was already an increasingly rational explanation
of nature, and indeed, of the universe. (DE, 5-6) “Myth sought to report,” the authors wrote, “to name, to tell of origins—but therefore also to narrate, record, explain.” (DE, 5) In this sense, myth was already enlightenment.

The organizing principle of myth was what Horkheimer and Adorno called the “principle of immanence,” or “the explanation of every event as repetition.” Natural events, social phenomena, human relationships are explained through reference, an endlessly repeated one, to unalterable fate. The consequence of myth’s adoption of fate as a principle of explanation is that it “incessantly reinstates what always was.” (DE, 8)

Oedipus, to cite a famous example, is doomed to personal tragedy, and is utterly incapable of escaping his unfortunate fate. The oracular prophecy cannot be changed, he has to accept his fate, the personal and social tragedy is unavoidable. Not only Oedipus’s tragedy, but any other political, social, cultural event or personal experience is always, constantly and invariably explained as a product of immutable fate. Myth’s explanations, in effect, persistently suggest that society and human life are products of fate and there is nothing one can do about it. For the authors, the advent of this mythological-explanatory attitude towards nature was also accompanied by the increasing separation of human beings and nature, which replaced the earlier, more symbiotic relationship. Horkheimer and Adorno referred to the biblical sanction of human beings’ “dominion” “over all the earth” as an illustration of this progressively rigid separation. (DE, 5)

All of these tendencies, already discernible in myth, find their radicalized culmination in modern enlightenment thinking and practice. The distinction between nature and humans becomes more and more unbridgeable. (DE, 6) “Human beings,” the authors asserted, “purchase the increase in their power with estrangement from that over
which it is exerted.” Scientific and technical knowledge and practice treat nature as mere material for manipulation and domination. \((DE, 6)\) Logic, scientific knowledge, and rational conceptualizations of events and phenomena provide successive and ever more refined explanations of nature and human society. An explanation is provided for any event or phenomenon that is paradoxical or simply unfamiliar, and thereby these events and phenomena are “sanitized,” or neutralized as it were, and assimilated in the body of already existing knowledge without having any impact on the social, political or economic order of things. As the authors put it:

\[
\text{[t]he arid wisdom which acknowledges nothing new under the sun, because all the pieces in the meaningless game have been played out, all the great thoughts have been thought, all possible discoveries can be construed in advance, and human beings are defined by self-preservation through adaptation—this barren wisdom merely reproduces the fantastic doctrine it rejects: the sanction of fate which, through retribution, incessantly reinstates what always was. (DE, 8)}
\]

In this way, the modern reincarnation of enlightenment, driven by the impulse to “dispel myths” and substitute “fantasy with knowledge,” becomes a new myth whose version of fate is as inescapable as that of the myths of old. \((DE, 1)\)

A new form of mythology, enlightenment, in its modern, scientific version, also exhibits features never assumed by ancient myths. As a project of domination, enlightenment knowledge and practices become directed at human beings! Like inanimate nature, they become objects of knowledge, manipulation and control by those in power. \((DE, 9, 21, 24)\) Originally aimed at dispelling the fantastic elements of myths, scientific and technological enlightenment is increasingly intolerant towards any manifestation of individuality. Conformity is the aim of twentieth-century enlightenment rationality and “human beings are forced into [its mold].” \((DE, 9)\) “Animism,” the
authors declared, “had endowed things with soul; industrialism makes souls into things.” (DE, 21) Thought itself, a kind that does not conform to the dominant requirements for scientific, logical and technological exactitude, is banished as something irrelevant to “the business of manipulating the actual.” More, conceptual thought critical of the status quo and domination—whose exponents Horkheimer and Adorno considered themselves to be—is treated as an outright sacrilege. In this way, “[b]y sacrificing thought, which in its reified form as mathematics, machinery, organization, avenges itself on a humanity forgetful of it, enlightenment forfeited its own realization.” (DE, 19, 29-33)

The dialectical intertwining of myth and enlightenment—this was the overarching theme of Horkheimer and Adorno’s philosophical inquiry in fragments. In addition to the two central theses, Dialectic implicitly contained an outline of the history of Western subjectivity. During the magical phase of Western history, as we saw, the relationship between human beings and external nature was one of adaptive closeness. The onset of the mythical phase marked the beginning of an ever more drastic separation between the human subject and nature as an object of manipulation. At the same time, it also witnessed the beginning of the practice of inflicting violence on internal human nature, a violence that resulted in the gradual formation of increasingly autonomous subjectivity. This process of self-infliction of violence on subjectivity, according to the authors, is exemplified in the myth of Odysseus as narrated in Homer’s Odyssey. By the time Odysseus encounters the Sirens he has already “come of age in suffering.” (DE, 25) “In the multitude of mortal dangers which he has had to endure,” the authors wrote, “the unity of his own life, the identity of the person, have been hardened.” Odysseus has himself tied to the mast of his ship and has his men plug their ears with wax, so that
neither he nor they can succumb to the temptation of the Sirens’ irresistible song, and can thereby avoid a shipwreck. The Sirens’ song represents the “allurement … of losing oneself in the past,” and “they have knowledge ‘of all that has ever happened on this fruitful earth.’” Theirs is the call of primeval nature beckoning the human being to “lose the self,” to “suspend … the boundary between oneself and other life”—an urge that, for the authors, has always been an integral part of “civilization.” (DE, 25-27) Odysseus’s decision to have himself tied to the mast and to deprive his men of the possibility of hearing the Sirens’ song help them to resist the irresistible, survive the temptation and retain the integrity of their selves. Odysseus himself, it is true, listens; he is, indeed, wildly “drawn to the Sirens” and thus suspends his self. But “he cannot go to [the Sirens];” the self-imposed tying to the mast sets limits to his delight, prevents its consummation as it were, turning it into an enjoyment from a distance. Blocking a flight to the lure, it makes his suspension of self incomplete and temporary, not fatal. Odysseus does “not … succumb to [the Sirens] even while he succumbs,” and so avoiding destruction, his self survives the trial. The story of him and his men becomes paradigmatic of the infliction of violence accompanying the birth of autonomous Western subjectivity. As the authors put it, “[h]umanity had to inflict terrible injuries on itself before the self—the identical, purpose-directed, masculine character of human beings—was created, and something of this process is repeated in every childhood.” (DE, 26, 46)

The Odyssey narrates the story of individuation, and the period of mythology saw the formation of autonomous subjectivity; the hallmark of the contemporary era is this subjectivity’s dissolution. Twentieth-century scientific and technological rationality is
inimical to any manifestation of individuality. In the era of bourgeois liberalism, the autonomous individual still had a place in the organization of society, as, for example, an independent economic agent. (*DE*, 23) The increasing complexity of the division of labor in the twentieth century destroys this space of independence and converts individuals into appendages to the system of political, economic and social organization. The goal of self-preservation compels individuals to seek conformity and manifestations of individuality, subjectivity, or thought, are suppressed. “...[T]he more heavily the process of self-preservation is based on the bourgeois division of labor,” the authors wrote, “the more it enforces the self-alienation of individuals, who must mold themselves to the technical apparatus body and soul.” (*DE*, 23) This erosion of subjectivity is no less evident among those dependent on the economic and technological apparatus as among those in power. The latter are at least equally alienated from both external nature and their fellow human beings. They “are wholly ossified as the self which issues commands.” (*DE*, 27)

The dissolution of subjectivity and mutilation of the self in the contemporary era and enlightenment’s reversion to myth—the authors brought these two themes together in the chapter entitled “The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception.” The reflections in it represented a sweeping indictment of twentieth-century Western society. It was also clear that the pathological tendencies thereof that Horkheimer and Adorno discerned were particularly pronounced in American society.

The chapter’s central concept was that of the “culture industry.” Its meaning and the culture industry’s effects on individuals were succinctly explicated by Adorno in a
later article meant to elucidate further his and Horkheimer’s reflections in *Dialectic*.

“The culture industry,” Adorno wrote,

fuses the old and familiar into a new quality. In all its branches, products which are tailored for consumption by masses, and which to a great extent determine the nature of that consumption, are manufactured more or less according to plan. The individual branches are similar in structure or at least fit into each other, ordering themselves into a system almost without a gap. This is made possible by contemporary technical capabilities as well as by economic and administrative concentration. The culture industry intentionally integrates its consumers from above. … [A]lthough the culture industry undeniably speculates on the conscious and unconscious state of the millions towards which it is directed, the masses are not primary, but secondary, they are an object of calculation; an appendage of the machinery.”

To illustrate the operation of humans’ manipulation by the culture industry, Horkheimer and Adorno focused on the content of cultural products. The contents of popular songs, films, pieces of literature, they claimed, are being standardized, becoming increasingly formulaic. They consist of clichéd elements that are used interchangeably: standardized scenes, identical, or at least very similar, musical motifs are taken from existing films or songs and used repeatedly in new ones, creating a semblance of newness, but always reiterating what already exists. (*DE*, 98-99)

The standardization of cultural products is paralleled by, and indeed contributes to, the enforcement of “sameness” among individuals, the standardization of subjectivity itself. In its institutions and apparatuses, the culture industry is forbiddingly intolerant of dissent or criticism of the status quo. If dissent is tolerated at all, it is a kind that does not challenge directly the order of things. (*DE*, 104-106) The content of cultural products reinforces this tendency. In films, for example, the non-conformist, the social misfit, the “outsider,” is usually portrayed as “a villain and is identified as such on his very first appearance, long before the action requires it, to forestall even the momentary
misapprehension that society turns against those of good will.” (*DE*, 121) The message is that non-conformity is an evil to be avoided by all means and compliance and adaptation to the status quo is the preferable and most cogent conduct. (*DE*, 120-122) Individuality, idiosyncratic behavior, independent thought are thereby mutilated, converting human beings into automata pursuing the conformity that the culture industry promulgates. (*DE*, 136) Even those in power are not immune to the shrinkage of individuality. Among power’s wielders, the mutilation of thought takes the form of its “restriction … to organization and administration.” The “consequence” of this crippling of thought “is the stupidity which afflicts the great as soon as they have to perform tasks other than the manipulation of the small.” (*DE*, 28)

Horkheimer and Adorno’s reflections painted an intensely bleak picture of their contemporary society. Given that the book was written at the time of the Nazis’ bid for world domination, the apocalyptic portrait is not surprising. Even less surprising is the fact that the authors examined the question of the origin and nature of anti-Semitism. Besides the rise of Nazism, which affected their lives, the analysis of anti-Semitism, as we saw, was the main intellectual task that preoccupied both of them during the mid- and late-1940s. In *Dialectic*, they tried to understand anti-Semitism in light of their philosophical inquiry into enlightenment, and not through the methods of social scientific research. Not all of their reflections on anti-Semitism were related directly to their conclusions on the intertwining of enlightenment and myth, but all of them bore the stamp of an attempt to interpret anti-Semitism from the point of view of their philosophy of Western history.
Horkheimer and Adorno presented their reflections on anti-Semitism in *Dialectic’s* last chapter, “Elements of Anti-Semitism: Limits of Enlightenment.” As they explained, the chapter was intended to provide a “sketch” of the “prehistory of anti-Semitism.” It consisted of seven theses, the first three of which the authors wrote together with Leo Löwenthal. Taken as a whole, the seven separate theses offered what were, in fact, five different interpretations of anti-Semitism.

The first three theses provided a conceptualization of anti-Semitism that was reminiscent of Horkheimer’s 1939 article. As Horkheimer had done earlier, the authors saw the rise of anti-Semitism as the product of the collapse of capitalism, which, they believed, their contemporary age was witnessing. (DE, 138-139) Capitalism’s antagonisms, they suggested, provide the fertile psychological ground for anti-Semitism. The rank-and-file anti-Semites, “who always go short, economically and sexually, hate without end; they find relaxation unbearable because they do not know fulfillment.” More particularly, the “masses” feel cheated at liberalism’s failure to fulfill its promise, embodied in the concept of human rights, to provide “happiness even where power [is] lacking.” The Jews were “granted … property, but without the authority to command.” The oppressed masses, “dimly aware that [liberalism’s] promise … remains a lie as long as classes exist,” are therefore enraged by the image of the Jewish banker or intellectual, the symbols of “happiness without power.” (DE, 138, 140-141)

For the rank-and-file anti-Semite, anti-Semitism provides an outlet for, and therefore an alleviation of, pent-up resentment and aggression. At the same time, its violent outbursts are both a manifestation and a consequence of the mutilation of thought and lack of independent subjectivity and personal judgment, which are the products of
the trajectory of Western history. “Anti-Semitic behavior,” the authors noted, “is unleashed in situations in which blinded people, deprived of subjectivity, are let loose as subjects.” In contrast to the rank-and-file anti-Semites, the wielders of power use it as a political tool. For them, “[i]t serves as a distraction, a cheap means of corruption, a terrorist warning.” (DE, 139-140)

Horkheimer and Adorno devoted particular attention to what they called “bourgeois anti-Semitism.” Emphasizing the relationship between anti-Semitism and the failure of capitalism, they argued that the former serves as a means used by members of the bourgeoisie to affirm their disintegrating sense of identity and personal worth. “Race today,” the authors wrote, meaning racism’s anti-Semitic version, “is the self-assertion of the bourgeois individual, integrated into the barbaric collective.” (DE, 138) At the same time, anti-Semitism, for the bourgeoisie, serves as a concealment of “domination in production.” Its psychological origin is bourgeois “self-hate.” (DE, 142, 144)

To elucidate what they meant by “self-hate,” the authors examined once again a question tackled by Horkheimer in “The Jews and Europe.” In his analysis, as Dan Diner points out, Horkheimer had provided a rather crude, economistic interpretation of anti-Semitism, one that relied heavily on a misconceived identification of the Jews with the sphere of circulation.164 “Horkheimer … insinuated,” Diner notes, “that the Jews in fact constituted a leading element in the sphere of circulation.”165 In “Elements,” as Diner observes, such a crude identification was absent.166 Ever since the dawn of capitalism, the authors argued, the economic and political ascendancy of the bourgeoisie has rested on the “rapacious” exploitation of workers. The bourgeois were very well aware of the exploitation on which their success rested, but tried to conceal it through ideology, such
as the justification of “profit as a reward for enterprise.” To the exploited, the injustice of
the system became evident only when the “merchant” presented them with the bill that
their meager wages could not pay. The Jews, who had been prominent in the circulation
sphere, primarily because they had been “denied access to the source of added value,”
tended to become the scapegoats for the rage of the exploited. The oppression of the
Jews within the capitalist economy, exemplified in their relegation to the sphere of
circulation, serves as a reminder to the bourgeois that they themselves are the real
oppressors. (DE, 142-144) Thus, born out of bourgeois “self-hate,” engendered by the
bourgeois’ awareness of themselves as exploiters, anti-Semitism ends up serving as a
disguise of bourgeois oppression.

While the first three theses sought to explain anti-Semitism in relation to the
contradictions of the capitalist order, Horkheimer and Adorno’s fourth thesis aimed at
elucidating its religious roots. The authors linked anti-Semitism to what they saw as the
element of fraudulence in Christianity. The God of Judaism, they claimed, was far more
terrible than the earlier “mythical gods,” exacting complete obedience and
subordination. Christianity “softened the terror of the absolute by allowing the creature
to find itself reflected in the deity: the divine mediator is called by a human name and
dies a human death.” (DE, 145) However, the conversion of “spiritual essence” into
“something which the mind identifies as natural” was “intellectually suspect.” In
addition, Christianity contained a share of fraudulence in that it promised “salvation”
through faith and “self-sacrificing love,” “yet cannot guarantee [the fulfillment of the
promise].” Some “paradoxical Christians,” like Kierkegaard, were aware of this
contradiction, but most “repressed [the] knowledge.” (DE, 145-147) The Jews serve, as
in the case of the bourgeois, as a reminder, but this time they remind Christians of Christianity’s inherent dubiousness. The Jews have “refused to make the murky sacrifice of reason,” and, as such, incur the hatred of the Christian anti-Semites. The latter “hate [the Jews] as one hates those who know better.” (DE, 147)

In their fifth thesis, Horkheimer and Adorno moved away from their engagement with religious roots and, to explain some psychological motives and practices in the behavior of anti-Semites, employed a concept they had already used in their examination of the relationship between humans and nature—mimesis. Their reflections also echoed Fenichel’s earlier psychoanalytically oriented analysis of anti-Semitism. Imitation, as we saw, was characteristic, for the authors, of magical practices at the dawn of Western civilization, practices that constituted an attempt at adaptation to nature. The magical practices of mimesis were gradually proscribed by “civilization,” which “replaced … [them] … with rational praxis, work.” (DE, 148) Any manifestation of the mimetic impulse, which is present in distractions from work or an open display of emotions, represents, the authors claimed echoing Fenichel, a regression to a phase of history overcome at enormous cost to human subjectivity. Mimetic behavior evokes the primeval fear of the powers of nature, and thus incurs the anger of those who conform to the demands of rational praxis. (DE, 148-150) The putative “mimetic traits” of the Jews, such as “the singing tone of voice,” produce anger and hatred in gentile anti-Semites, who are, without realizing it, all too ready to indulge in their own mimetic impulses. (DE, 151-153) The anti-Semitic imitations of alleged Jewish traits are nothing other than an indulgence in the mimetic impulse. Their aim, however, is that impulse’s simultaneous enjoyment and condemnation. (DE, 151) In fact, the authors suggested,
civilized society is not averse to offering opportunities for regression to mimetic behavior, provided that “the prohibition is suspended by rationalization in the service of practical purposes, real or apparent.” The political gatherings of anti-Semites are precisely such officially sanctioned, dismal festivals aimed at enjoying a “despised and self-despising” mimetic impulse. (*DE*, 151-152) In addition to providing opportunities for regression to mimesis, the fascist and Nazi gatherings represent magical practices in a deeply distorted form. As the authors vividly put it, “… the barbaric drumming, the monotonous repetition of words and gestures, are so many organized imitations of magical practices, the mimesis of mimesis. The *Führer*, with his ham-actor’s facial expressions and the hysterical charisma turned on with a switch, leads the dance.” (*DE*, 152)

In their fifth thesis, the authors did not address directly the issue of whether Jewish traits existed in reality, or were solely the result of anti-Semitic allegations. (*DE*, 152) But they did draw attention to the element of projection in such charges. We saw that conceptualizing anti-Semitism as a product of projection was a recurrent theme in *Studies in Prejudice*. In Horkheimer and Adorno’s philosophical reflections, projection involved the displacement of the “subliminal craving of the indigenous population to revert to [mimetic behavior]” onto the screen provided by the Jews. The desires to indulge in the mimesis of magic and “sacrificial practices,” for example, are converted into accusations of “forbidden magic and bloody rituals.” (*DE*, 153)

Horkheimer and Adorno made projection the central theme of their sixth thesis. In it, following the standard psychoanalytic interpretation, they broadened the conceptualization of projection in the fifth thesis, to include the externalization and
displacement of all unconscious impulses onto a suitable projection screen. (DE, 154, 158) At the same time, however, they noted that “all perception” contains an element of “projection,” and, to elucidate this claim, they transcended the psychoanalytic model with several philosophical reflections on the nature of perception. “Between the actual object and the indubitable sense datum,” they wrote,

between inner and outer, yawns an abyss which the subject must bridge at its own peril. To reflect the thing as it is, the subject must give back to it more than it receives from it. From the traces the thing leaves behind in its senses the subject recreates the world outside it [through concepts and judgments]: the unity of the thing in its manifold properties and states; and in so doing, in learning how to impart a synthetic unity not only to the outward impressions but to the inward ones which gradually separate themselves from them, it retroactively constitutes the self. (DE, 155)

The moment of the subject’s “giving back” to the outside world is precisely the element of projection in cognition. (DE, 154-156) The maintenance of the dialectical relationship between the subject and the outside world requires constant “reflection on [the] antithesis.” (DE, 156) Anti-Semitism, the authors suggested, does not simply involve projection, but an aberrant version of the projective mechanism. It involves “false projection,” projection run wild as it were, resulting from the lack of reflection on, and the concomitant break in, the dialectical relationship between the subject and the outer world. (DE, 155-156) The false projection is the “boundless” endowment of the world with the “contents” of the unreflecting subject. (DE, 156) A ready example of this type of false projection is the anti-Semitic fantasy of an ominous Jewish conspiracy.

In their seventh and last thesis, Horkheimer and Adorno related their reflections on anti-Semitism to some of the central claims they had formulated throughout Dialectic and especially in their chapter on the culture industry. They began the thesis with a
provocative assertion: “there are no longer any anti-Semites. The last of them were liberals who wanted to express their antiliberal opinions.” (DE, 165) To substantiate such a statement, which in fact obviated the necessity of their reflections, the authors used a concept that Adorno had formulated in The Authoritarian Personality: “ticket thinking.” In The Authoritarian Personality, the concept described a political behavior characterized by semi-automatic support for a whole set of political ideas, such as a position against trade unions, without differentiating between the separate ideas within the set, or “ticket,” and even without being fully aware of the political meaning and significance of these ideas. (AP, 663-669) In addition, the authors reiterated the argument they had made in the chapter on the culture industry that their contemporary era was witnessing the mutilation of subjectivity, and indeed the destruction of the individual, by the vast apparatuses of economic, political and cultural domination. Pursuing the goal of standardization of individuality and subjectivity ever more relentlessly, they argued, the apparatuses of domination impose “ready-made thought models,” limiting the freedom of the individual to the freedom to choose among those prefabricated options. (DE, 167) “Today,” the authors asserted, “individuals receive their tickets ready-made from the powers that be, as consumers receive their automobiles from the sales outlets of factories.” (DE, 170) Far from being a separate and clearly delineated political idea in its own right, even if an intensely misguided one, anti-Semitism is merely one component of the fascist political “ticket.” “Anti-Semitism,” the authors wrote, “has practically ceased to be an independent impulse and has become a plank in the platform: anyone who gives fascism its chance subscribes to the settlement of the Jewish question along with the breaking of the unions and the crusade against
Bolshevism.” (DE, 166) It was precisely in this sense that, for Horkheimer and Adorno, anti-Semites and anti-Semitism were disappearing. Anti-Semitism was a symptom of the broader pathology of standardization, and indeed, of the gradual disappearance of thinking and individuality.

Though theoretically rigorous when viewed in light of the authors’ broader claims, the proposition that anti-Semitism as an independent impulse was on the wane had a limited value in terms of applicability to concrete historical reality. Horkheimer and Adorno’s last thesis exhibited what was probably the main defect of all of their reflections on anti-Semitism—their lack of historical specificity. The authors’ talk of the disappearance of anti-Semitism explained as little about the rise of anti-Semitism in its Nazi variant as did the conceptualization of the Nazi political rallies as magical practices, or the explanation of Christian anti-Semitism in terms of the intellectual fraudulence of Christianity. The first three theses, with their emphasis on the relationship between capitalism and the rise of fascism and Nazism, were the ones possessing the highest degree of value as an historical explanation, but even they were painted in too broad strokes to be of much help in explaining why anti-Semitism assumed the destructive form that it did in Nazi Germany and not somewhere else. Even the interpretation of anti-Semitism as a result of the mechanism of projection was more socially and historically specific in the discussion of concrete individuals’ attitudes in Studies in Prejudice, based as that discussion was on the intensive analysis of these attitudes. Despite the many problems undermining the theoretical, heuristic and practical value of its arguments, the series nevertheless showed a measure of social and historical concreteness that Dialectic conspicuously lacked. Admittedly, Horkheimer and
Adorno’s reflections were not meant to provide a particular historical analysis of the rise of Nazi anti-Semitism; formulated in the form of fragments, they were not a coherent argument. But despite their theoretical character and fragmentary form, the reflections’ limitations as a tool of historical inquiry were significant. Motivated to a great extent by the concrete rise of anti-Semitism in Weimar and Nazi Germany, the reflections on anti-Semitism made a contribution to the historical understating of Nazi anti-Semitism, or, for that matter, to the understanding of the concrete manifestations of anti-Semitism in any period, that was too indirect.

Doubting the value of Horkheimer and Adorno’s reflections for historical analysis is an easy target of a counter-criticism that such a charge exemplifies the very kind of thinking that they denounced so vehemently in *Dialectic*. They themselves, however, used social-scientific methodology in their empirical analysis of anti-Semitism in *Studies*. In fact, not only did they use such methodology and engage in the empirical research on anti-Semitism, but they also considered the initial reflections that were to give rise to the chapter on anti-Semitism in *Dialectic* to be “a theoretical study for the anti-Semitism project.” The preface to the 1944 and 1947 editions of the book stated that “the ‘elements’ are directly related to empirical research by the Institute of Social Research.” Yet, despite this close relationship, the reflections in *Dialectic* stood in a very marked contrast to the methodology, and to the very subject matter and conclusions, of *Studies*. Indeed, the tension between theoretical speculation and empirical research, discernible on the pages of *The Authoritarian Personality*, found its culmination in the much broader discrepancy between the philosophical reflections on anti-Semitism in *Dialectic* and the analysis of anti-Semitism in *Studies*. In this, the
reflections on anti-Semitism contradicted directly one of the fundamental tenets of Critical Theory—the integration of theoretical insight and empirical investigation.

The theses on anti-Semitism also raise the important issue of the practical—and ethical—dimension of theory. Ever since Marx, the insistence on the inseparability of theory and praxis had been a hallmark of Marxist theorization. Adorno himself decided to begin his *Negative Dialectics* with the now famous statement: “Philosophy, which once seemed obsolete, lives on because the moment to realize it was missed.” But the lack of historical specificity in “Elements,” their self-conscious detachment, even aloofness, from historical realities suggests that the reflections on anti-Semitism were not merely a manifestation of a divergence between theory and praxis, but actually contributed to sharpening that divergence. Perhaps these reflections still live on, because the project of which they originally formed a part also went amiss—in its attempt to provide a rigorous, coherent, and sound explanation of anti-Semitism, one that could have made possible its successful eradication.

But these riddles and quandaries have momentous implications also in a more specific sense. They have a crucial bearing on the endeavors, works, and views of the intellectuals we have examined so far. Critical here is the theme of escape. We saw how, after a sustained engagement with the history of anti-Semitism, Lazare rebounded, as it were, into nebulous dreams of a revolutionary anarchist panacea for ethnic hatred. His espousal of widely shared anarchist beliefs, which connected him to the context of the European *fin-de-siècle*, led him towards his wishful leap. Proust likewise, unable to cope with the problem of Jewish identity, chose an escape into the ivory tower of art. His devotion to the notion of art for its own sake—his modern artistic sensibility—produced
another doubtful flight. The “Elements of Anti-Semitism” suggest that Horkheimer and Adorno too made a similar kind of escape their intellectual credo. Theirs was an escape into theory. Licensed by the idea of joining theoretical speculation and empirical inquiry, their philosophical engagement with anti-Semitism tended towards devolving into a hermitic exercise removed from political and social praxis, from their historical context, and from their own, more sociological research. And the principle of integrating theorization and empirical investigation linked their work to Marxism and to positivistic social science—two vital contexts of modern European intellectual history. Evident therefore among these figures is the emergence of a similar, fateful pattern. As if taken aback by the enormity of solving the problematic of Jewish selfhood and anti-Semitism, they ended up escaping from their confrontations with these two questions. As if confounded by them, though not necessarily aware of their inability to solve them, they wound up in flights—into revolutionary fantasy, aestheticism, solitary thought. These epistemological escapes were meant, essentially, as auspicious pursuits, as attempts at resolving the two historic issues and remedying the thinkers’ historical contexts. But while positively intended, the efforts turn out to be misguided, producing dubious escapes. They miscarried, and the roots of their failures were, invariably, the authors’ distinctive intellectual perspectives, which for their part tied them to key intellectual-cultural contexts that they inhabited.

By Way of Conclusion: A Cunning New Context

The Frankfurt School’s examination of anti-Semitism was damaged by two central principles of Critical Theory: its proposed integration of social theorization and
empirical research, and its stance of determined criticism of twentieth-century Western society. These intellectual factors, moreover, connected the School firmly to the significant historical contexts of Marxism and empirical social science. But the School’s investigation of the hatred produced certain longer-term, contextualizing repercussions of its own. More particularly, the empirical dissections in Studies contributed to developing and launching a set of concepts—a new analytical context—which influenced the writing of German history for decades, and which critically constricted historical understanding. This conceptual apparatus came to be known as the Sonderweg thesis in German historiography. And a work that made a key contribution to its articulation was The Authoritarian Personality.

The concept of “authoritarian character” exhibited problems that limited considerably its heuristic value as a tool of historical explanation. Despite its theoretical sophistication, the portrait of the prejudiced person, or “authoritarian personality,” risked becoming an unhistorical essentialization of psychological traits, a formulaic picture of the potential fascist that could then be employed to explain the emergence of Nazism and Nazi anti-Semitism. Especially in the immediate aftermath of the Second World War, historical analyses frequently employed the notion of a putative “German national character” to explain the rise of Nazism. As Ralf Dahrendorf noted in his Society and Democracy in Germany, such studies used a conception of an alleged national character of Germans, showing features such as “romanticism” and “irrationality,” to explain the advent of the Nazi dictatorship in Germany. The social scientific concept of the authoritarian personality clearly ran the risk of becoming a sophisticated version of the notion of a German character. Dahrendorf himself saw the
efforts of Fromm and Adorno et al. to probe the psychology of individuals susceptible to fascism by delineating the traits of the “sado-masochistic character” or the “authoritarian personality” as unselfconscious attempts to revive this notion.173

While the concept of the potentially fascist personality tended to essentialize Germans as authoritarian, a similar trend was also evident in The Authoritarian Personality’s analysis of the family conducive to the formation of this personality. The dissection of the family milieu of the high-scorers showed remarkable similarities to studies of the German family that appeared immediately after the Second World War. An example of these was Father Land: A Study of Authoritarianism in the German Family, by the psychiatrist Bertram Schaffner.174 Schaffner described the German father as “omnipotent, omniscient, and omnipresent, as far as this is possible for a human being,” and the German mother as “completely dependent on her husband.”175 The father imposes a strict discipline in the family and, in cases of disobedience of his authority, feels justified in having recourse to physical punishment.176 The result of this atmosphere of profound inequality and discipline is extremely negative for the child. Wrote Schaffner: “[k]ept subordinate through [discipline, the German boy] adopts the identical methods when he graduates into his own paternal status, and as if in revenge, becomes an aggressive, arrogant adult.”177 Not infrequently, the aggression is displaced and directed towards those who are a “cause” of “frustrations.”178

The parallels between Schaffner’s conclusions and those of The Authoritarian Personality are visible. The similarities were not the result of an accidental coincidence of views on the German family. They would have remained little more than similarities, had they not constituted the symptomatic beginnings of an important development in
German historiography in the aftermath of the Second World War—what came to be known as the Sonderweg thesis in German historiography. Indeed, not only the view of the authoritarianism of the German family, but also the idea of the authoritarian German, as embodied in the concept of the “authoritarian personality,” became the first building blocks of this influential view of German history.

Beginning in the late 1950s and early 1960s, the Sonderweg thesis gained particularly strong momentum in the late 1960s and continued to influence the writing of German history until at least the early 1980s. In fact, Dahrendorf’s own Democracy and Society in Germany represented a prime example of this historiographical stance. In general, the Sonderweg thesis was based on the view that, starting around the middle of the nineteenth century, Germany embarked on a special path of historical development that differed radically from the social and political development of Western Europe, especially that of France and Britain. To use Dahrendorf’s phrase, German history was characterized above all by the country’s “persistent failure to give home to democracy in its liberal sense.” This view of German history rested on the acceptance of the idea of what Geoff Eley has called “an authoritarian syndrome of pre-industrial traditions and arrested liberalism.” The emergence of this syndrome, in turn, was primarily the result of the absence of a self-confident bourgeoisie in Germany and its concomitant failure to establish democratic institutions on the model of those in England and France. Thus, instead of “constitut[ing] itself as a self-conscious class-subject acting politically in its own collective interests” against the “domination of [the] landowning aristocracy,” the German bourgeoisie “permitted its own assimilation to the existing ‘aristocratic’ and ‘authoritarian’ value system.”
The notion of the German *Sonderweg*—to whose establishment *The Authoritarian Personality* made a significant contribution—has largely been discredited. The most important challenge came from two non-German historians of Germany in the early 1980s, Eley himself and David Blackbourn, in their *The Peculiarities of German History: Bourgeois Society and Politics in Nineteenth-Century Germany*. Eley and Blackbourn argued that the *Sonderweg* view of German history rested on a host of historically and theoretically unwarranted assumptions, not least among which was that of a necessary linkage between liberalism and the bourgeoisie, where the former is seen as the logical set of political ideas adopted by the latter.\(^{185}\) Eley and Blackbourn emphasized the erroneousness of indicting the German bourgeoisie for its putative failure, and instead insisted that an independent and self-confident bourgeoisie existed nowhere in nineteenth-century Europe.\(^{186}\) While German society, like its European counterparts, was not characterized by the unmistakable supremacy of a buoyant bourgeoisie, by the third quarter of the nineteenth century, Eley and Blackbourn contended, the German bourgeoisie had carried out a “silent revolution,” establishing its social dominance.\(^{187}\) Eley and Blackbourn’s critique of the *Sonderweg* thesis was supported indirectly by another influential study of the early 1980s, Arno Mayer’s *The Persistence of the Old Regime: Europe to the Great War*. Mayer offered the provocative thesis that the European “*ancien régimes*” retained their economic, political and cultural “pre-eminence” in Europe until the outbreak of the First World War.\(^{188}\) Even England, according to him, “never became a ‘bourgeois order’ run by a ‘conquering’ or ‘triumphant’ bourgeoisie.”\(^{189}\)
At least as critical as Eley and Blackbourn’s and Mayer’s arguments for the validity of the Sonderweg thesis is recent research on nineteenth- and twentieth-century Germany, and especially the work of Margaret Lavinia Anderson. Anderson’s *Practicing Democracy: Elections and Political Culture in Imperial Germany* examines the election culture and practices in Imperial Germany in the period between the introduction of universal manhood suffrage in 1867 and the end of the First World War. Anderson paints a picture of Imperial Germany that differs significantly from the image of the German Reich as a bastion of authoritarianism. Her analysis shows that many electoral practices in Imperial Germany could hardly meet our contemporary standards of electoral freedom. More often than not, for example, the big German landowners put enormous pressure on those economically dependent on them to vote for the Reichstag candidate of the landowner’s own choice.\(^1\) Despite such pressures, however, there nevertheless existed considerable “degrees of freedom” in Imperial Germany’s electoral culture and practices, exemplified by the not inconsiderable number of insurance and mutual support funds providing financial assistance for individuals “punished … for their political behavior” by the economically and politically powerful.\(^2\) The overall result of “fifty years of going to the polls,” the five decades of “practicing democracy,” was that, by the First World War, Germans had become accustomed to the idea that “democracy was both desirable and inevitable,” and Germany had become a “partly democratic country.”\(^3\)

In light of these and other recent studies, perhaps the most justifiable position on German authoritarianism is that suggested by Konrad Jarausch and Larry Jones—one that refuses to accept both the overemphasis on the authoritarianism of German society
characteristic of works propounding the Sonderweg thesis and the idea that “bourgeois hegemony was ... as complete as Blackbourn and Eley [originally] claimed.” Anderson’s emphasis on the democratization of Germany before the outbreak of the First World War is convincing provided that her insistence on its partial character is also retained. What is important for the discussion of the empirical research on anti-Semitism is that the works of German historiography since the early 1980s have clearly undermined, if not destroyed altogether, the value of the concept of the authoritarian personality as a tool of historical explanation. The discrediting of the Sonderweg thesis has cast serious doubts on the beginnings of this view of German history in The Authoritarian Personality. Conceptualizations of a putatively “authoritarian personality,” of authoritarianism in the German family and German society, could remain convincing as long as German history, partly as a result of these conceptualizations themselves, was thought of as exhibiting marked authoritarian tendencies.

Through its concept of “the authoritarian personality,” therefore, Studies in Prejudice had crucial contextualizing repercussions, contributing to the articulation of conceptual patterns which limited historical thinking. Linked to the vital intellectual contexts of Marxism and empirical social science, the series tried to confront the darkest aberrations of modern European history. Ironically, its attempt to explain these pathologies of the Western historical context in the mid-twentieth century constructed a new concept—that of an authoritarian personality—which turned out to be intellectually debilitating. It became a part of a new, analytical context, whose influences and acceptance ended up obstructing historical understanding. Not only did the concept and
the context fail to become interpretatively enabling. They actually thwarted historical understanding.
Notes

3 Wiggershaus, The Frankfurt School, 12.
4 Ibid., 14, 16-17, 19.
5 Ibid., 19.
8 Held, Introduction to Critical Theory, 29.
9 Ibid., 31.
10 Wiggershaus, The Frankfurt School, 46-47.
11 Held, Introduction to Critical Theory, 34.
12 Ibid.
13 Ibid.
15 Ibid., 146.
16 Ibid., 434-435.
18 Ibid., 32.
19 Ibid., 34.
22 Ibid., 206, 218.
23 Ibid., 229, 234.
24 Ibid., 216-217.
25 Ibid., 234.
27 Van Reijen and Bransen, “The Disappearance of Class History,” 252.
28 Ibid., 250-251.
29 Quoted in Wiggershaus, The Frankfurt School, 143.
32 Ibid.
33 Ibid.


39 Ibid., 87-88, 92.

40 Ibid., 82.

41 Ibid., 84.

42 Ibid., 95-96.

43 Ibid., 95, 98.

44 Ibid., 114.

45 Ibid. As Franklin G. Maleson points out, the existence of a link between masochism and sadism was first suggested by Freud and was subsequently accepted by psychoanalysts as “a somewhat axiomatic assumption [, which, however,] was not always supportable clinically.” Franklin G. Maleson, “Masochism and Sadism” in Edward Erwin, ed., The Freud Encyclopedia: Theory, Therapy, and Culture (New York: Routledge, 2002), 331.


47 Ibid.

48 Ibid., 116-117.

49 Wiggershaus, The Frankfurt School, 273-274.

50 Ibid., 355-356, 359-360.

51 Ibid., 363.

52 Ibid., 363, 366.

53 Max Horkheimer, “Statement on relations [sic] with the American Jewish Committee,” Leo Löwenthal Archive, Houghton Library, Harvard University, bMS Ger 185 (160), 1.

54 Ibid.

55 Ibid., 3-4.


57 Ibid., vii.


59 Schorsch, “German Antisemitism,” 262.


61 Katz, From Prejudice to Destruction, 5-6.

62 Schorsch, “German Antisemitism,” 262.

63 Ibid., 263.

64 Jay, The Dialectical Imagination, 87-88.


66 Ibid.

67 In his The Case of Sigmund Freud, Gilman argued that the concepts of psychoanalysis represented, in part, an attempt by Freud to counter anti-Semitic images of the Jews in the “medical literature” of the fin-de-siècle. Freud, Gilman argued, transformed “these charges into universal attributes of his definition of the human being.” Gilman, The Case of Sigmund Freud, 10. An example of such a transformation would be the Oedipus complex. “The fantasies of parricide and incest framed by the Oedipus complex,” Gilman noted, “become one male Jew’s answer to the charge of incest or inbreeding lodged against the Jews.” Ibid., 198. In his other study of the same year, Gilman argued, alternatively, that medical and cultural anti-Semitic stereotypes were “countered in the rhetoric of psychoanalysis through the construction of specific concepts of gender onto which the anxiety about the Jew’s body and mind (and, directly, Freud’s own body and mind) [were] displaced.” Gilman, Freud, Race, and Gender, 11. Thus, Freud’s claims “transferred” the anti-Semitic image of the Jews as possessing an inscrutable, “hidden,” “essence” onto a conception of the “feminine” as similarly “unknowable.” Ibid., 36-37.


70 Ibid., 29.
71 Ibid., 27-31.
72 Wiggershaus, The Frankfurt School, 358.
76 I owe this insight to Dr. Harold Mah.
80 Fenichel wrote, for example, “[t]he obstinacy with which the Jews have resisted assimilation through the ages, although the ghetto system should have been encouragement enough, although other people in a similar position have, during the course of history, repeatedly been absorbed by their hosts—this is a problem the examination of which would lead too far. Let us accept this as a fact. The Jews retained their peculiarities, and their hosts did not understand them.” Fenichel, “Psychoanalysis of Antisemitism,” 28-29.
81 Sartre, Anti-Semite and Jew, 152.
83 A notable exception in this respect was Ackerman and Jahoda’s Anti-Semitism and Emotional Disorder. Although emphasizing the necessity of using the concept of “national character” with caution, the authors accepted the existence of “Jewish” character traits. As they put it, “[i]n the absence of conclusive evidence and in the full knowledge that this is an expression of belief rather than a fact, it is here assumed that there are certain characteristics of personality which are typically Jewish. Centuries of life in the ghetto, of emphasis on study rather than manual work, of the experience of persecution in the living memory of so many consecutive generations of Jews—all these and other experiential factors cannot fail to have left their trace on the Jewish personality.” Nathan Ackerman and Marie Jahoda, Anti-Semitism and Emotional Disorder: A Psychoanalytic Interpretation (New York: Harper, 1950), 7. Even Ackerman and Jahoda, however, pointed out that “in no single case [among the prejudiced individuals they studied] were these Jewish personality attributes the cause of anti-Semitic feelings.” Ibid. Jay has pointed out that, in Dialectic of Enlightenment, Adorno and Horkheimer “open[ed] for discussion” the Jews’ role in anti-Semitism. Jay, “The Jews and the Frankfurt School,” 96. Jay is certainly right in his observation, but the shift in general attitudes towards anti-Semitism on the part of intellectuals that Studies in Prejudice marked is unmistakable.
84 Leo Lowenthal and Norbert Guterman, Prophets of Deceit: A Study of the Techniques of the American Agitator (New York: Harper, 1949), xv; Wiggershaus, The Frankfurt School, 410. In Prophets of Deceit, Löwenthal’s name appeared as “Lowenthal,” without the umlaut. I am using the German spelling of his name throughout, including, for the sake of consistency, the bibliography. Hereafter, the book itself will be cited as PD, followed by page numbers.
85 In The Dialectical Imagination, Jay also draws attention to this idea of the authors of Prophets of Deceit. As Jay puts it, “The language of the agitator, its authors held, had to be deciphered by a kind of psychological Morse code. As was to be expected, the major source of the code was psychoanalysis...” Jay, The Dialectical Imagination, 238. Jay, however, reverses the meaning of Löwenthal and Guterman’s original statement. He suggests that the authors of Prophets of Deceit used psychoanalysis as a code for deciphering the propaganda’s meaning, whereas Löwenthal and Guterman’s statement says that the propaganda’s hidden meaning itself is the code that the agitators send to their audiences.
86 Jay, The Dialectical Imagination, 238. Jay, however, does not discuss Erikson’s argument in much
detail.

Erik Erikson, “Hitler’s Imagery and German Youth,” *Psychiatry* 5:4 (November 1942): 480-481. Erikson’s article was later published, with slight modifications, in his 1950 *Childhood and Society*. Erik H. Erikson, *Childhood and Society*, 2nd ed. (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1963), 326-358. I have decided to discuss the original article, as it was the original text that was available to the authors of *Studies in Prejudice*.

Erikson, “Hitler’s Imagery and German Youth,” 478-479.

Ibid., 478.

Ibid., 479.

Ibid., 480. In his article, Erikson also attempted to utilize some of his conclusions about Hitler’s appeal to explain the psychological allure of anti-Semitism. Erikson, in effect, offered two psychoanalytic interpretations of the appeal of Hitler’s anti-Semitism. The adolescents in Weimar Germany, he argued, were “passionately cruel with [themselves],” trying to extirpate every trace of weakness in themselves in their protest against their families’ contradictory patterns of authority. Ibid., 487. Their anti-Semitism was a projection of their own felt but dimly comprehended weaknesses onto the scapegoat of the Jew. Their masochism, moreover, provided a justification for their hatred of the Jews—if they were cruel to themselves, it seemed all too natural to be cruel to the alleged enemy. Ibid. Secondly, Erikson claimed that, during the early twentieth century, and especially during the period of the Weimar Republic, most Germans experienced a profound crisis of cultural identity. As a result of this crisis, two national character types, according Erikson, emerged in Germany after the defeat of the First World War, a “too wide” one and a “narrow” one. The “too wide” German “became cosmopolitan beyond recognition,” denied, and indeed came to despise, his or her German cultural identity, and “was always glad to be mistaken for an Englishman, a Frenchman or American.” While the “narrow” type affirmed and clung tenaciously to whatever he or she conceived to be his or her “Germanness,” he or she “arrogantly overdid the narrow inventory of his [sic] few genuine characteristics.” Ibid., 485. Neither of these character types represented an unproblematic adoption of a healthy cultural identity. Opposed to this chasm in German cultural identity stood the two general Jewish character types, as conceived by Erikson: the “orthodox, not influential, anachronistic type, to whom changing environment and time means absolutely nothing[,] and the successful type to whom continuous adaptation to geographical and cultural change has become second nature.” Ibid., 488. In addition, individual Jewish intellectuals, in Erikson’s view, had gradually emerged as the most prominent intellectual champions of relativism and critical insight. In a chaotic period of an acute crisis of German cultural identity, anti-Semitism was the hatred of those who seemed to feel at home everywhere; it was also the hatred of those who seemed to have embraced relativism and critical insight as “a means of racial self-preservation,” which, if adopted and practised by Germans would easily turn into a means of cultural and personal disintegration. Ibid.


A detailed early overview of the impact of the study on subsequent research is provided in Richard Christie, “Authoritarianism Re-Examined,” in Richard Christie and Marie Jahoda, eds., *Studies in the Scope and Method of “The Authoritarian Personality”* (Glencoe: The Free Press, 1954), 123-196. The aim of Christie’s discussion was to evaluate the degree to which most of the basic theoretical conclusions of *The Authoritarian Personality* were confirmed or disproved by subsequent research. Christie argued that most theoretical claims were, in fact, confirmed by subsequent sociological and psychological research. Ibid.

The authors insisted repeatedly that the study’s purpose was to examine the psychological determinants of potential susceptibility to anti-democratic ideas, rather than analyze overtly fascistic patterns of behavior. They pointed out, for example, that “[t]he forces of personality are not responses but readiness for response; whether or not a readiness will issue in overt expression depends not only upon the situation of the moment but upon what other readinesses stand in opposition to it.” (AP, 5)


Ibid.

Ibid., 269. A succinct examination of the origins of ego psychology and the significance of Hartmann’s work is contained in Gertrude Blanck and Rubin Blanck, *Ego Psychology: Theory & Practice* (New York:
This persistent attempt at revision and refinement, in fact, earned the commendation of even the most severe critics of *The Authoritarian Personality*. In their “methodological critique” of the study, for example, Hyman and Sheatsley pointed out that one of the “most stimulating” aspects of the study was the fact that “it represents a philosophy of research in stages, each stage representing a modification and improvement of an earlier design or procedure.” Hyman and Sheatsley, “Methodological Critique,” 53.

This high correlation provided a statistical proof of the hypothesis that anti-Semitism constituted one facet of a generally prejudiced psychological predisposition and ideological outlook.

Opposed to the ingroup is the “outgroup,” which can be any group whose members do not seem to the subject to belong to the ingroup. (*AP*, 41, 43, 46)


My discussion of *Studies in Prejudice* is indebted to Glazer’s. In the subsequent discussion, my points of agreement with Glazer will be noted in the endnotes.

I have chosen the authoritarian type as the most cogent illustration of the study’s conclusions, disregarding the remaining five, to avoid burdening the discussion with too many details.

In *The Authoritarian Personality*, Adorno actually referred to “Max Horkheimer’s theory in the collective work of which he wrote the sociopsychological part.” (*AP*, 759) When referring to the “collective work,” Adorno clearly had in mind the *Studien über Autorität und Familie*, and when referring to “Horkheimer’s theory” he probably had in mind Fromm’s analysis in the “Sozialpsychologischer Teil” of the *Studien*. Adorno’s reference to Horkheimer’s theory seems to be a typographical error, or an oversight on Adorno’s part. Horkheimer wrote the first part of the *Studien*, entitled “Allgemeiner Teil,” or “General Part,” while the chapter entitled “Sozialpsychologischer Teil,” or “Sociopsychological Part,” was written by Fromm. In his contribution to the *Studien*, Horkheimer did not develop consistently the theory that Adorno refers to, even though the theoretical assumption that Adorno utilized is certainly implicit in Horkheimer’s discussion. This is evident, for example, on pages 69 and 70 of Horkheimer’s “Allgemeiner Teil.” Horkheimer, “Allgemeiner Teil,” in Institut für Sozialforschung, *Studien über Autorität und Familie* (Paris: Félix Alcan, 1936), 69-70. Horkheimer’s essay was, again, translated as Max Horkheimer, “Authority and the Family,” trans., Matthew J. O’Connell, in Max Horkheimer, *Critical Theory: Selected Essays*, trans., Matthew J. O’Connell, et al. (New York: Herder and Herder, 1972), 47-128. In the English version, the corresponding pages are 120 and 121. Horkheimer, “Authority and the Family,” 120-121.

In *The Dialectical Imagination*, Jay also draws attention to Adorno’s discussion of the “authoritarian syndrome.” Jay, *The Dialectical Imagination*, 246. In the main, my discussion is similar to Jay’s and supports his conclusions.


Glazer, in his 1950 assessment of the *Studies*, was the first one to draw attention to this problematic aspect of the study. Nathan Glazer, “The Authoritarian Personality in Profile: Report on a Major Study of Race Hatred,” *Commentary* (June 1950): 580.

Glazer questioned Adorno’s suggestion that the tendencies at issue are fascist. “Can it be demonstrated,” he asked, “that ‘resentment of unions’ or of ‘income limitations’ are ‘potentially fascist persuasions’? Here one would not be convinced by the argument that they are correlated with other points of view that are undeniably fascist. For why may not these attitudes conceivably be the ones in a generally authoritarian personality that offer hope for action on behalf of democracy?” *Ibid.*

In his history of the Frankfurt School, Wiggershaus points out, correctly I think, that the last paragraph of the study was “unmistakably written by Adorno.” Wiggershaus, *The Frankfurt School*, 423. Judging from the style, it is safe to assume that Adorno wrote the whole conclusion.

In their 1954 “Methodological Critique” of *The Authoritarian Personality*, Hyman and Sheatsley
criticized another problematic aspect of the study—what they thought was a theoretical imaginativeness, in the part containing the qualitative analysis, which was not warranted by the empirical evidence. As Hyman and Sheatsley put it, “...the analysts often exercise license far beyond what is permitted the scientific investigator.” Hyman and Sheatsley, “Methodological Critique,” 102. In the qualitative part of the study, Hyman and Sheatsley observed, “... we find psychiatric diagnoses rampant,” which, they claimed, stems from “the study directors’ bias towards psychodynamic explanations.” Ibid., 102, 107. Adorno’s “existential judgment” on his contemporary American society exhibits a similar measure of theoretical overstatement and a lack of basis in empirical data, a result of the Frankfurt School’s critical stance towards their contemporary society.

117 It should be noted that, in addition to anti-Semitism, the study’s secondary objective was the examination of the factors determining prejudice against African-Americans. As the authors wrote, the “central question” of the study was, “What are the factors essentially associated with anti-Semitism and are these factors also associated with anti-Negro attitudes?” (DP, 2) Since, however, the comparison of prejudice against African-Americans and hostility against Jews was a secondary objective of the study, the discussion focuses on Bettelheim and Janowitz’s analysis of anti-Semitism.
118 Anti-African-American stereotypes, on the other hand, were found to be projections of rejected id-tendencies: African-Americans were frequently viewed as being “sloppy,” or “dirty.” (DP, 39)
120 A similar implicit call for submission to societal authorities transpired clearly also in the 1964 edition of Dynamics of Prejudice. In his 1950 Commentary review of Studies in Prejudice, Glazer pointed out what seems to be the most fundamental contradiction of Studies in Prejudice—the discrepancy between the conclusion of Dynamics of Prejudice that acceptance of societal institutions is related to ethnic tolerance and the contradictory finding of The Authoritarian Personality that acceptance of society is related to ethnic prejudice and nonconformity is related to lack of prejudice. Glazer, “The Authoritarian Personality in Profile,” 581. Discussing this contradiction, Bettelheim and Janowitz pointed out that “the efforts in The Authoritarian Personality lead away from the [deeper] underlying dynamics involved in ethnic tolerance.” Bettelheim and Janowitz, Social Change and Prejudice, 75. “Instead,” they went on to assert, “it is necessary to analyze the interplay between the levels of personal hostility and effects of the controlling institutions. It may well be that for some individuals weak levels of social control are adequate to control low levels of personal hostility. But for the population at large, the strength of the controlling institutions must be powerful enough to counterbalance the levels of personal hostility [italics mine].” Ibid., 76.
122 Ibid.
123 Ibid.
124 Ibid., 582.
125 Bettelheim and Janowitz, Social Change and Prejudice, 75.
127 Bettelheim and Janowitz, Social Change and Prejudice, 75.
128 Glazer, “The Authoritarian Personality in Profile,” 582.
129 In their examination of defense mechanisms related to anti-Semitism, Ackerman and Jahoda discuss “compensation” as being linked to “reaction formation.” Compensation, they explain, “is the attempt to achieve in special spheres gratifications which outweigh the frustrations of inherent deficiencies.” (ASED, 67) They also point out that reaction formation and compensation have identical “immediate goals: the achievement of power, status, money, social advantages, and privileges of all sorts.” (ASED, 67) Even though Ackerman and Jahoda make a strong case for the relatedness of the two defense mechanisms and the presence of compensation among the individuals in the sample, they do not reveal an explicit connection between compensation and anti-Semitism. (ASED, 67-68)
130 The clearest indication of the deficiencies of Emotional Disorder was not contained in the study itself but in a letter from Horkheimer to Paul Lazarsfeld from August 21, 1947. Discussing different possibilities
for future research, Horkheimer wrote: “[one] project which should be carried out on the [West] coast is a
study parallel to the New York Analysts Study [sic].” Several times I wrote to [Samuel] Flowerman
concerning the turn the study was taking under Ackerman…. Insisting on the desirability of a study on
the West Coast, he noted: “…in view of the abstract and ambiguous character of its data, the New York
collection of cases is not too edifying.” Max Horkheimer, “Letter to Paul Lazarsfeld,” August 21, 1947,
Leo Löwenthal Archive, Houghton Library, Harvard University, bMS Ger 185 (45), 1. Here Horkheimer
readily expressed his dissatisfaction with the progress of Ackerman and Jahoda’s research and analysis.
What is more important, he was willing to question the soundness and reliability of their empirical
evidence. A strong reservation concerning the study’s evidence on the part of the person bearing most of
the responsibility for the organization of the research on anti-Semitism cast a critically thick shadow of
doubt on Emotional Disorder’s analytical value.
132 In his history of the Frankfurt School, Jay aptly entitled the chapter examining Dialectic of
Enlightenment, Horkheimer’s later Eclipse of Reason and Adorno’s Minima Moralia, “Toward a
133 Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, Dialectic of Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments, trans., Edmund Jephcott, ed.,
134 Ibid., xix.
135 Ibid.
136 Eva Reichmann’s 1974 assessment of Horkheimer’s intellectual development and his changing
attitudes towards Jewish tradition and his own Jewish origins includes an overview of some of
Horkheimer’s main arguments in “The Jews and Europe.” Eva Reichmann, “Max Horkheimer the Jew:
Horkheimer’s views on fascism, Nazism and anti-Semitism in the period between the mid-1930s to the
mid-1940s is contained in Peter Stirk, Max Horkheimer: A New Interpretation (Hemel Hempstead:
School,” 90-100. A more critical evaluation of Horkheimer’s views on anti-Semitism is Dan Diner,
“Reason and the ‘Other’: Horkheimer’s Reflections on Anti-Semitism and Mass Annihilation,” in Seyla
Benhabib, Wolfgang Bonß, and John McCole, eds., On Max Horkheimer: New Perspectives (Cambridge:
137 Max Horkheimer, “The Jews and Europe,” in Stephen Eric Bronner and Douglas MacKay Kellner,
138 Ibid., 78.
139 Quoted in Pierre Ayçoberry, The Nazi Question: An Essay on the Interpretations of National Socialism
140 Horkheimer, “The Jews and Europe,” 77. Stirk has pointed out that, in his writings of the 1930s,
Horkheimer did not “always distinguish between totalitarian and authoritarian forms.” Stirk, Max
Horkheimer, 132. Stirk’s observation is certainly true of Horkheimer’s article “The Jews and Europe.”
141 Ibid., 93.
142 Ibid., 89.
143 Ibid., 82.
144 Ibid.
145 Ibid., 89.
146 Ibid.
147 Ibid., 89-90.
148 Ibid., 90.
149 Ibid., 92.
150 Ibid.
151 Ibid.
152 Ibid., 91-92.
153 Ibid., 91.
154 Ibid., 92.
155 Ibid., 78.


158 Ibid.

159 Ibid.

160 Ibid., xviii.

161 Ibid., xix.


163 Horkheimer and Adorno, “Preface (1944 and 1947),” xix.


165 Ibid.

166 Ibid., 339.

167 In the first thesis, in contrast, Horkheimer and Adorno seemed to assume that Jewish traits actually existed. (*DE*, 138)


171 I owe most of the ideas in this discussion to Dr. Harold Mah; he also provided invaluable guidance to the literature related to the debate on the *Sonderweg* thesis. I also thank Dr. Nolan Heie for providing me with additional guidance to this literature.


173 Ibid., 359.

174 Significantly, Schaffner’s study was based on material gathered by the Information Control Division of the postwar American Military Government in Germany. It included information from a variety of intelligence and psychological tests of individuals screened to determine their suitability to hold positions in the German media and an opinion survey of approximately 2,000 Germans living mostly in the American Zone of Occupation. Bertram Schaffner, *Father Land: A Study of Authoritarianism in the German Family* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1948), 6-11. Schaffner acknowledged that his conclusions were also based on his personal observations of German culture and society. *Ibid.*, 10-11. Even though the book was based on ample statistical information, it did not even remotely approach the statistical rigor of, for example, *The Authoritarian Personality*. In the beginning of this study, Schaffner pointed out that the pattern of the German family that he outlined was “the common denominator which became clear during the psychiatric interviews, a composite which emerged from both interviews and from personal observation in numerous homes in all the social strata.” *Ibid.*, 12. Nowhere does it become clear, however, how the composite picture of the German family actually emerged, or what the precise methods were that Schaffner employed for determining its statistical validity, or indeed empirical presence.

175 Ibid., 15, 34.

176 Ibid., 15-21.

177 Ibid., 47.

178 Ibid., 48.


180 Ibid., 44-45.


182 Eley, “The British Model and the German Road,” 42.

183 Ibid., 42-43.

184 Ibid.

185 Ibid., 56-58.


Jarausch and Jones, “German Liberalism Reconsidered,” 3. The collection provides a much more nuanced portrait of the historical fortunes of liberalism in Germany, focusing also on its not inconsiderable achievements. Ibid., 3. Eleanor Turk’s contribution, for example, examined the efforts of German liberals to abolish the existing political and institutional barriers to freedom of association in the Kaiserreich, efforts that culminated in the adoption of the Association Law of 1908. Eleanor L. Turk, “German Liberals and the Genesis of the German Association Law of 1908,” in Konrad H. Jarausch and Larry Eugene Jones, eds., In Search of a Liberal Germany: Studies in the History of German Liberalism from 1789 to the Present (New York: Berg, 1990), 237-260. The collection edited by Blackbourn and Evans provided an additional challenge to the arguments about the alleged weakness of the German bourgeoisie espoused by proponents of the Sonderweg thesis. David Blackbourn, “The German Bourgeoisie: An Introduction,” in David Blackbourn and Richard J. Evans, eds., The German Bourgeoisie: Essays on the Social History of the German Middle Class from the Late Eighteenth to the Early Twentieth Century (London: Routledge, 1991), 1. Dolores L. Augustine, in particular, criticized the argument that the bourgeoisie of Imperial Germany became “feudalized.” Dolores L. Augustine, “Arriving in the Upper Class: The Wealthy Business Elite in Wilhelmine Germany,” in David Blackbourn and Richard J. Evans, eds., The German Bourgeoisie: Essays on the Social History of the German Middle Class from the Late Eighteenth to the Early Twentieth Century (London: Routledge, 1991), 46. Augustine argued that the German haute bourgeoisie of the late nineteenth century separated itself from the rest of the middle class and evolved a distinct social identity and social life of its own. This identity and social life incorporated elements from the aristocratic culture but also possessed elements that distinguished the upper bourgeoisie from the remaining social classes, including the aristocracy. Ibid., 46-86. A recent broader interpretation of the history of Imperial Germany based on a general acceptance of the criticisms of the Sonderweg thesis is Volker R. Berghahn’s 1994 study Imperial Germany, 1871-1914. In contrast to older analyses adopting the Sonderweg perspective, Berghahn emphasizes what he calls the “progressive pluralization of German society.” Volker R. Berghahn, Imperial Germany, 1871-1914: Economy, Society, Culture, and Politics (Prudence: Berghahn, 1994), xvi. According to his analysis, the main feature of the politics, culture and society of Wilhelmine Germany was its division into distinct social, economic and political formations, such as classes and parties, and their consolidation. Ibid., 123-131, 201-221, 239-240.

Jarausch and Jones, “German Liberalism Reconsidered,” 18.
Chapter 6

The Perplexities of History: Hannah Arendt on Jewish Identity and Anti-Semitism

―[The] unchangeable identity of the person, though disclosing itself intangibly in act and speech, becomes tangible only in the story of the actor’s or speaker’s life; but as such it can be known, that is grasped as a palpable entity only after it has come to its end. In other words, human essence—not human nature in general (which does not exist) nor the sum total of qualities and shortcomings in the individual, but the essence of who somebody is—can come into being only when life departs, leaving behind nothing but a story.”

—Hannah Arendt, The Human Condition

Introduction

“She was passionate in the way believers in justice can become and that believers in mercy must remain…. She followed wherever serious inquiry would take her, and if she made enemies it was never out of fear.”¹ Thus William Jovanovich, in his speech at Hannah Arendt’s funeral, articulating a crucial reason for her appeal as a thinker—her intellectual integrity and courage. Arendt had repeatedly insisted that the meaning of an event or an individual’s life is revealed only to the backward glance of the historian and in the stories historians tell. The beginning of her story—her death—interrupted an inquiry she had pursued for a number of years: she had just completed the first two parts of The Life of the Mind and begun the manuscript for the third. Arendt’s reflections on the workings of the mind had grown out of another project of “serious inquiry” that had preoccupied her for decades. This other project had required truly enormous passion,
integrity and courage—it was her engagement with the problems of Jewish identity, anti-Semitism and totalitarianism.

Casting a backward look at Arendt’s work, this chapter explores the meaning of her repeated, extensive and consuming attempts to tackle this, the most critical problematic of modern European history. For Arendt, however, these issues were not merely objects of inquiry. Totalitarianism and anti-Semitism affected her very personally; they profoundly shaped her destiny; indeed, they directly victimized her. And, this could hardly have been different for a Jewish intellectual at a time when Jews were being swept up into the very center of an unprecedented, murderous, global maelstrom.

Arendt was born on October 14, 1906 in Hanover. Her parents, Martha and Paul Arendt, belonged to well-to-do Jewish families in Königsberg, but Arendt’s father died after a long battle with syphilis when she was seven years old, and his illness and death marred her childhood. A gifted adolescent, she began her university studies in 1924, at Marburg University. She had intended to specialize in theology, but the work of a brilliant young professor, Martin Heidegger, strengthened her interest in philosophy. Arendt’s relationship with Heidegger was not strictly academic: a love affair between them, in fact, meant that she had to continue her studies in philosophy elsewhere—at Heidelberg with Karl Jaspers. Working with Jaspers, she earned her doctorate in philosophy in 1929 with a dissertation on “Saint Augustine’s Concept of Love.” Philosophy proper, however, would not remain Arendt’s main academic interest. It would be replaced by the historical phenomenon that soon posed a threat to her very life—Nazism, or, in her own language, Nazi “totalitarianism.” Alarmed by its rise, Arendt
left Germany in 1933, after having been arrested while conducting research for a Zionist organization at the Prussian State Library. Escaping to Prague, then to Geneva, she finally chose Paris as her place of refuge. In the French capital, she again engaged in Zionist activities, joining organizations that provided aid to prospective émigrés to Palestine. While in Paris, Arendt met Heinrich Blücher, a former member of Rosa Luxemburg’s Spartacist faction, and the two of them were married in 1940. In the spring of the following year, they escaped to the United States, where Arendt, like many other refugee intellectuals, found a warm home. The next three decades were a period of extraordinary productivity; its most significant landmarks—*The Origins of Totalitarianism* (1951), *The Human Condition* (1958), and the immensely controversial *Eichmann in Jerusalem* (1963)—propelled Arendt to international prominence. Several months before her death, on December 4, 1975, she was awarded Denmark’s Sonning Prize for Contributions to European Civilization.3

Even this cursory glance shows that the twentieth-century catastrophes surrounding the Jewish question affected Arendt very deeply. It is thus unsurprising that, as we saw, the significance of her Jewish origin and its relationships to her intellectual endeavors have been a subject of continuous scholarly interest. Seeking to highlight a truly critical perplexity in Arendt’s work, this chapter adopts key conclusions of the most important studies of her confrontations with Jewish issues. It accepts more specifically their stress on the absolute centrality of Jewish concerns in Arendt’s life and work, and the view of these concerns as vital spurs and stimuli, motivating and inspiring her thinking. But while sharing these claims, the chapter looks at what is an unexplored
and neglected, but certainly momentous and intensely paradoxical, opposite side of them. Trying to uncover a new—positively indispensable—dimension of these arguments and thus complete them, the chapter takes a tack contrary to their direction and trajectory. It shows the ways in which Arendt’s philosophizing, while originally shaped by her engagements with Jewish concerns, ironically turned against these engagements and ended up obstructing them. The chapter traces this destructive subversion in Arendt’s writings on Jewish identity and anti-Semitism. On closer analysis, it appears that her philosophical concepts, forged in her sustained struggle with the Jewish question, ultimately sabotaged fatally her attempts to grapple with it in these writings.

Two sets of concepts in particular emerged as especially confounding obstacles. They were Arendt’s conceptions of the human mind, and of history. Examples of cutting-edge philosophical theorizing in their own right, they repeatedly complicated, hindered, and frustrated Arendt’s confrontations with Jewish identity and anti-Semitism. Its development prompted by her involvement in the Eichmann trial, Arendt’s model of the mental activities of thinking and judging conflicted harshly with her inquiries into Jewish identity and anti-Semitism. It damaged beyond repair her interpretation of Jewish selfhood, while clashing head-on with, and being forcefully challenged by, her analysis of Nazism and Nazi anti-Semitism. Arendt’s conception of history too was linked directly to her engagement with Jewish concerns, deployed as it was in her attempt to understand Nazi totalitarianism. But while interpretatively enabling, her views on history also impaired and undermined her examination of Nazism, producing a reading of
history that inadvertently denied its own principal arguments.

These two philosophical conceptions, however, have an even further significance. Their elaboration anchored Arendt’s work in fundamental contexts of the European intellectual tradition. Her theorization of mental activities belonged firmly to the tradition of continental philosophy, even if she evolved her own, distinctive and even idiosyncratic, understanding of the mind. More specifically, her model of the mental activity of judging was founded on central concepts in the philosophy of Immanuel Kant. And her views on history, in turn, were built on ancient Greek concepts. To comprehend the origins of the unprecedented evil of Nazism, Arendt went back to the origins of the Western tradition of philosophy, directly and self-consciously borrowing elements from Greek historiography. But while these two conceptions thus linked her work to crucial historical contexts, they became sources of critical trouble in her struggles with the questions of Jewish identity and anti-Semitism. These two contextualizing factors turned out to be major stumbling blocks in Arendt’s writings on the latter issues. They disrupted those inquiries, entangling them in problems and perplexities that often proved fatal.

Arendt examined Jewish identity and anti-Semitism most extensively in three landmarks in her work—her biography of the Berlin salonnière Rahel Varnhagen, her analysis of totalitarianism, and her highly controversial account of the trial of the Nazi bureaucrat Adolf Eichmann. Her dissection of Jewish selfhood and anti-Semitism in these texts was inextricably linked to a problematic of crucial importance to European philosophical and literary existentialism—the problematic of transcendence.
Transcendence, for instance, was a key concept in Sartre’s *Being and Nothingness.* As a resolute refusal to acquiesce in physical suffering and a relentless fight to alleviate it, it also appeared in Albert Camus’s novel *The Plague,* embodied in the narrator, Dr. Rieux. In what follows, the terms, “transcendence” and “embeddedness,” are understood to mean two antagonistic modes of activity. Transcendence signifies the condition of going beyond, of overstepping, of breaking through the limitations and restraints imposed by a context; it is a condition of freedom from contextual restraint, broadly understood. Transcendence’s opposite, embeddedness, is a state of contextual situatedness, of being solidly emplaced, fixed in and fully determined by context. This chapter argues that, even if not always explicitly or deliberately, Arendt nevertheless considered the issues of Jewish identity and anti-Semitism in terms of transcendence of, and embeddedness in, historical context. Viewed in this way, for Arendt Jewish identity and anti-Semitism came to exhibit critical ambiguities and ultimately insoluble conundrums.

Transcendence emerged as a key issue in Arendt’s writings; in general, she gave it an unmistakably positive valence. It appeared as such, for example, in the 1946 article “What Is Existentz Philosophy?” As Jay has argued, Arendt suggested there that “history [is] an illegitimate source of constraints on freedom[;] ... she applauded Husserl’s success in freeing modern philosophy from ‘the fetters of historicism,’” claiming that Husserl made man “once again … a theme of philosophy” after the latter had reduced him to a helpless speck engulfed in an overwhelming historical process. Arendt, therefore, saw transcendence as something desirable and endorsed it; embeddedness, in contrast,
emerged as transcendence’s negative opposite, as she condemned philosophy’s reduction and debasement of humans before Husserl.

The positive view of transcendence she enunciated in her article eventually became a main tenet of Arendt’s work as whole. It is embodied most clearly in her recurring and forceful emphasis on new beginnings. *The Human Condition* provides a ready example: “[b]ecause they are *initium,*” wrote Arendt, “newcomers and beginners by virtue of birth, men take initiative, are prompted into action…. With the creation of man, the principle of beginning came into the world….“9 Arendt conceived beginning, initiating action, transcending one’s context as an emphatically positive project, indeed, as an expression of humanness. By contrast, embeddedness could only be a decisive flaw, a denial of an elemental human capacity.

Notwithstanding her endorsement of beginnings, however, Arendt’s views on transcendence and embeddedness were never unambiguous. This chapter argues that such ambiguities are particularly obtrusive in her writings on Jewish identity and anti-Semitism. Indeed, her views in these works turn out to be deeply and intensely ambivalent. Despite her stress on beginnings, Arendt’s texts on Jewish identity and anti-Semitism disclosed transcendence as a deluded project, a hopeless endeavor, even as the embodiment of evil. For example, she condemned attempts to forge a Jewish identity on the basis of an escape from—a flawed kind of overcoming of—one’s historical context. In a vigorous paradox, she also interpreted Nazism as an extremely destructive bursting through context, equating transcendence with the most radically anti-human development in European history. She did envision an auspicious transcendence amidst
the riddles of selfhood, and discerned a very real freedom, a rising above the overwhelming evil of Nazism. But her conception of the mind blurred both of these hopeful visions of transcendence, making them chimerical. Unsurprisingly, embeddedness emerged in her writings on Jewish identity and anti-Semitism as no less deluded than transcendence, no less hopeless, and no less evil. But paradoxically, a form of it, before it too crumbled into negativity, actually acquired a positive valence. The promising embeddedness Arendt in fact promoted was a return to the past, a premeditated situating of oneself in history that would found and be used to sculpt a viable self. But the vision of this emplacement was dissolved, again, by Arendt’s model of the mind. The two fundamental concepts of transcendence and embeddedness and their antagonism are rendered fatally ambivalent, conflicted and incoherent in crucial ways by an acute discord that runs through Arendt’s work. Her philosophical concepts—her conceptions of history and of the human mind—clash with her interpretations of historical contexts and these unresolved tensions obstruct her views on transcendence and embeddedness and leave them deeply perplexed. The ambiguities, conflicts and conundrums of the two antithetical concepts—and this is the crux of the matter—correspond, in momentous ways, to fateful failures of Arendt’s inquiries into Jewish identity and anti-Semitism.10

Following Arendt’s own ideas about the historian’s postmortem glance, this chapter takes as its point of departure her last work—the unfinished *The Life of the Mind*. In the book’s introduction, Arendt explained that “the immediate impulse” for her “preoccupation with mental activities” “came from [her] attending Eichmann’s trial in
Jerusalem.” In Israel, Arendt’s “interest” was “awakened” by what she thought was the most striking feature of the Nazi bureaucrat—his “thoughtlessness,” the blatant “absence of thinking” in both “his past behavior [and] in his behavior during the trial.” Arendt asked herself: “[c]ould the activity of thinking as such, the habit of examining whatever happens to come to pass or to attract attention, regardless of results and specific content, could this activity be among the conditions that make men abstain from evil-doing or even actually ‘condition’ them against it?” (LMT, 4-5) _The Life of the Mind_ was intended to answer this question. Ultimately, this chapter tries to assess the accuracy of Arendt’s answer. But in the meantime, and more importantly, it attempts to show how Arendt’s philosophical concepts disorganize her interpretations of Jewish identity, anti-Semitism and totalitarianism. Arendt’s conceptions of the mental activities of thinking and judging are two sets of concepts involved in these troubles and it is to them that we now turn.

Arendt’s Conception of Mental Activities: Thinking and Judging

Arendt’s analysis of thinking is contained in the first volume of _The Life of the Mind_, entitled “Thinking.” For an epigraph to its first chapter, she chose W. H. Auden’s words: “Does God ever judge us by appearances? I suspect that he does.” (LMT, 17) Auden’s words went against the grain of the Western philosophical tradition which, since Plato banished the poets from the Republic, has been suspicious of appearances. According to Arendt, a “metaphysical dichotomy” between “(true) Being and (mere) Appearance”—in which being was always assigned “a higher rank of reality”—has haunted Western philosophy since its beginnings. Philosophers always assumed that an invisible, and
more authentic, “ground” lies behind the appearances of the everyday world and that, moreover, this ground is the world’s hidden “cause.” Assuming that the cause is superior to the effect, the Western “tradition of philosophy … transformed the base from which something rises into the cause that produces it and … then assigned to this producing agent a higher rank of reality to what merely meets the eye.” (LMT, 23-25)

Arendt’s choice of Auden’s words was meant to suggest that the prioritization of being over appearance may be misguided, that the potentially deceptive “surface” may in fact be the “superior” reality. Indeed, argued Arendt, the world humans inhabit is, above all, a “world of appearances.” “The world men are born into,” she affirmed, “contains many things, natural and artificial, living and dead, transient and sempiternal, all of which have in common that they appear and hence are meant to be seen, heard, touched, tasted, and smelled, to be perceived by sentient creatures endowed with the appropriate sense organs.” The world of appearances is a world where “Being and Appearing coincide,” where everything that “exists … presuppose[s] a spectator”—where, in other words, everything that exists appears and is perceived and vice versa. “Living beings, men and animals,” are both “subjects and objects—perceiving and being perceived—at the same time.” What distinguishes them from the “mere appearances” of inanimate nature, is an “urge toward self-display.” For Arendt, this “impulse” is common to both humans and animals. What distinguishes the former from the latter are the “activities” of the human mind. And these, Arendt contended, are opposed radically to the world of appearances of which humans are a part. (LMT, 19-22, 29)
For Arendt, “the three basic mental activities” are “thinking, willing, and judging.” They are “autonomous” in that “they cannot be derived from each other and … cannot be reduced to a common denominator.” Nor do they possess obvious causes; they are in this sense gratuitous, arising from naturally given and inexplicable propensities of the mind. What they do share, however, is “their invisibility,” the fact that “they never appear.” What they also share, and what is the pre-condition for their invisible “actualization,” is their “deliberate withdrawal from [the world of] appearances.” All three activities take place when the mind turns away from the appearances “present to the senses” and towards itself. (LMT, 69-71, 75)

The separation from appearances is certainly a trait of the activity of thinking. Following Kant’s definition of the imagination as “the faculty of representing in intuition an object that is not itself present,” Arendt argued that the imagination “represents” in the mind the images of objects once perceived by the senses but no longer present to them. These “image[s] [are] then stored in memory, ready to become … ‘vision[s] in thought’ the moment the mind gets hold of [them].” Thinking entails precisely this “getting hold of” images stored in memory and their subsequent manipulation. In this process of manipulation, the mind creates its own “thought-objects”—“concepts,” “ideas,” or “categories”—through a process of “abstracting,” or generalizing, from the images produced by imagination and stored in memory. (LMT, 75-77, 103)

The tendency towards “generalization” is related to the character of the realm where the thinking mind, or “thinking ego,” withdraws. In thinking, the mind “deals
with,” or “moves among,” de-materialized, “invisible” generalities—be they concepts or ideas—and is utterly “removed” from any spatially defined particulars; it “is, [spatially] speaking, nowhere.” In terms of time, the thinking mind situates itself in a peculiar “gap” of a “timeless present.” Without the presence of the mind, time, non-human time, is “a continuously flowing everlasting stream.” By beginning to think, the mind disengages itself from “the continuity of … life in a world of appearances.” Since “the subject matter” of “reflection” is necessarily either “what has already disappeared or what has not yet appeared,” and cannot be what is appearing at the moment of thinking, the mind is able to move along time’s continuum. It can even transform time into its object of reflection and definition, “articulating” time, for example, into past, present and future. By thus disregarding and even opposing time, thinking creates for itself an extended “now” where time’s flow is suspended. This is thinking’s “timeless present”—characteristic only of “mental phenomena” and non-existent in “historical or biological time”—a present “actualized in the thinking process and last[ing] no longer than this process lasts.” (LMT, 199, 204-210)

For Arendt, the possibility for creating such strange “gaps” in time arises from the very character of thinking. “The thinking ego,” Arendt wrote, “is sheer activity and therefore ageless, sexless, without qualities, and without a life story.” Thinking’s transcendence of temporal constraints is made possible precisely by the fact that the thinking ego is not temporally defined or constrained. (LMT, 42-43, 206)

The thinking ego resembles an inexhaustible and invisible spring soundlessly murmuring forth, as it were, an endless stream of invisible thoughts. The paradoxical
murmur arises from thinking’s peculiar “dialogical” character. Thinking is in fact a “dialogue” of the thinking ego with itself—a “soundless dialogue … between me and myself”—in which the thinking ego talks to, listens to, and responds back to itself. Thinking, said Arendt quoting Kant, is “‘talking with oneself … hence also inwardly listening.’” It is, in principle, “unending,” but it is interrupted whenever the mind immerses itself in, or is “intruded upon” by, the world of appearances. Such an interruption transforms “the two-in-one [into a] One …[,] as though the two into which the thinking process had split [the thinker] clapped together again.” (LMT, 185-187)

According to Arendt, the activity of thinking is self-contained, “an end in itself” not initiated or propelled by an “outside” purpose. It arises out of a natural “need” of reason to “search for [meaning].” Thinking itself is precisely an endless process of dialogical questioning and “quest for meaning.” It produces no stable “truths” or knowledge, such as experimentally verifiable scientific explanations, but, constantly asking questions and looking for their answers, generates ever-changing meaning. (LMT, 57-59, 62, 64, 123) Thinking’s “criterion”—what determines the degree of its meaningfulness—is the “agreement” between the partners in the dialogue of thought. Meaningful, for instance, are thoughts which, arising from one of thinking’s partners meet the approval, the affirmative “It makes sense,” of the other. (LMT, 185-186)

Providing a systematic analysis of thinking, Arendt would never complete her inquiry into the activity of judging. She died several days after finishing “Willing,” the second part of The Life of the Mind, having just started work on the manuscript for the third part,
“Judging.” What we know about her views on judging can be gleaned from remarks in the two existing volumes of The Life of the Mind, in some of her other writings, in her Lectures on Kant’s Political Philosophy, and in her notes from a seminar on Kant’s Critique of Judgment. What is important for our purposes is that, as these reflections show, Arendt viewed judgment in two distinct ways. As Benhabib has suggested, Arendt considered judgment, on the one hand, as a “moral faculty” and, on the other, as a “retrospective faculty of culling meaning from the past.” Judgment is both “the faculty of ‘telling right from wrong’” and the faculty of historical insight that enables the historian to evaluate the past critically, to “sit[...] in judgment over [the past].” (LMT, 216)

To explain how judgment operates, Arendt followed Kant. She agreed with him that, in the words of D’Entrèves, “judgment in general is the faculty of thinking [a] particular as contained under [a] universal.” (LMT, 69) She also accepted Kant’s notion of “determinant judgments,” wherein “judgment … subsumes the particular … under [a given general principle].” (LMT, 69, LKPP, 76) Guided, for example, by the religious commandments, we judge their transgressions morally wrong. Kant also distinguished “determinant” from “reflective” judgments—those made in the absence of general principles where judgment “ascends ‘from the particular … to the universal.’” (LMT, 69) Arendt examined Kant’s views on “reflective judgments” in the Critique of Judgment and offered her analysis as an account of the way reflective judgment in general—and not only aesthetic reflective judgment, which Kant had examined—operates. For Arendt, thus, moral and historical judgments are determinant or reflective
and, if reflective, they operate according to the mechanisms she thought Kant had delineated.

In the Kant Lectures, Arendt claimed that reflective judgment is related to the faculty of imagination. For Arendt, as we have seen, imagination is the faculty of representing, as mental images, objects that have been perceived by the senses. In the *Lectures*, Arendt argued that, by converting an object into a mental image, the imagination “establishes the proper distance, the remoteness or … disinterestedness, that is requisite for … evaluating something at its proper worth.” We are “no longer affect[ed] … directly” by the object itself and therefore become capable of evaluating it. The de-materialized object, however, “touches” and “affects” us and we judge the object on the basis of these affects. We judge, for example, as “pleasing” objects that please us. These immediate judgments are then judged again—we evaluate our initial judgments. Our subsequent judgments are, at least in part, determined by “communicability.” We reflect and decide on the “communicability” of our initial judgments, on whether they are, and what “‘makes’” them, “‘communicable’” to others. The communicability of initial judgments, their being publicly presentable, determines how we subsequently judge them. We condemn as wrong, for example, “feelings of hatred” when we know others would frown upon them. (*LKPP*, 62, 65-69, 72)

Reckoning with the views of others, the judgments on communicability are thus intersubjectively determined. Indeed, Arendt suggested, intersubjectivity was for Kant—and it became for her as well—an intrinsic characteristic of reflective judgment. In judging, Kant had argued, we “compare['] our judgment with the possible … judgments
of others, and [we] put[…] ourselves in the place of [others].” (qtd. in LKPP, 71) Kant called this imaginary adoption of the perspectives of others “enlarged thought,” or an “enlarged mentality.” (LKPP, 71) The latter, for Arendt, tends to enhance the validity of our judgments. Comparing our judgments with those of others, we transcend our “private conditions and circumstances” and “attain that relative impartiality that is the specific virtue of judgment.” We also refine our judgments, we reach a “general standpoint” and form “general” judgments that include and are produced by the evaluation of many alternative perspectives. These general judgments of ours have a greater validity, in the sense that their “possible appeal” increases. Based on the judgments of others, they are much more likely to be understood and accepted by many. (LKPP, 42-43, 71-74)

We have seen that, according to Arendt, mental activities withdraw from the world of appearances. Unlike thinking, however, judgment for Arendt is much more closely related to the world of appearances. It is rooted in the existential fact that we are all members of a human community; indeed, reflective judgment is possible at all because of that fact. The “enlarged way of thinking,” Arendt said, “…needs the presence of others ‘in whose place’ it must think … and without whom it never has the opportunity to operate at all.” Arendt, in fact, considered what she took to be Kant’s suggestion that judgment depends on community one of the crucial insights of the Critique of Judgment. In the Critique, wrote Arendt, “we find that sociability is the very essence of men insofar as they are of this world.” In her view, “[t]his is a radical departure from all those theories that stress human interdependence as dependence on
our fellow men for our needs and wants. Kant stresses that at least one of our mental faculties, the faculty of judgment, presupposes the presence of others.” (LKPP, 74)

These, in outline, are Arendt’s conceptions of determinant and reflective judgments. They constitute two distinct models of how judgment operates and these models make up the core of her analysis of the faculty. Arendt supplemented the two models with some reflections on the role of examples in judgment. Referring again to Kant, she claimed that the mind can imagine a “particular” that it “judges” a good example of a general principle that the particular, being an example, “reveals.” Arendt’s own example is Achilles and courage. (LKPP, 77) Having availed itself of examples, the mind can then use them as yardsticks to judge other particulars, determining, for example, whether someone is courageous or not. “The examples,” said Arendt, “lead and guide us;” “‘they are the go-cart of judgments.’” (LKPP, 76)

Arendt’s reflections on examples are much more inconclusive than her two models. She never clarified, for instance, the relationship between judging by examples and her two main kinds of judgments, asserting that “examples play a role in both reflective and determinant judgments” but never specifying their precise role in the mechanisms of each kind of judgment.24 These inadequacies, however, pale in comparison to what are the truly fundamental paradoxes related to Arendt’s conception of judgment. Arendt herself was aware, suggests Benhabib, that “the moral attitude of enlarged thought seems to be missing when we most need it, that is, in those situations of moral and political upheaval when [intersubjectivity and] the fabric of moral interactions that constitute everyday life are … [seriously damaged].”25 In this respect,
indeed, Arendt’s historical inquiries into Jewish issues reveal a fatal contradiction. Not only intersubjectivity, these inquiries show, is missing in contexts where judgment is most desperately needed. Equally lacking are general principles guiding thought and action. Nor is any help from examples certain or forthcoming. In contexts of a most critical need of judgment, in other words, the possibilities for all kinds of judgments turn out to be radically precluded. This perplexity entangles in confusion the antagonism of transcendence and embeddedness in Arendt’s engagements with Jewish issues and obstructs these engagements beyond repair. It fatally disorganized, first of all, Arendt’s dissection of Jewish identity in her biography Rahel Varnhagen: The Life of a Jewess.

Deluded Transcendence, Hopeless Embeddedness: The Story of Rahel Varnhagen

Arendt’s biography of Rahel Varnhagen was her most substantial engagement with the problem of Jewish identity. She situated her reflections within the framework of transcendence and embeddedness, conceiving the dilemmas of Jewish identity as products of one’s approach to history. Her attempt to unravel the conundrums of Jewish identity in terms of such an historical dimension, however, proved abortive.

A famous Jewish salonnière around the turn of the nineteenth century, Varnhagen was a prolific writer of letters and diaries in which she tried to understand her intellectual and emotional experiences. Based on Varnhagen’s writings, Arendt’s study was not intended to be a conventional biography.26 “What interested me solely,” said Arendt, “was to narrate the story of Rahel’s life as she herself might have told it.” (RV,
The biography offered a critical reflection on Varnhagen’s experiences and thoughts in which the distinction between the narrator and her subject was deliberately blurred. Arendt began the book with a significant remark Varnhagen had made to her gentile husband shortly before she died. “What a History!,” Varnhagen had asserted.

—A fugitive from Egypt and Palestine, here I am and find help, love, fostering.... With real rapture I think of these origins of mine and this whole nexus of destiny, through which the oldest memories of the human race stand side by side with the latest developments. … The thing which all my life seemed to me the greatest shame, which was the misery and misfortune of my life—having been born a Jewess—this I should on no account now wish to have missed. (RV, 85)

These words captured the gist of Varnhagen’s experiences. The “rapture” that her Jewish origin inspired had appeared only late in her life. Until then, her origin had been turning her life into a series of “miseries.” It is these miseries that Arendt traced for most of her study.

Varnhagen was born in 1771 in Berlin into a well-to-do Jewish family but, after her parents’ death, she was “left without [assets]” and had to rely on “the dubious generosity of her brothers.” Like most Jews at the time, the young Varnhagen desired acceptance into gentile society. (RV, 87-88, 103) She perceived her Jewishness as a serious handicap and, indeed, felt that it was turning her “‘life [into] a slow bleeding to death.’” Varnhagen’s response to these problems proved inadequate. Aware of being considered inferior, she withdrew into herself in an attempt to “fend[...] off [disturbing] actuality,” “refus[ing]” to accept “the fact of having been born a Jew.” The isolation and denial resulted in a dangerous detachment from the world around her. She transformed herself into a self-contained bubble of subjectivity, one radically separated from the outside world and producing a spurious sense of autonomy of the self. (RV, 88-92)
Before long, however, the bad world showed its stubborn presence and burst the bubble of the self.

The world intruded into Varnhagen’s detachment in the guise of love. She fell in love twice and twice she was bitterly disappointed. She first fell in love with Count Karl von Finckenstein, and even became engaged to him, only to see her “long[ing] to depart from Judaism” destroyed, as the weak-willed count gave in to his family’s “disapproval” of the engagement. Varnhagen fell in love again, this time with a Spaniard, Don Raphael d’Urquijo. Urquijo, unable to cope with “her boundless, intemperate love” and believing in women’s “subordination to men,” “thwarted” the love of a woman used to the company of men. Varnhagen had plunged heart and soul into these unrequited loves—she had, for example, lost all sense of proportion in her passion for Urquijo—and her disappointments were overwhelming. Her “soul” after Urquijo’s rebuff was “crazed with grief.” (RV, 103, 112-113, 150, 153, 156, 162, 164)

Yet, even despair was not completely meaningless. Disappointment compelled Varnhagen to abandon her inner seclusion from the world. Love and grief became a principium individuationis, dragging her out of her detachment and forcing her to become a “specific person.” Reflecting on her pain, Varnhagen realized that loves and disappointments are the stuff of life, something everyone experiences. She realized that she was not an isolated, fluid bubble, but a distinct individual, a personality with definite “contours” and an individual “history,” and one, moreover, little “different[…] from … everyone else.” Her escape from the world, Varnhagen realized, had entailed a lack of
sense of self, an indefiniteness that had prevented her from orienting herself in the world and from responding adequately to its claims. (RV, 158-175)

Attaining a sense of distinct selfhood, Varnhagen also realized that she “ha[d] a specific social [existence],” that she was “naturally intertwined with many others in the intricacies of social life.” Being able to enjoy life, she decided, required abandoning subjectivity’s citadel. One had to find one’s distinct place in society, to “become one person among others.” The best way to achieve that was assimilation and the pursuit of “a higher social position.” From now on, she—deliberately and relentlessly—tried to erase her Jewishness and seek social success. (RV, 173-175)

Determined to “‘extirpate’” “‘the Jew … from [herself],’” Varnhagen changed her family name from “Levin” to “Robert.” By that time, she had already started a relationship with August Varnhagen, which would, in fact, become her means to assimilation and a higher status. Coming from a doctor’s family of modest means and having no lasting “‘passion’” for a particular vocation, Varnhagen managed, through opportunism, cunning, and luck, to attain a position far beyond what his background and pedestrian personality promised. Looking for a “chance for advancement,” he joined Austria’s war effort against Napoleonic France in 1809. As luck would have it, he became a friend of the colonel in command of his regiment. The colonel employed him as a secretary and Varnhagen acquired connections in political and diplomatic circles. In the 1812 war between Russia and France, his connections helped him become an Imperial Captain with the Russian forces. After the war, he attended the Congress of Vienna and then became Prussian chargé d’affaires in Baden. Meanwhile, claiming to
have discovered evidence that he belonged to a noble family, he even managed to obtain noble status. Never losing sight of what served his advancement, Varnhagen thus gained entry into “the highest [social] circles.” (*RV*, 175, 194-196, 219-239)

Varnhagen had married Rahel a few years before his appointment in Baden. As the wife of a diplomat, she could with relish consider herself belonging to the society of her hopes. (*RV*, 218, 238-239) Seemingly triumphant, she discovered, however, that the denial of self assimilation and social ascent entailed required sacrifices she was unwilling to make. She “discovered,” wrote Arendt, “that it was necessary for the parvenu—but for him alone—to sacrifice every natural impulse [and] to conceal all truth.” Complete assimilation and “entrance into society,” in other words, required a thorough re-definition of self, a total “self-deception” that erased all traces of one’s Jewishness. No half-measures would do. Indeed, one faced an insoluble paradox. As Arendt put it, “[i]n a society on the whole hostile to the Jews—and that situation obtained in all countries in which Jews lived, down to the twentieth century—it is possible to assimilate only by assimilating to anti-Semitism also.” At the cost of inner ambivalence, Varnhagen had retained enough human decency to refrain from erasing totally her former self. Beneath the surface of assimilation, she “remained a Jew and pariah.” (*RV*, 241-242, 244-248, 255-256, 258)

In Arendt’s eyes, this refusal to repudiate her identity as an outcast Jew redeemed Varnhagen, albeit belatedly. The battered, repeatedly denied self of a Jewish pariah offered Varnhagen a perspective for making “those few important perceptions which she
had to have before she died.” “To die without them,” Arendt asserted, “would have constituted real bankruptcy.” (RV, 247)

What were those supremely important insights? Varnhagen gained them during the last years of her life and they represented a radical departure from all her earlier attitudes. Having “realized” that the misfortunes of the Jews were only a symptom of a flawed social order and, indeed, of a nefarious “‘history of man [on] earth,’” Varnhagen turned to Saint-Simon and reflected on questions of “freedom and equality.” In her attitude towards Jewishness, Varnhagen was moving steadily towards an “affirmation of Jewishness” in the manner of Heinrich Heine, whose writings she admired. She met with approval Heine’s “‘enthusias[m] for the cause of the Jews.’” (RV, 257-259, 367-368) At the end of her life, in other words, Varnhagen was moving towards positions Lazare would adopt seven decades later.28

Arendt made it clear that what steered Varnhagen away from “real bankruptcy” was precisely the movement towards political and social concerns and an affirmation of Jewishness. (RV, 247, 258-259) The “real rapture” Varnhagen acknowledged before she died was the result of her belated appreciation of Jewish identity. It revealed her earlier subjective isolation and efforts at assimilation as misguided intellectual and political positions. Commenting on Varnhagen’s choice of assimilation, Arendt asserted, “[s]he never saw the other possibility, of joining those who had not arrived, of throwing in her lot with those who like herself were dependent on some sort of future which would be more favorable to them.” At the end of her life, Varnhagen dimly perceived that the position Arendt articulated was a viable stance she could have chosen. Throughout her
life, she should have been—self-consciously and proudly—“a Jew and pariah.” (RV, 220, 258)

Varnhagen could have sensed only very vaguely what to Arendt was an absolutely fundamental reason for her misguided choices. It was, Arendt argued, a failure of understanding, a lack of insight that barred Varnhagen from the “other possibility.” “It may well be difficult,” wrote Arendt, “for us to understand our own history when we are born in 1771 in Berlin and that history has already begun seventeen hundred years earlier in Jerusalem. But if we do not understand it, … our history will take its revenge, will exert its superiority and become our personal destiny.” (RV, 85)

According to Arendt, Varnhagen’s life itself, all her struggles before the final shift in her outlook, became the gradual advent of history’s “revenge.” In her pursuit of assimilation, said Arendt, Varnhagen “walked down all the roads that could lead her into the alien world, and upon all these roads she … left her track, … converted them into Jewish roads, pariah roads; ultimately her whole life … became a segment of Jewish history in Germany.” All of Varnhagen’s struggles were an effort to escape from Jewish history, from the history of “the outcasts of history.” But no matter how hard she “tried to flee” from it, Jewish history ultimately reasserted itself. Whatever Varnhagen did, she remained a pariah. (RV, 240, 255)

For Arendt, Varnhagen made fatal mistakes in her approach to her status as an outcast and to her Jewish identity. Denying her links with Jewish society and culture, Varnhagen tried to find, on her own, a “personal” solution to the “Jewish question.” The latter became for her a “personal problem” and, rather than an historical condition,
Jewishness became a “personal quality,” an “innate” “character trait” that she had to deal with. Thus perverting her origins, Varnhagen first fled into subjectivity, and then embarked on a struggle to erase what she considered a “defect” to achieve social acceptance. These two struggles, however, were utterly hopeless—the world shattered the prison of the self and, despite her metamorphoses, the anti-Semitic society never ceased treating her with contempt. In both cases, Varnhagen suffered bitter defeat. (RV, 88-89, 250-251, 253-254) The disasters, Arendt suggested, were products of a lack of understanding of Jewish history and, consequently, of a flawed attitude towards it. Arendt, in other words, transforms the problem of resolving the ambiguities of a conflicted self and forging a viable Jewish identity into a problem of understanding, and particularly of historical understanding, at the same time linking the dilemmas of Jewish identity to the problematic of transcendence and embeddedness. Arendt sees Varnhagen’s efforts as the pursuit of deeply flawed forms of transcendence. Varnhagen’s two strategies were deluded endeavors to overcome Jewish pariahhood by “fleeing” from Jewish history, by escaping it and dodging it. Profoundly misguided, both of these forms of transcendence ended in failure.

Characterizing transcendence in this way, Arendt at the same time offered an alternative. Not a flight from Jewish history, but a responsible approach to it was required. The latter was embodied in Varnhagen’s concern for political and social questions and “the cause of the Jews,” in—deliberately and self-consciously—“throwing in [one’s] lot with [the pariahs].” This new stance could have arisen from an adequate understanding of Jewish history. Arendt, in other words, calls for embeddedness, an
embeddedness that would consist of adequately comprehending Jewish history and, on the basis of the knowledge of Jewish history, situating oneself firmly in it and seeing one’s self as its product. (RV, 85-86) Such an embrace of history could then lead to a new historical beginning, a viable transcendence exemplified by the stance of a proud Jewish pariah. This solution, however, of the perplexities of Jewish identity, this transcendence of context is, in fact, illusory. It is rendered spurious by Arendt’s conception of mental activities.

In her analysis of the “life of the mind,” as we saw, Arendt made it clear that the faculty of the mind that we use to evaluate the past is judgment. The historian reflects on history and his or her reflections are estimates of what has been, of its rights and wrongs and its ugliness and beauty. A form of judgment, historical insight is either “determinant” or “reflective.” If reflective, it is intersubjectively determined and requires “the presence of others,” a human community. The very “quality,” as it were, of reflective historical judgment depends on the number of opinions the judging person is able to take into account when forming judgments. Living at a time when assimilation was the order of the day, Varnhagen did not have at her disposal any general principles that could have guided her to a position Arendt recommended. A community that could have helped refine her understanding of history was also non-existent. The anti-Semitic gentile society could not provide the missing community and, indeed, Varnhagen would never belong to it. In addition, as Arendt argued, the Jewish community at the end of the eighteenth century was “rapidly disintegrating.” Its members “did not even want to be emancipated as a whole; all they wanted was to escape from Jewishness, as individuals if
possible.” The Jewish question had become for them, as it had for Varnhagen, “a personal problem.” (RV, 87-88) Varnhagen’s ability to judge could certainly not be improved in a vanishing community, aside from the fact that she herself desired individual assimilation. Nor could Varnhagen, finally, rely on any examples to guide her judgments, as none of the people, events and ideas she encountered could have served as examples and helped her acquire refined historical insight.** To see Varnhagen’s failure of understanding—and see it as her error, as Varnhagen might have seen it—as a fundamental source of her tribulations is to misread Varnhagen’s story. Viewed as products of a failure of understanding, Varnhagen’s identity conflicts were inevitable. Having no blueprints or examples to guide her and belonging to no community, she never had the chance to form valid judgments, or to correct her misjudgments. For Varnhagen, understanding Jewish history was not an option. The enlightened embeddedness Arendt sees is, thus, chimerical.

In all of Varnhagen’s struggles, there was only one moment when she had a chance to gain sensitive historical insight. This chance appeared in an unlikely setting—her friendship with the nobleman Alexander von der Marwitz. “Love was not involved,” said Arendt, “and yet there was an exclusiveness about this friendship; nothing else was allowed to enter it.” The closeness enabled Varnhagen, for the first—and last—time, to take into account the perspective of another. “To the degree,” wrote Arendt, “that she made [Marwitz’s] life her own, … her ‘heart’ … learned how to be objective, how to be ‘outside itself.’” (RV, 207-208) Varnhagen, in fact, learned to think historically, to view “reality” as historically conditioned. She realized, said Arendt, “that the society to which
she did not belong … recognized … a reality of heritage, of tradition…. [Marwitz] taught her that lines existed from … the present to the past; lines that dwindled to threads as they stretched farther back…. Yet only through these ties … could historical reality be grasped.” (RV, 208-209) Only at the time of this friendship did Varnhagen have a chance to learn to exercise historical judgment. She did, indeed, begin to think historically and became aware of her life as a product of history. She “now saw [her exclusion from society],” wrote Arendt, “as the specific misfortune of having been born in the wrong place, assigned by history to a doomed world.” (RV, 212) Profoundly general and vague, however, this insight did not enable—and could not have enabled—Varnhagen to gain a new understanding of Jewish history. It certainly did not prevent her from marrying August Varnhagen and embarking on the path of social ambition and a discarding of her Jewish self.

For Varnhagen, the friendship with Marwitz was an exceptional experience that would never be repeated.31 Rare as it was, this experience gave her insight that was unhelpful. From the beginning until the end, Varnhagen lacked an understanding of Jewish history. Given the lack of human community, blueprints and examples for judgment, her failure of understanding is unsurprising. Her struggles appear—from the perspective of Arendt’s conception of mental activities—inevitable, a fate she could not have avoided. In fact, what becomes surprising is Varnhagen’s belated movement towards political and social concerns and an affirmation of Jewish identity. This radical shift of outlook—this new beginning—is not a product of a more valid judgment and a new understanding of Jewish history. Late in life, Varnhagen still lacked the community,
blueprints and examples that would have enabled her to judge Jewish history anew. From the perspective of Arendt’s conception of the mind, the shift is gratuitous and the new position is no more valid than Varnhagen’s previous choices, including the pursuit of assimilation. Not based on historical judgment and knowledge, it is yet another tentative groping for a way out of pariahhood. Thus, the transcendence that Arendt applauds is unjustified; it is, ultimately, a hopeless endeavor.

Arendt’s analysis of judgment thus obstructs fatally her views on transcendence, embeddedness and Jewish identity. There seems to be only one conceivable way out of the conundrums of Varnhagen’s final shift of outlook and it is contained in Arendt’s reflections on examples in judgment. Given the total absence of a suitable community, blueprints, and examples, Varnhagen’s last change could have occurred only if she had used her own experiences as an example in judging Jewish history. Arendt did not envision the solipsistic possibility of using oneself as an example in her reflections on judgment; the examples she had in mind are external objects, or other individuals—like Achilles. But, be that as it may, a mental process of judging through herself seems to have been involved in Varnhagen’s final shift. Varnhagen, said Arendt,

became a Saint-Simonist, enthusiastic over “this great newly invented instrument which is at last probing that great old wound, the history of man upon earth.” She became “entirely interested only in what improvements the earth can make for us: it and our actions upon it [italics removed].” She had realized that the “diseased matter” which had to “get out of us” was not contained in the Jews alone; that the pox only broke out on the Jews, infecting them by contagion; that everything she herself had undertaken to fight it, all her life, was nothing but a “cosmetic” which did not “help, even if it were slapped on with housepainter’s brushes [italics mine].” (RV, 258)
Varnhagen had become aware that her attempts to find a personal solution to the Jewish question were misguided and this example of error contributed to her change of attitude. However, even leaving aside the issue of judgment’s “impartiality” when it is based on one’s own self, Varnhagen’s assessment of her life did not supply the crucial element that could have made her new stance legitimate from Arendt’s perspective—an understanding of Jewish history. She had come to see “the history of man upon earth” as a “great old wound,” but her comprehension of history, Jewish history included, did not go beyond the generality of this metaphor, and of phrases like “diseased matter.” (RV, 258) On Arendt’s own account, Varnhagen’s supposedly correct approach to Jewish identity and a viable transcendence of the history of history’s outcasts was not a result of a judicious knowledge of Jewish history. Insofar as it was a product of historical understanding at all, it was a result of hazy intuitions about history. Varnhagen’s last approach is thus hardly more valid than her alleged blunders; fundamentally, her belated transcendence and affirmation of Jewish identity remains a hopeless endeavor.

The History of Anti-Semitism Revisited: Transcendence as Method

Arendt’s Varnhagen biography offered an historical analysis of the vicissitudes of Jewish identity. In this sense, it belonged to the historical current of the discourse on anti-Semitism that Lazare had helped launch. Still following the journalist, Arendt would have further recourse to historical analysis to understand anti-Semitism. The most substantial product of her efforts was the magisterial The Origins of Totalitarianism.
Historians have recognized that Origins is not a work of “conventional” historical analysis. Its unconventionality stems from Arendt’s belief that the phenomenon of totalitarianism defied all accepted categories of explanation. She insisted that the Nazi Final Solution was “unprecedented” and argued that the concentration camps posed a serious challenge to social scientists’ “hitherto unquestioned fundamental preconceptions regarding the course of the world and human behavior.”

“Our common sense,” wrote Arendt, trained in utilitarian thinking for which the good as well as the evil make sense, is offended by nothing so much as by the complete senselessness of a world where punishment persecutes the innocent more than the criminal, where labor does not result and is not intended to result in products, where crimes do not benefit and are not even calculated to benefit their authors.

The concentration camps, claimed Arendt, “may very likely become … [a serious] stumbling-block on the road toward the proper understanding of contemporary politics and society.” If possible at all, understanding Nazism would require new concepts and new methods. Arendt herself adopted a method that differed from conventional approaches and it reflected her distinct views on history and historical understanding. These views, like so much else in Arendt, were influenced by her admiration of the ancient Greeks.

Arendt did not elaborate a consistent conception of history and historical understanding, but she did offer occasional reflections on both. The most systematic of these was the essay “The Concept of History: Ancient and Modern.” The Greek concept of history, Arendt argued there, was “rooted in the Greek concept and experience of nature.” The Greeks considered nature an immortal realm of cyclical becoming, where
birth and death succeed each other in an everlasting flow. In contrast to nature, humans are finite, “the mortals,” who, while immortal as a natural species, do not partake in nature’s immortality as individuals. In a culture that viewed nature as an endless cycle, history assumed the task of “endowing [human] works, deeds, and words with some permanence and … arresting their perishability” through “remembrance.” By preserving the memory of human activities, history aimed at providing for humans what nature had denied them—immortality.37

Radically different from the Greek concept of history is its modern counterpart. According to Arendt, the modern concepts of both nature and history arose out of the modern “loss of confidence in the truth-revealing capacity of the senses,” itself rooted in the “experience” of “the discovery that the earth, contrary to all direct sense experience, revolves around the sun.” The distrust of the senses led to disbelief in the possibility of knowledge of the outside world, at the same time giving rise to the conviction, exemplified by Vico, that “man must be capable of knowing at least what he made himself.” This conviction assumed not merely that the only possible knowledge is knowledge of “man-made” things, but also that knowledge is, above all, knowledge of the process of making of things. As such, it contributed to a “[shift] [of] emphasis … from interest in things to interest in processes.” The result of this shift was that “the chief preoccupation of … scientific inquiry, natural as well as historical, [became] … processes.”38

In the modern era, both nature and history came to be viewed as processes, and history, in particular, is conceived as an endless process whose past and future both disappear into infinity. As such, it “establish[es] mankind in a potential earthly
immortality.” While for the Greeks nature provided immortality for the human species, history now promised immortality to humankind—as both a species and a creator of culture.39

Arendt had no doubt that the modern “thinking in terms of processes” was a radical departure from ancient attitudes. We moderns, she argued, “consider everything in terms of processes and are not concerned with single entities or individual occurrences and their special separate causes.” In Greece, in contrast, the “deeds and works … which [became] the topic of historical narrative, [were] not seen as parts of either an encompassing whole or a process; on the contrary, the stress [was] always on single instances and single gestures.” According to Arendt, neither the Greeks nor the Romans viewed events as self-contained monads and they paid attention to “causality and context.” “But,” she asserted, “causality and context were seen in a light provided by the event itself, illuminating a specific segment of human affairs; they were not envisaged as having an independent existence of which the event would be only the more or less accidental though adequate expression.”40

A type of thinking based on the concept of process could not have helped Arendt in her analysis of Nazism. Inimical to singularity, it could not have explained the unprecedented. Much more adequate would be an approach that stressed the uniqueness of the historical event. Such a “neo-classical,” as it were, approach would bear at least a formal resemblance to the Greek attitude towards history. An adherence to precisely such an approach informed Arendt’s remarks on causality in the article “Understanding
“Understanding and Politics,” where she reflected on the problem of understanding totalitarianism.41

“Causality,” Arendt argued in the article,

… is an altogether alien and falsifying category in the historical sciences. Not only does the actual meaning of every event always transcend any number of past “causes” which we may assign to it … but this past always comes into being only with the event itself…. The event illuminates its own past; it can never be deduced from it.

Whenever an event occurs that is great enough to illuminate its own past, history comes into being.42

Arendt based these reflections on the same metaphor of illumination that she used later in her analysis of the ancient concept of history. They suggested that, for her analysis of totalitarianism, she had borrowed the emphasis on the event and the views on its relationship to its past from the ancient Greeks. Indeed, only one sentence after her assertion on history’s coming into being, Arendt noted: “Herodotus is not merely the first historiographer: in the words of Karl Reinhardt, ‘history exists since Herodotus’—that is the Greek past became history through the light shed on it by the Persian Wars.”43

“Understanding and Politics” showed not only that Arendt’s approach was rooted in the ancient Greek understanding of history, but also that she discarded causality as a conceptual tool. Much more adequate than causality were the notions of “elements” and their “crystallization.” Arendt articulated these two notions in her reply to a 1953 review of *Origins* by Eric Voegelin. “The book,” Arendt asserted, “… does not really deal with the ‘origins’ of totalitarianism—as its title unfortunately suggests—but gives a historical account of the elements which crystallized into totalitarianism; this account is followed by an analysis of totalitarian movements and domination itself.”44 *Origins*, then, was an
analysis of the “elements” of totalitarianism and of the form of political organization that constituted their crystallization and whose “historical significance” “transcended” them.\textsuperscript{45}

According to Arendt’s reflections on history, every historical event partakes of transcendence. Under the historian’s scrutiny, transcendence inheres in the very fabric of history.\textsuperscript{46} In Arendt’s case, in fact, transcendence pertained not only to history but also to her own views on it. Her notion of inherent transcendence, her stress on the event and her critique of causality transcended conceptual orthodoxy. Reflecting these views in its focus on the event and its concept of crystallizing elements, Arendt’s approach to Nazism too moved beyond conventions. Curiously, this transcending method was a product of a familiar strategy. In her Varnhagen biography, Arendt had called for a new beginning based on understanding of and situatedness in history. For her analysis of Nazism, she herself followed a similar strategy. Adopting classical notions of history, she forged a new method meant to respond adequately to an unprecedented phenomenon. Transcending orthodoxy, Arendt’s approach further embraced the transcendence she saw as inherent in history and, emphasizing the event, self-consciously detached the latter from its context. Doubly transcendent and anchored in time-honored concepts, this neo-classical method, however, exhibited crucial limitations. Despite its deployment of both embeddedness and transcendence, its perplexities infected fatally \textit{Origins}’ historical dissection.

\textit{Origins} itself revealed anti-Semitism as one of the elements that “crystallized into totalitarianism.” In this sense, the book was a history of anti-Semitism, and, in
writing it, as we have noted, Arendt followed Lazare’s example. Even more specifically, she followed him also in his emphasis on the link between anti-Semitism and the histories of European nationalism and the European state. Without making Lazare’s mistake of accepting anti-Semitic prejudices, Arendt followed him even further in seeking some of anti-Semitism’s sources in Jewish history. “Modern antisemitism,” she asserted, “must be seen in the … framework of the development of the nation-state, and at the same time its source must be found in certain aspects of Jewish history and specifically Jewish functions during the last centuries.”(OT, 9)

Arendt discerned four stages in the history of the nation-state and the fate of European Jewry. First, “the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries witnessed the slow development of nation-states under the tutelage of absolute monarchs,” who used “individual Jews” for managing the states’ finances. Second, as a result of the growing financial needs of nation-states after the French Revolution, a powerful “inter-European” stratum of wealthy Jews formed, whose “combined wealth” alone “could … meet the new enlarged governmental needs” and which was granted special privileges. This was also the period that witnessed Jewish emancipation in “all full-fledged nation-states.” The third stage began with the advent of imperialism. That development “undermined the very foundations of the nation-state,” while the cohesiveness of the wealthy Jewish stratum weakened, as it lost its “exclusive position in state business to imperialistically minded businessmen.” Fourth, the cohesive and powerful Jewish stratum “disintegrated together with the nation-state during the decades preceding the outbreak of the first World War [sic].” In the war’s aftermath, “the non-national, inter-European Jewish
“element”—consisting of “atomized” individuals—“became an object of universal hatred because of its useless wealth, and of contempt because of its lack of power.” (OT, 14-15)

This was the trajectory of what Arendt occasionally referred to as “political antisemitism,” as it was related to the history of the nation-state until the aftermath of the First World War. For Arendt, however, “political” anti-Semitism in the same period also had a social complement, consisting of the attitudes of gentile society towards Jews bent on assimilation. (OT, 28-29, 54-55, 87-88) While Arendt followed Lazare in her examination of this “political” anti-Semitism, she turned to another analyst of hatred to elucidate those social attitudes—Marcel Proust.

According to Arendt, the growing “political, economic, and legal equality for Jews” in Western Europe was accompanied by gentile society’s refusal to recognize them as equals. Gentile society was willing to tolerate only individual “exceptional” Jews who were “not like Jews [in general].” Jews aspiring to acceptance were compelled to dissociate themselves from the rest of the Jewish people and from the characteristics that society held to constitute a putative “Jewishness.” At the same time, however, the Jewishness of these Jews constituted what society valued most—“their foreign, exotic appeal.” Only insofar as they remained Jews would they achieve social acceptance. As Arendt put it, in “a society which discriminated against ‘ordinary’ Jews…, [assimilating] Jews had to differentiate themselves clearly from the ‘Jew in general,’ and just as clearly to indicate that they were Jews.” These contradictory demands forced Jews to transform what was a political, religious, or national “Jewish question” into the “personal problem” of forging and performing an identity that both erased Jewishness and revealed it
indirectly. *(OT, 54-62, 65-68, 240)* In a society convinced, for example, that Jews possessed an excessive sexuality, the lewd look at a society lady’s bosom of Proust’s Swann could help the cause of acceptance.

Ironically, the attempt to forge this conflicted identity entailed a concern with one’s Jewishness that produced a set of psychological traits that, in turn, became typical of Jews bent on assimilation. Without fully realizing it, Jews transformed Jewishness into “a psychological quality,” a trait of the individual self. They “felt themselves exceptions from the Jewish people” and they were “half proud and half ashamed of their Jewishness.” Overall, they lived in a constant inner “ambiguity,” unable to find the impossible balance between society’s contradictory demands and unable to forge a stable and unproblematic identity. *(OT, 64, 66-67, 84)*

Exploring further the behavior of assimilated Jews, Arendt turned to its analysis in Proust’s *Remembrance*. Haunted by “the black ghost of boredom,” said Arendt, the society of the Faubourg Saint-Germain showed the familiar ambivalence towards Jews. Having to erase what actually guaranteed their social acceptance, Jews exhibited traits typical of assimilation psychology. *(OT, 67-68, 80-82, 84)* Proust showed, according to Arendt, that Jews

felt either superior or inferior, but in any case proudly different from other normal beings; [they] believed their difference to be a natural fact acquired by birth; … were constantly justifying, not what they did, but what they were; and …, finally, always wavered between such apologetic attitudes and sudden, provocative claims that they were an elite.

For Arendt, Proust offered a truthful image of the outward behavior of assimilated Jews. Yet, his description was also flawed. Focusing only on the external manifestation of the
inner drama of assimilated Jews, he mistakenly interpreted their behavior as the result of “racial predestination.” The source of the behavior he described, on the contrary, consisted of psychological conflicts, themselves rooted in society’s contradictory demands. (OT, 84)

While mistaken in his views on Jewish behavior, Proust revealed a set of social attitudes that Arendt thought crucial for the history of anti-Semitism. In Remembrance, society’s attitudes towards Jews exhibited a peculiar tendency. Traditionally treating Jews as “criminals,” as “departure[s] from the norm” to be shunned and condemned, society was more and more inclined to view them as possessors of a secret “vice.” Theirs was the imagined “‘vice’ of Jewishness,” an inherent “defect,” as it were, that society found irresistibly attractive. Society, in other words, seemed to have become strangely tolerant of people formerly considered criminals. Despite the seeming tolerance, however, the Faubourg retained its traditional anti-Semitism. Its tolerance, indeed, was truly ominous. If anything, the acceptance of the “vice” of Jewishness signified that society was simply “no longer horrified by crime.” Even more serious was the new finality of social attitudes. Jewishness was now seen as an inborn quality that nothing could remove. “Jews,” said Arendt, “had been able to escape from Judaism into conversion; from Jewishness there was no escape. A crime, moreover, is met with punishment; a vice can only be exterminated.” In Arendt’s view, the social attitudes towards the “vice” of Jewishness help explain “the catastrophic thoroughness with which antisemitic devices could be put to work” in Nazi Germany. (OT, 67-68, 80-82, 87)
For Arendt, the history of anti-Semitism since the end of the eighteenth century exhibited a key discontinuity. Until the 1870s, anti-Semitism was “still pretty solidly grounded in factual realities characteristic of Jewish-Gentile relations.” For example, modern anti-Semitism “first flared up” when the Prussian aristocracy, stripped of its privileges in the early nineteenth century, expressed a “sudden and unexpected” hatred against what seemed to them the “only group” that, because of its close ties with the state, would “enjoy[…] special advantages.” In contrast, the anti-Semitism after the 1870s “transcended” its “factual basis of interest conflict and demonstrable experience” and became a part of developments “almost completely unrelated to the realities of modern Jewish history.” After the 1870s, said Arendt, anti-Semitism “played … a prominent role in world affairs … [and] … was … used for ulterior purposes that, though their implementation finally claimed Jews as their chief victims, left all particular issues of both Jewish and anti-Jewish interest far behind.” (OT, xvi, 29-32) Anti-Semitism’s history, in other words, transcended its scope as a history of hatred and acquired much broader dimensions. Anti-Semitism itself emerged as a form of transcendence, breaking away from the context of “Jewish-Gentile relations” and assuming world-historical significance.

Two agents that helped detach anti-Semitism from factual realities in the age of imperialism were the continental pan-movements. Indeed, Arendt saw Pan-Germanism and Pan-Slavism as precursors of the totalitarian movements, even calling the latter the pan-movements’ “successors.” “Nazism and Bolshevism,” she asserted, “owe more to Pan-Germanism and Pan-Slavism (respectively) than to any other ideology or political
movement.” The pan-movements sprang up in the third quarter of the nineteenth century and gained popularity with the rise of imperialism towards the century’s end. They became champions of widespread aspirations—not at all unusual in an era of fierce competition for colonies—for territorial expansion on the European continent itself. And they became vehicles of a “continental imperialism” aimed at transcending “the narrowness of the nation-state” and establishing “continental empires.” (OT, 222-225, 229, 232, 261)

For Arendt, “the driving force behind continental imperialism” was what she called “tribal nationalism.” The latter found fertile ground among those nationalities of Central and Eastern Europe that, like the Slavic population of Austria-Hungary, did not possess independent nationhood. At a time when the sovereign nation-state was becoming a seemingly universal form of political organization and deprived of this source of national identity, these people had little choice but to assume an identity rooted in the individual self. Precisely such an identity was what the pan-movements supplied. They formulated a “tribal nationalism” that rested on the belief that “the individual’s … soul … is … the embodiment of … national qualities” and that insisted, as a result of this claim, “that a fundamental difference exists between [its] people and all others.” Indeed, locating national identity in the soul, the pan-movements deified the national essence. They claimed that their own peoples were chosen by God and were, in their special blessedness, radically different from other peoples. From a practical perspective, tribal nationalism—equating the people with the nation irrespective of place of residence—necessarily implied an opposition to the state with its territorial limitations.
Accordingly, the pan-movements came to espouse a strong “hostility to the state as an institution.” (*OT*, 223-224, 226-227, 229-235, 237)

The pan-movements, claimed Arendt, brought to European politics a crucial new element—the very concept of “movement.” It distinguished them from traditional parties and indicated that they had “discover[ed] [a] form of organization which … would never need a goal or a program but could change its policy from day to day.” The pan-movements came to value sheer movement and, rather than strictly defined, concrete goals and political “platforms,” would exalt the divinity of the “folk community” and its soul and spin dark “dreams of continental empires.” The new concept not only differentiated them from parties, but also implied an opposition to the latter: declaring they were “above [all] parties,” the pan-movements opposed both existing parties and the “party system” as a whole. Indeed, their claims to be “above parties” transcended even the party system. According to Arendt, “the pan-movements attacked [the] … parties as part and parcel of a general system which [also] included the nation-state.” (*OT*, 224-227, 231-236, 250-251, 257, 260-261, 265)

Ominously innovative in their organization and in their deification of national identities, the pan-movements also evolved an “entirely new position on antisemitism.” For them, anti-Semitism was not merely “an instrument of propaganda,” as it had been for earlier anti-Semitic organizations, but became “the center of a whole outlook on life and the world.” At the root of their anti-Semitism were resentment and envy at what seemed to be a successful competitor that had already become everything the pan-movements aspired to be. The Jews seemed to be a living “proof that no territory was
needed to constitute a nationality.” They were also “a perfect model of a nation without a state and without visible institutions.” For assimilated Jews too, as tribal nationalists instinctively felt, Jewish identity was rooted in the individual self. Above all, “what drove the Jews into the center of these racial ideologies was the … fact that the pan-movements’ claim to chosenness could clash seriously only with the Jewish claim.” Fueled by a pseudo-religious, fanatical envy, the anti-Semitism of the pan-movements broke whatever links it might have had with the concrete realities of “Jewish-Gentile relations” and became “the mainstay of their ideology.” (OT, 228-229, 239-243)

In Arendt’s analysis, then, transcendence emerged as the pan-movements’ key feature. Aggressively opposed to the institution of the state, the party system, and the nation-state as a whole, the pan-movements exhibited a form of transcendence aimed at bursting and radically re-defining the political status quo. Charged with transcendence were also the pan-movements’ anti-Semitic deliriums, as they cut themselves off from the factuality of contemporary contexts. In general, the pan-movements’ antagonism to their context—understood broadly as both the factuality of Jewish-Gentile relations and the current forms of political organization—saturated them with transcendence and made them its very embodiment. Their transcendence—whose central current was anti-Semitism—was a delusional, expansionist, and profoundly nihilistic transgression. As in the Varnhagen biography, therefore, transcendence here emerged not as the auspicious surpassing of context affirmed in Arendt’s stress on beginnings, but as a misguided, and in this case intensely ominous, deviation.
Already expansionist and nihilistic, the devious transcendence of the pan-movements would be radicalized beyond recognition by their “totalitarian successors.” Nazism and Bolshevism would not merely transcend the limitations of the nation-state, but actually “use[...] the state administration” to pursue a much more ambitious “long-range goal[—]world conquest.” Even more radically, they would “aim at ... the transformation of human nature itself.” Of the two totalitarian movements, Nazism came closer to achieving this radically anti-human goal. (*OT*, 261, 392, 445, 458)

The door to the pursuit of Nazi goals, according to Arendt, was opened by the profound socio-economic and political upheavals in Germany in the early twentieth century. A time of humiliating military defeat, the end of the First World War marked the beginning of a period of extreme economic crisis. The postwar “inflation and unemployment” did not merely destabilize the economy but brought about the “breakdown of the class system” itself. Within a few years, millions of Germans were “declassed” by the crisis and this declassing had dire political repercussions. It brought with it “the breakdown of the party system, chiefly because [the] parties, being interest parties, could no longer represent class interests.” The result was pervasive disillusionment with, distrust of, and even rage against existing parties and the party system as a whole. The breakdown of the class system also meant the disappearance of what for Arendt was the main source of individual identity in the “highly atomized [bourgeois] society”—“membership in a class.” These attitudes offered fertile ground for the rise of Nazi totalitarianism. Opposing the party system, the Nazi movement emerged as the “organization[...] of atomized, isolated individuals” “who ... derive[d] [their]
sense of belonging to the world only from [their] belonging to [the] movement.” (OT, 260-262, 312-315, 317-318, 323-324)

Offering a spurious shelter, the Nazis strengthened their appeal to the déclassés through propaganda. One of the latter’s key elements was anti-Semitism. For Arendt, the Nazis’ anti-Semitism was both central to their movement and exhibited peculiar characteristics. In contrast to other anti-Semitic organizations before 1933, the Nazis established anti-Semitism as a decisive source of individual identity. They “demanded proof of non-Jewish descent for membership,” thereby making anti-Semitism “the intimate concern of every individual” and “no longer a question of opinions about people different from the majority.” At the same time, the notion of a Jewish conspiracy to dominate the world, as enunciated in the “Protocols of the Elders of Zion,” became a central, and the “most efficient,” tool of Nazi propaganda. In another contrast to other anti-Semitic organizations, the Nazis “discovered” “that the masses were not so frightened by Jewish world rule as they were interested in how it could be done.” Nazi propaganda promised Germans that they could easily ascend to “domination of the world”—in the form of rule of the racially superior German folk community (Volksgemeinschaft). All that was required was defeat of the current secret masters. (OT, 341, 354-356, 358-362)

Rather than espousing limited political objectives, the Nazi movement was guided by two central goals: “global rule” and “the permanent [total] domination of each single individual in each sphere of life.” The first of these goals was, in fact, a prerequisite for the second, since total domination, Arendt claimed, is possible “only
under global totalitarian conditions.” It was their aim to “conquer the world” that the Nazis set out to achieve once they seized power. In control of a state and its instruments of violence, they “conduct[ed] [a] foreign policy [based] on the consistent assumption that they [would] eventually achieve [the] ultimate goal [of global conquest].” The most obvious result of this foreign policy—and the most sweeping attempt at global rule—was military aggression and the outbreak of global war. (OT, 323, 326, 378, 389, 392, 411, 415-416)

After their seizure of power, the Nazis instituted changes in the state structure that differentiated theirs from traditional forms of government. One crucial change involved the secret police. Traditionally, the secret police had always been “a state within the state,” enjoying a relative independence from the government. In the totalitarian state, the secret police became “totally subject to the will of the Leader” and was transformed into a mere “executioner” of his orders. At the same time, however, it became “the true executive branch of the government through which all orders [were] transmitted” and was invested with enormous power. Setting out in pursuit of their second central goal—total domination—the Nazis charged the secret police with the task of achieving it. The most radical form of its attempts was the “experiment” of the concentration camps. (OT, 413-414, 420-422, 425-427, 430, 435-439)

After 1933, the secret police was initially charged with destroying the existing opposition to the regime, its “secret enemies” and “former opponents.” According to Arendt, the police accomplished this task by 1935. That year marked the beginning of the “stage” of “total domination,” when the police began the hunt of “objective enemies”
of the regime. These were groups singled out for destruction by the regime’s ideology, in complete disregard of their attitudes towards the regime or any potential dangers they posed. For the Nazis, the Jews were the foremost objective enemy. The application of the new category, however, was not limited to one group and “new objective enemies [were] discovered” when the initial “category [was] liquidated.” For example, “the Nazis, foreseeing the completion of Jewish extermination, … [took] the necessary preliminary steps for the liquidation of the Polish people.” Moreover, to the category of the “objective enemy” was added the practice of punishing people for “possible crimes,” crimes the regime imagined individuals might commit. This system of punishing imagined crimes and destroying imagined enemies radically “negate[d] human freedom.” One’s choices, thoughts, or actions no longer had any influence whatsoever on one’s safety, punishment, life, or death. (*OT*, 421-427, 432-433)

Much more than even the severe limitation of freedom was what the Nazis attempted in the concentration camps. “Total domination,” wrote Arendt, “…is possible only if each and every person can be reduced to a never-changing identity of reactions, so that each of these bundles of reactions can be exchanged at random for any other.” The Nazi camps were the “laboratories” conducting precisely an “experiment of total domination,” attempting a reduction of their inmates to “bundles of reactions.” As such, they were the Nazis’ “guiding social ideal.” (*OT*, 437-438)

In the camps themselves—“Hell in the most literal sense”—the inmates were systematically driven through a series of degradations and tortures, all of which were calculated to eradicate individual identity and, indeed, human “spontaneity.” Arendt
defined spontaneity as “man’s power to begin something new out of his own resources.” As a political capacity, she claimed, “it is identical with man’s freedom.” Viewed in this light, the camps “eliminate[d] … not only freedom in any specific sense, but the very source of freedom.” Arendt also insisted that human beings themselves are, in fact, beginnings and beginners and the capacity to begin defines what it means to be human. Human beings, she wrote, “are being born and … therefore each of them is a new beginning, begins, in a sense, the world anew.” (OT, 438, 445, 453-455, 466, 479)

“Because they are initium,” Arendt asserted later in The Human Condition, “newcomers and beginners by virtue of birth, men take initiative, are prompted into action.” More than the eradication of freedom, therefore, the Nazis attempted nothing less than “the transformation of human nature itself.” The Nazi camps, thus, became a direct assault on humanity itself, understood both as a living human community and as a human “essence.” (OT, 437-438, 458-459)

“The actual meaning of every event,” Arendt believed, “transcends” its origins, and her reflections on the camps’ assault on humanity were precisely an elaboration of Nazism’s transcending meaning. Transcendence, indeed, emerged in Origins as Nazism’s most fundamental aspect. Pan-Germanism’s heir, Nazi totalitarianism did not just abhor the limits of the nation-state, but set about transcending them in practice. It even attempted the destructive transcendence of humanity itself—transcendence at its most inhuman. The latter was the most extreme of those “ulterior purposes” for which, in Arendt’s view, modern anti-Semitism was eventually “used.” Nazi totalitarianism and
anti-Semitism were thus nothing but transcendence through and through, a veritable incarnation of a radical transcendence.

In thus interpreting Nazism and anti-Semitism, Arendt showed a side of transcendence that, surprisingly, jarred with her positive view on it in her stress on beginnings, which, as we have just noted, appeared even in *Origins* itself. Transcendence, it seems, was a Janus-faced impulse, potentially positive but also radically dreadful. As a rebellious pariahhood, transcendence was what Arendt recommended for Jews; as beginnings, it was what she advocated in general for human beings. But, in a profound paradox, what she also suggested was that transcendence meant hell on earth, nothing less than humanity’s destruction. What, then, was transcendence for Arendt? Was it the embodiment of humanity, or humanity’s demise? Was it positivity, or the ultimate evil? Perhaps it was what *Origins*, in fact, revealed it to be—a serious, potentially insoluble, perplexity.

These puzzles of transcendence were complicated much more critically in *Origins* by Arendt’s method. Arendt’s analysis, as we have seen, was rooted in a methodological, embedded transcendence that re-defined conceptual conventions. Postulating transcendence as intrinsic to events and stressing the particular event and its singularity, Arendt’s neo-classical method embraced the transcendence she discerned in history. This approach certainly contributed to the complexity of her dissection, allowing her, for instance, to elaborate the meaning of the concentration camps. Yet, it also mired in perplexities her interpretation of Nazism and anti-Semitism as transcendence. For all her stress to the contrary, what Arendt shows is that Nazi totalitarianism and anti-
Semitism were deeply embedded in very significant historical contexts. Transcendence, it turns out, is not only discordantly ambivalent but, fused with embeddedness, also faulty and dangerous as method, producing as it does an historical interpretation that subverts its own central claims.

In the first chapter of *Origins*, Arendt dismissed what she called the “doctrine of an ‘eternal antisemitism,’” based on the assumption that anti-Semitic “outbursts need no special explanation because they are natural consequences of an eternal problem.” This doctrine, according to her, “den[ies] all specific Jewish responsibility and refuse[s] to discuss matters in specific historical terms.” (*OT*, 7-8) A reaction against such views, Arendt’s interpretation went to the other extreme in its denial of anti-Semitism’s long duration. Arendt, as we have noted, located the origins of modern anti-Semitism in the early nineteenth century: she claimed that modern anti-Semitism “first flared up” at that time. Her focus on the event and its singularity, in other words, led her to examine only the type of anti-Semitism that crystallized in totalitarianism. This anti-Semitism was related to the history of the European nation-state and, therefore, the history of anti-Semitism started only when it became intertwined with the latter’s history. The result is an elision of centuries of earlier anti-Semitic hatred.

This elision was not merely a limitation of the scope of *Origins*, although it certainly was that. Much more fatally, it obstructed the analysis itself. Anti-Semitism’s elided history repeatedly intruded into Arendt’s interpretation, challenging her attempt to debunk notions of “eternal anti-Semitism.”
The disruptive intrusions surfaced at several crucial junctures. One of them appeared in Arendt’s discussion of the Dreyfus Affair. Arendt viewed the Affair and its anti-Semitism as harbingers of developments in Nazi Germany. (OT, 92-95) However, she also considered the anti-Dreyfusard campaign a concerted effort on the part of the Catholic clergy to increase its influence in the Third Republic, even at the risk of destroying the Republic itself. Under the guidance of the Jesuits, argued Arendt, the Catholic clergy aligned itself with the French army and, treating the army as an instrument to achieve its own objectives, managed to convince it to take part in the clergy’s struggle against the Republic. In fact, the Catholic clergy’s anti-republican struggles in France were part of a pan-European effort to increase the Church’s power and influence. Significantly, it was during the upheavals of the Affair that the clergy discovered that anti-Semitism was a “powerful” instrument for gaining mass support and used it to stir anti-Semitic feeling throughout Europe through the Catholic press. The campaign of the clergy, Arendt asserted, “was the first attempt and the only one prior to Hitler to exploit … antisemitism on a Pan-European scale.” (OT, 100-102, 104, 107-111, 113, 115-117)

In Arendt’s interpretation, this singular forerunner of Hitler’s anti-Semitism appears *ex nihilo*, as if it had no past whatsoever. The clerical attempt to use anti-Semitism as a political instrument was deeply rooted in the long tradition of Christian anti-Jewish hatred. This tradition was precisely what Lazare’s *Antisemitism* revealed and a recourse to it would have helped elucidate a crucial dimension of what Arendt conceives as a political campaign to bolster the Catholic Church’s influence. Had she
taken into account the history of religious anti-Semitism, her interpretation would have shown that both late-nineteenth-century French and twentieth-century Nazi anti-Semitism were embedded in a centuries-long history of hatred.

The elision of anti-Semitism’s history also affected Arendt’s analysis of the pan-movements. As we have seen, she argued that the conflict of “the pan-movements’ claim to chosenness with the Jewish claim”—“more than anything else”—contributed to their adoption of anti-Semitism as their “ideological center.” Ironically, what made the adoption itself possible was Jewish history and, in particular, the history of the Jewish “concept of chosenness.” As Arendt put it, “only because this ancient myth, together with the only people surviving from antiquity, had struck deep roots in Western civilization could the modern mob leader, with a certain amount of plausibility, summon up the impudence to drag God into the petty conflicts between peoples and to ask His consent to [a racist] election.” Viewed in this light, “tribal nationalism [was] the precise perversion of a religion which made God choose one nation.” Arendt also suggested—in passing—that the “element of fanaticism” of the Jewish idea of chosenness was “inherited by Christianity with its claim to exclusive possession of Truth.” (OT, 240, 242) What these remarks reveal is that the pan-movements’ perversion of religion was part of a paradoxical, discontinuous continuity dating back to Antiquity. This continuity embeds the pan-movements’ concept of chosenness in several very long histories—the history of the Jews, of Judaism, of Christianity, of religious conflicts and religious anti-Semitism. And, as direct “successors” to Pan-Germanism, the Nazis and their anti-Semitism were hardly less embedded in these same histories.
Indeed, the relevance of at least one of these histories—that of Christianity—to the history of Nazi anti-Semitism surfaced even in Arendt’s analysis of Nazi totalitarianism, a very unlikely place given the latter’s secular character. For Arendt, as we have seen, the disillusionment and disorientation of the masses provided fertile ground for the rise of Nazism. Reflecting on the analogy between the concentration camps and Hell, Arendt wrote,

[n]othing perhaps distinguishes modern masses as radically from those of previous centuries as the loss of faith in a Last Judgment: the worst have lost their fear and the best have lost their hope. Unable as yet to live without fear and hope, these masses are attracted by every effort which seems to promise a man-made fabrication of the Paradise they had longed for and of the Hell they had feared. (OT, 446)

The decline of “faith in a Last Judgment” was directly related to the mentality of the masses and, indeed, contributed to Nazism’s perverse appeal. Once again, Nazism emerges, according to Arendt’s own claims, as deeply embedded in a very, very long history.

Arendt called Nazi totalitarianism a “novel form of government,” but she also showed that Nazism and Nazi anti-Semitism were a part of very extended histories. (OT, 460) Explicitly situating her analysis in opposition to notions of “eternal anti-Semitism,” Arendt revealed that there might be more truth in these notions than she was willing to admit. At crucial points in Origins, Nazi anti-Semitism emerged as deeply embedded in the histories of religion and religious conflict and hatred. The most probable source of this deficiency was Arendt’s insistence on the event and its singularity. In her reply to Voegelin’s review of Origins, Arendt wrote, “[w]hat I did [in the book] … was to discover the chief elements of totalitarianism and to analyze them in historical terms,
tracing these elements back in history as far as I deemed proper and necessary.”

The exclusive focus on the event and its singularity seems to have contributed to Arendt’s disinclination to trace totalitarianism’s elements further back than she did and to her concomitant refusal to relate them to anti-Semitism’s centuries-long antecedent history. The elided contexts, however, re-appeared repeatedly, reasserting their links to Nazi totalitarianism and anti-Semitism, showing the latter as deeply embedded, and thus stymying Arendt’s interpretation.

Impeding the analysis, the intrusions of contexts nevertheless confirmed the condemnation of embeddedness in Arendt’s celebration of beginnings. Now contra Arendt, embeddedness appeared dreadful, as dreadful as transcendence. It, too, unleashed hell on earth, spelled humanity’s demise. Arendt’s dissection of Nazi totalitarianism, in other words, unwittingly collapsed the antithesis of the two concepts and equated both with evil.

All in all, *Origins* revealed both concepts as serious perplexities for Arendt. Transcendence was certainly an intensely awkward puzzle. The view of totalitarianism and anti-Semitism as transcendence clashed with Arendt’s stress on transcendence’s positive potential, producing an unresolved, and perhaps irresolvable, ambivalence. Embedded in classical concepts, transcendence also resulted in confusion as method. Designed to understand the unprecedented, Arendt’s neo-classical approach broke through conceptual conventions and, postulating transcendence as inherent in history, affirmed and employed this transcendence. But what that employment also produced was an elision of historical contexts, and these suppressed contexts repeatedly intruded
into Arendt’s analysis. Subverting her central claims, these intrusions showed Nazi totalitarianism and anti-Semitism as historically embedded phenomena, conflating embeddedness and transcendence and identifying both with ultimate evil. As method, Arendt’s embedded transcendence thus infected her dissection with debilitating conundrums. Perhaps most importantly—and repeating the pattern of the Varnhagen biography—supposedly positive forms of both embeddedness and transcendence, now linked in method, emerged in *Origins* as an endeavor that was, in crucial ways, fatally and hopelessly perplexed.

The Peril of Embeddedness in *Origins* and *Eichmann in Jerusalem*

Undermining Arendt’s claims about its “transcendence,” Nazism emerged in *Origins* as embedded in critical contexts. Significantly, the perplexities of transcendence and embeddedness surfaced in other ways as well in Arendt’s analysis of Nazism. In particular, they appeared in her engagement with a problematic she had introduced in her Varnhagen biography: the relationship between understanding and Jewish identity. Starting with *Origins*, Arendt expanded this problematic much further and undertook an extensive analysis of the connections between human understanding and Nazi anti-Semitism and totalitarianism. This analysis culminated in the most provocative of her books—*Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil*.

In *Origins* itself, Arendt’s reflections on Nazism and human understanding were related to her analysis of Nazi ideology. Ideologies in general, according to her, are centered on a single idea, as, for example, “the struggle of races” in the case of racism.
Accepting as axiomatic their central idea, viewing history as a moving process and elaborating their core idea to explain this historical process, ideologies develop self-contained explanations of all of history. An ideology, claimed Arendt, “promises to explain all historical happenings, [to provide] the total explanation of the past, the total knowledge of the present, and the reliable prediction of the future.” Ideologies are also completely logically consistent, i.e., consistent “in the manner of … argumentation,” and, as “total explanations,” tend to “become[…] independent of all experience.” What differentiated Nazism’s racist ideology from ideologies in general was the fact that Hitler and the Nazis accepted it “dead seriously” and absolutely “literally,” and elaborated its “implications [to] extremes of logical consistency.” Starting, for example, from the idea of the struggle of races, Nazi racism deduced, all too consistently, that some races were losers in the struggle, therefore, “unfit to live,” and, therefore, due for extermination. “Ideologies are harmless,” wrote Arendt, “… only as long as they are not believed in seriously. Once [they are] … taken literally they become the nuclei of logical systems in which, as in the systems of paranoiacs, everything follows comprehensibly and even compulsorily once the first premise is accepted.” Nazi racist ideology was precisely such a literal, self-contained, utterly logical—and extreme in its “logicality”—“system” of ideological lunacy. (OT, 457-458, 468-473)

For Arendt, the logical, mad system of Nazi ideology played a crucial role in compelling the masses to subject themselves to it. As we have seen, she claimed that Nazism’s most secure source of popular support were the disoriented and radically atomized masses. Disillusioned and confused, these masses were also afflicted by
another profoundly unsettling experience—that of loneliness. According to Arendt, the socio-economic and political cataclysms of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries increasingly denied the modern masses a stable “place in the world” and made loneliness—“the experience of not belonging to the world at all”—a pervasive malaise. (*OT*, 474-478) The masses, in other words, were thrown into a profoundly unsettling condition of a radical loss of context. As Arendt defined it, the descent into loneliness—into “not belonging to the world”—is a casting off of subjectivity, an unhinging of the self from its context. It is a subjective transcendence structurally similar to the successive escapes from history Arendt condemns in Varnhagen’s case. And, like Varnhagen’s evasions, this is a transcendence charged with negativity.50

Rather than mere feelings of abandonment or anguish, loneliness, for Arendt, involves a profound distortion of human mental activities. To explain this aspect of loneliness, she contrasted it with what she called “solitude.” Solitude is a withdrawal from the company of others and from the outside world in general. This is the state in which thinking’s “dialogue between me and myself” is actualized. In loneliness, as distinguished from solitude, the “two-in-one” of thinking is transformed into a “one,” when the individual is “deserted by [his or her] own self.” “In this situation,” wrote Arendt, “man loses trust in himself as the partner of his thoughts.” Thinking, dependent as it is on the duality of the thinking ego, is no longer possible. What alone remains “is the ability of logical reasoning whose premise is the self-evident”—a mental “capacity … which is as independent of thinking as it is of experience.” Loneliness allows one to engage only in sheer logical deductions, performing, for example, mathematical
calculations, or focusing exclusively on the logical consequences of events and calculating those consequences without subjecting these calculations to the approval or disapproval of the partner of thinking’s two-in-one. Loneliness, then, by making thinking “characterized by ... logicality” a familiar experience, accustomed the masses to it and made them much more receptive to the logicality-saturated totalitarian ideology. The ideology’s insane system, in turn, provided a desperately needed source of identity. Embracing it and aware “that he will be utterly lost if ever he lets go of [it],” the individual tries not to depart from the (ideo)logical system and this attempt, this “inner coercion,” to keep one’s self in line “seems to confirm … [the self] outside all relationships with others.” (OT, 471-478)

The interplay of loneliness and ideology links Nazi totalitarianism to a peculiar dialectic of transcendence and embeddedness. The ground for Nazism was prepared by subjectivity’s falling out of context, a negative transcendence that Nazism mobilized and channeled into a self-erasing embeddedness. The individual’s “inner coercion,” said Arendt, “fits him into the iron band of terror even when he is alone.” (OT, 478) The uprooted, thought-less self fastens itself into the meshes of the paranoid ideology and becomes almost identical with it. Significantly, Nazism deploys this absorption of the self, this momentous embeddedness in ideology, to pursue its larger, transcendent objectives. Nazi totalitarianism is thus founded on a dialectical chain of shifts, where an initial cast-off transcendence is transformed into an embeddedness in ideology, only to become transmuted into an extreme, anti-human, transcendence. Inherent to this chain,
what in fact makes its unfolding possible after its initial link, is a historically conditioned deformity of mind.

The relationship between the workings of the mind and totalitarianism became one of the main themes of Arendt’s “report” on the trial of Adolf Eichmann, the Nazi bureaucrat chiefly responsible for organizing the deportations of Jews to the concentration camps during the Final Solution. In Origins, as we have just seen, Arendt had argued for an affinity between extremist logical thinking and susceptibility to Nazism. She had also seen such logical thinking as the result of a total absence of thinking, understood as the mind’s inner dialogue with itself. In Origins, in other words, absence of thinking emerged as an indispensable prerequisite for the success of totalitarian ideology. Now, in Eichmann in Jerusalem, Arendt suggested that not only the absence of thinking, but also the absence of the “enlarged mentality” contributed to totalitarianism. And, as in Origins, this mental anti-trait was related to a dialectic of transcendence and embeddedness.

For Arendt, the link between the absence of the “enlarged mentality” and Nazism was evident in what she termed “the banality of evil.” As she explained, the phrase did not designate a philosophical concept, but a “factual … phenomenon which stared one in the face at [Eichmann’s] trial.” The “factual phenomenon” consisted of the blatant fact that Eichmann was not an “abnormal monster” driven by excessively evil motives, but very much a “normal” person. “Eichmann was not Iago and not Macbeth,” said Arendt, “and nothing would have been farther from his mind than to determine with Richard III
‘to prove a villain.’” The “factual phenomenon” included also the fact that Eichmann’s outstanding characteristic was what Arendt called his “sheer thoughtlessness,” his “almost total” “inability to think, namely, to think from the standpoint of somebody else.” In Arendt’s view, this inability to think “predisposed him to become one of the greatest criminals of [the Nazi] period.” From the perspective of Arendt’s later reflections on the mind, Eichmann lacked the capacity for “enlarged thought” that she deemed a prerequisite for judgment. This inability prevented him from grasping the implications of his actions and from realizing “that he [was] doing wrong.” Eichmann’s defect was an absence of “enlarged thinking” and, by implication, aberrant judgment. It contributed to his becoming an instrument of genocide. (EJ, 47-51, 276, 287-288)

Together with her analysis of the link between mental activities and Nazism in Origins, Arendt’s report on the Eichmann trial produced her own version of what the authors of Studies in Prejudice had called the “authoritarian personality.” The difference is that, for Arendt, the factors that predisposed individuals to Nazism are not psychological, but mental. Absence of thinking, absorption in logicality, lack of capacity for enlarged thinking and a failure to grasp the wrongfulness of one’s actions—these were the traits, the crucial defects, that helped transform individuals into supporters of Nazism and perpetrators of genocide. Notably, Arendt’s Nazi personality is a curious anti-personality, defined more by the absence of traits, rather than by their presence. The trait that seems present, proclivity to logicality, is not a sign of thinking but a symptom of its disappearance.
Arendt’s conception of an “authoritarian personality” was the result of an explanatory strategy similar to the one she had used in her Varnhagen biography. In it, as we have seen, she transformed the issue of Jewish identity into a problem of understanding. In Origins and Eichmann in Jerusalem, she similarly transformed the historical issues of Nazism’s mass support and genocide into a problem of human mental activities. The result of this transformation, Arendt’s anti-personality, harmonized with her claim that Nazi totalitarianism tended to eradicate all signs of humanness, even human spontaneity; as we have seen, the concentration camps were, indeed, “the guiding social ideal of total domination.” (OT, 438) Critically, the anti-personality also harmonized with the dynamic of transcendence and embeddedness Arendt had broached in Origins. Prone to logicality, embedding themselves in Nazism’s directives, and incapable of grasping the depravity of their actions, Nazism’s supporters followed its directives uncritically, almost automatically. They resembled mentally hollow automata, glued firmly to a totalitarian whirlwind. We have seen this condition—a fatal emplacement in context, mobilized in the pursuit of a profoundly evil transcendence. It is a condition of a fateful conflation of transcendence and embeddedness, both of which emerge as unidirectionally evil.

In Eichmann in Jerusalem, Arendt proposed that the main source of the evil of embeddedness was aberrant judgment, itself a consequence of “thoughtlessness.” Significantly, she suggested that faulty judgment was, in fact, a trait Eichmann shared with millions of Germans, as failure of judgment had been a mass phenomenon. Arendt emphasized “the totality of the moral collapse” under the Nazis, claiming, for instance,
that “there existed not a single organization or public institution in Germany, at least during the war years, that did not become involved in criminal actions and transactions.” She was convinced that only “few [Germans] were still able to tell right from wrong.”

(EJ, 125, 159, 295) Arendt made it clear in Origins that Nazism was radically destructive of any form of human community: its drive towards total “domination of … [the] individual in each and every sphere of life” could not but spell doom to all communication and community. (OT, 326, 465-466) At the same time, the Nazis’ subversion of traditional principles of conduct—such as the commandment “‘Thou shalt not kill!’”—made “determinant judgments” impossible. (EJ, 287, 295) In the absence of the two main pillars of judgment—general principles and human community—its failure on a mass scale is an all too expected phenomenon. In such a situation, only examples could conceivably have served as its props. But even this possibility does not refute the fact that Nazism profoundly imperilled the ability to judge. While not downright impossible, a survival of judgment would here be highly surprising.

Arendt’s perception of a mass failure of judgment exemplified a conceptual convergence in which her views on the human mind reinforced her analysis of Nazism. A convergence of this kind, however, was not always present in her work: as we have seen, her conception of mental activities invalidated central claims of her Varnhagen biography. We have also seen that, in the form of her notion of “the banality of evil,” Arendt’s authoritarian personality encouraged her to begin the philosophical investigations that would produce The Life of the Mind. But, in an irony doubled by the perplexities of her previous engagement with Jewish identity, Arendt’s reflections on
mental activities conflicted with her analysis of Nazism in *Origins* and *Eichmann in Jerusalem*. These conflicts had critical implications: Arendt’s reflections on mental activities undermined a momentous, *actual* transcendence—consisting of the survival of judgment and an escape from evil—she perceived under the demoralized conditions of Nazism. In an even further paradoxical twist, her historical interpretation of these very conditions, conversely, eroded the hope for a transcendence of evil she had set out to find—and thought she had found—in *The Life of the Mind*.

In *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, Arendt perceived in Nazi Germany a “factual phenomenon” as obvious and real as Eichmann’s “thoughtlessness.” This is a momentous transcendence, precisely the improbable transcendence of those few Germans still able to exercise proper judgment. They “were still able to tell right from wrong” and, in this way, escaped from the mass “moral collapse” and resisted the embedding grasp of Nazism. Theirs was the profoundly surprising, unexpected, miraculous transcendence of the survival of judgment. (*EJ*, 294-295) Arendt has no doubt whatsoever that these people’s judgment continued to function under the same adverse conditions that made judgment’s failure seem inevitable. She is convinced that judgment was an *actual* safeguard against evil—it was thus an all too real transcendence and a possible answer to the original question, of whether thinking could be a guard against evil, behind *The Life of the Mind*. She herself is aware, however, that the survival of the ability to judge is perplexing. (*EJ*, 294-295) How this was possible, how judgment could still operate in this most critical of moments, and what made the exceptional few different from an Eichmann and from the majority of Germans Arendt never showed.
She believed, it is true, that judgment, as a mental activity, is gratuitous, but what also appears gratuitous in her analysis is “proper” judgment, the ability “to tell right from wrong.” (LMT, 69, EJ, 294-295) Then again, Arendt’s views on the role of examples also seem to suggest a potential solution. But, still not fully developed at the time of her death, these views provided precisely that—a potential solution, perhaps a promise, but not a workable account. In the last analysis, the existence of proper judgment under Nazism remained a perplexity, a given that Arendt never adequately explained. Indeed, her two main models of judgment clashed with it and denied it.

Some remarks Arendt made about the relationship between thinking and judging in *The Life of the Mind* seem to suggest another possible solution to this conundrum. Thinking, as we have seen, does not yield stable truths in its quest for meaning. According to Arendt, its questioning dialogue in fact subverts established conventions and dogmas; it scrutinizes, destabilizes and frequently “destroys them.” Thereby, it exerts a “liberating effect on …[judgment],” enabling it to evaluate particulars anew, “without subsuming them under [existing truisms].” “And this,” Arendt affirmed, “at the rare moments when the stakes are on the table, may indeed prevent catastrophes, at least for the self.” (LMT 192-193) This liberating effect, however, concerns only existing, or prevalent, truths and opinions. While thinking could thus have helped destroy Nazi-imposed truths, it could not have solved the key obstacles of the absence of community and of morally right “rules to be abided by.” (EJ, 295) Nor, unrelated as its unraveling effect is to examples, could thinking have supplied, through this effect, examples to serve as props of judgment. Arendt’s analysis of judgment, then, did not answer the
question of how it was possible to resist evil in the context of Nazism. The transcendence of judgment remained a factual perplexity, as gratuitous as it was real.

Perhaps more significant than even this conundrum was the fact that a solution to the riddle of defying evil did not emerge even in Arendt’s reflections on thinking. Setting out to discover if thinking could stave off evil, Arendt provided a positive answer: thinking, she affirmed, could protect us. Arendt thus seemed to have uncovered a way of resisting evil, of escaping, through thinking, its encroachment and its surrounding presence. This hopeful transcendence, however, was actually spurious. It was challenged and upset by Arendt’s interpretation of the historical context of Nazism. Transcending thinking, it turns out, could keep evil at bay, but only in the abstract, certainly not—or only with difficulty—in the context of Nazism.

In *The Life of the Mind*, Arendt’s attempt to answer the question of whether thinking does not “make men abstain from evil-doing” led her to conclude that thinking was a shield against evil. We have seen that the “criterion” for the validity of thinking is the “agreement” between thinking’s two-in-one. For Arendt, the possibility of internal strife is what transforms thinking into a natural safeguard against evil. Thinking is directed not only towards outside things, but also towards the self—it is a “silent intercourse” of the mental partners in which they examine each other. As such, it accustoms us to subjecting ourselves to examination. Accustomed to this inner scrutiny, we anticipate the silent partner when we are not engaged in thinking’s dialogue, and this “anticipation” is what, for Arendt, constitutes “conscience.” More particularly, by making the inner scrutiny a familiar experience, thinking inculcates a fear of the partner
that “awaits” us in solitude and thereby helps prevent us from “contradicting” ourselves, from incurring the partner’s wrath, by committing evil. Conversely, a “person who does not know that silent intercourse … will [not] mind committing any crime, since he can count on its being forgotten the next moment.” (LMT, 185-191) A person devoted to thinking is thus a very unlikely supporter of tyranny or crime. If not its opponent, that person is at least a likely escapee from evil—a potential pursuer of a propitious transcendence.

Though plausible in the framework of Arendt’s analysis of the mind, the claim that thinking is a safeguard against evil, and thus a means of transcendence, was irrelevant to the context of Nazism. In Origins, as we have seen, Arendt argued that the stresses and dislocations of modernity made loneliness a widespread malaise, which, in turn, resulted in the disappearance of thinking, its substitution with logicality, and the latter’s exploitation by the Nazis. If anything, the way Arendt presents this process shows both how fragile thinking is and how dependent it is on external factors. Thinking disappeared in loneliness—the cast-off transcendence of the self—and loneliness itself was a product of modernity. Moreover, the spread of loneliness was noticeable as early as the nineteenth century and pre-dated Nazism. (OT, 474-479) Modernity had started undermining thinking before evil burst on the European scene in the form of Nazism and, when it did, thinking could hardly have prevented it because thinking had begun to disappear. By the time evil was ready to lay claim to the masses, therefore, the very question of whether thinking as such could prevent evil-doing had ceased to make much sense. Arendt’s analysis of the context of Nazism, thus, undermined one of The Life of
the Mind’s crucial claims—that thinking is a safeguard against evil. It ruled out her avowal of a possible transcendence.

Paradoxically, Arendt’s work, taken as a whole, provided no adequate answer to the question of how thinking could prevent evil, and thus could not show the way to a possible, hopeful transcendence. The question of how thinking could stave off evil, as we have just seen, was not even an issue when evil was in full swing. The time when it actually made sense—when thinking existed—was when people could have identified—as evil—the historical developments that would only eventually lead to evil. It also made sense after evil had tried to destroy the world. Not thinking per se, therefore, but only thinking about the conditions that destroyed thinking could prevent evil. On Arendt’s analysis, The Origins of Totalitarianism, rather than The Life of the Mind, provided the more adequate answer and contained the greater promise of transcendence. As our analysis has suggested, however, that promise itself—even that promise—is open to doubt.

Conclusion: Elusive Hopes

Arendt was fascinated by beginnings. Concluding Origins on an optimistic note, she referred, in its penultimate sentence, to a favorite phrase of hers, Augustine’s “that a beginning be made man was created.” (OT, 479) Thus even Origins, that intensely tragic book, contained an emphatic affirmation of beginnings. Arendt’s unwavering faith in beginnings is ingenuously life-affirming, ingenuously human; but its repeated, even excessive, avowals almost intimate a lurking compulsion. Is it, perhaps, possible that beginnings have a darker side? That, tantalizing as they may be, they are not always and
unequivocally positive? This chapter suggests that beginnings—an instance of transcendent do, indeed, have a hidden, perplexing underside in Arendt’s work.

The chapter examined Arendt’s engagements with Jewish issues, arguing that her confrontations with them were defined by two antithetical concepts—transcendence and embeddedness. Elucidating these two concepts’ unstable and multiple valences, the chapter sought to show how these concepts are entangled in critical conundrums in Arendt’s thinking. As her stress on beginnings suggests, she ascribed, in general, an unequivocally positive value to transcendence; by default, she condemned, as clearly, its opposite. But what her writings on the Jewish question revealed was that these valences were profoundly volatile, shifting unexpectedly from one pole of the antithesis to the other. Both transcendence and embeddedness emerged in these texts as deeply ambivalent, radically equivocal concepts. As an escape from history, transcendence appeared in the Varnhagen biography as a flawed pursuit. Even more negative was the self’s falling out of context, which, as loneliness, made Nazism possible. Transcendence became the synonym of ultimate evil in Origins, where Arendt interpreted Nazism as a wild, radically anti-human transgression.

Less surprisingly, embeddedness too emerged in these texts as negative. It appeared as inseparable from transcendence at its most evil. Nazism, Arendt showed despite herself, was deeply embedded in critical contexts; its followers’ embeddedness in its ideology was one of its vital conditions. Embeddedness too, in other words, was identical with evil. But, being transcendence’s supposed opposite, its negativity was far less surprising. What was, in fact, paradoxical was its acquisition of a positive valence.
In the Varnhagen biography, as we saw, Arendt called for an enlightened embeddedness in history that could, then, found a judicious, hopeful transcendence. Fixity in context, then, did not always appear bad, something to be necessarily condemned.

But the most significant aspect in all of these shifts of valence concerns the positive values of transcendence and embeddedness. Both concepts often emerged as profoundly negative, but much more crucial is the fact that their seemingly positive incarnations were always—\textit{invariably}—chimerical. Both the enlightened emplacement in history and the new beginning Arendt advocated in the Varnhagen biography turned out to be impossible, hopeless projects. The (f)actual, all too real, transcendence of evil Arendt saw in Nazi Germany emerged as gratuitous, and conceptually implausible. What nullified these propitious possibilities was a jarring discord between Arendt’s philosophical concepts and her interpretations of historical contexts. What is significant about the fading of these possibilities is that each of them indicates a possible resolution of acute and fateful dilemmas in the Jewish issues Arendt confronted. The disappearance of these hopes thus means failures of her inquiries into truly vital aspects of her Jewish concerns.

Perhaps nowhere are these failures more obtrusive that in \textit{Origins}—Arendt’s \textit{magnum opus}. There, she adopted a strategy similar to the one she had prescribed to Varnhagen. Reviving classical notions of history, embedding her thinking in them, Arendt sought to forge a new hermeneutic approach, which both transcended conceptual orthodoxy and embraced the transcendence she saw as inherent in history. This strategy did indeed produce a new interpretative beginning—\textit{Origins} itself. But this beginning, its
achievements notwithstanding, was a flawed beginning. Like Varnhagen’s belated shifts of outlook, Arendt’s interpretative transcendence was, in crucial ways, a hopeless endeavor.
Notes

7. I have borrowed the idea that Arendt’s engagements with Jewish issues were linked to, and indeed elaborated in terms of, the existentialist problematic of transcendence from Dr. Harold Mah. My approaching Arendt’s work from the perspective of this problematic is heavily indebted to him.
10. I would like to thank Dr. Harold Mah for drawing my attention to the ambiguities and ambivalence in Arendt’s views on transcendence and embeddedness.


18 *Ibid*.


22 Arendt, “Imagination,” 84.

23 *Ibid*.

24 *Ibid*.


27 An account of some of the ways in which Arendt’s own experiences transpired in her biography is contained in Dagmar Barnouw, *Visible Spaces*, 41-47. Barnouw refers to a passage in the biography that also reveals Arendt’s attempt to blur the distinction between narrator and subject. “Arendt … stresses the fact,” writes Barnouw, “that her criticism of Rahel ‘corresponds to Rahel’s self-criticism, and since [Rahel]—unburdened by modern inferiority feelings—could rightly say of herself that she did not “vainly seek applause I would not record myself” she also had no need to “pay flattering visits to myself.” It is, of course, only of my intentions that I speak[,] [writes Arendt]; I may not always carry them out successfully and at such times may appear to be passing judgment upon Rahel from some higher vantage point. If so, I have simply failed in what I set out to do.” *Ibid.*, 41.

28 By the time Arendt completed her biography, she had already become familiar with Lazare’s reflections on pariahhood. In 1926, three years before she started writing her biography, Arendt had met the Zionist Kurt Blumenfeld who had introduced her to Lazare’s writings. Barnouw, *Visible Spaces*, 30, 38-39; Young-Bruehl, *Hannah Arendt*, 121-122.

29 Rahel’s failure to understand Jewish history is a recurrent theme in the book. Arendt’s references to it appear on the following pages: 86-87, 89, 155, 180, 208-209, 214-215, 239-240. Rahel’s inadequate grasp of the situation of Jews in her contemporary society is discussed on pages 221 and 222.

30 The only source of either general principles or examples that Varnhagen could conceivably have utilized before the final shift in her outlook was what Arendt referred to as the “revolutionary movements” of the early nineteenth century. Indeed, as Arendt notes, members of “the Jewish intelligentsia all[ied] [themselves] with [these] movements” and Varnhagen herself, as we have seen, “became a Saint-Simonist” at the end of her life. Before the final shift, however, she disregarded the revolutionary milieu completely, convinced as she was that assimilation was her only option. (*RV*, 223, 258)

31 The friendship lasted for two years. Rahel ultimately realized that her noble friend would never be able to disregard the differences in their social positions and that she could never count on him to help her overcome her exclusion from society. This realization spelled the end of the friendship. (*RV*, 205, 215-218)


33 Aschheim sees Arendt’s book as one of the first “serious attempts to forge the theoretical, historical, and conceptual tools necessary to illuminate and explain the great cataclysms of the twentieth century.” Aschheim, “Nazism, Culture,” 117-118.


38 Ibid., 54-57.
39 Ibid., 58, 61, 67-68, 74-75.
40 Ibid., 42-43, 61, 63-64, 88.
41 For an illuminating analysis of Arendt's historical method, see Bernstein, Hannah Arendt, 50-51.
43 Ibid., 319.
48 Arendt notes that the Pan-Germans were “anti clerical and became anti-Christians.” (OT, 233) Opposition to Christianity, however, is part of the history of Christianity.
50 I would like to thank Dr. Harold Mah for pointing out to me the structural similarities between the descent into loneliness and transcendence, conceived as negativity.
51 Arendt’s reflections on “the banality of evil” became one of the central issues in the controversies surrounding the publication of Eichmann in Jerusalem. Barnouw, Visible Spaces, 2. For a sensitive analysis of these controversies, see Ibid., 1-3, 223-251.
52 It seems obvious that Origins and Eichmann in Jerusalem contain an attempt, albeit not a systematic one, to delineate some of the traits that made individuals receptive to Nazi propaganda and willing to participate in Nazi crimes. Given her firm opposition to psychoanalysis—she called it a “pseudo-science” in “Thinking”—Arendt would never have accepted the findings of Studies in Prejudice. (LMT, 113) In Origins, Arendt also criticized Sartre for suggesting that “the Jew [is] someone who is regarded and defined as a Jew by others.” According to Arendt, “Jewish self-consciousness was [n]ever a mere creation of anti-Semitism.” On the contrary, it was deeply rooted in “Jewish history, whose central concern since the Babylonian exile has always been the survival of the people [as Jews] against the overwhelming odds of dispersion.” (OT, xv) Despite these criticisms, however, Arendt’s own reflections on thinking and Nazism were certainly a part of the theoretical attempts around the end of the Second World War to probe the peculiarities of the fascist.
53 The idea that Arendt tends to view the historical event as a “miracle” was suggested to me by comments made by Dominick LaCapra at the 2006 Tracing the Temporal Conference at Cornell University. Dominick LaCapra, Tracing the Temporal: New Trajectories in Cultural and Intellectual History, Cornell University, April 21, 2006.
Chapter 7

Conclusion: A Retrospect of a Discourse Past

Arendt famously believed that the meaning of historical events emerges in retrospect, is revealed only to the backward glance of the historian. This study’s gaze at its intellectuals tried to discern vital meanings of their momentous engagements with anti-Semitism and Jewish identity. How, then, do their confrontations with the two crucial issues appear in a general look at them? What are the defining aspects of the endeavor to understand this absolutely central problematic of modern European history?

Undoubtedly, the attempts to understand anti-Semitism and Jewish identity possess vast intellectual and historical significance. We have noted the main dimensions of their magnitude. Constituting pivotal parts of their authors’ work, they were immediate responses to critical developments in the figures’ contexts, and in modern European history. They were also pioneering endeavors, providing ground-breaking explorations of their newly defined problematic, and thereby also opening up new areas and subjects of inquiry. In fact, they thus helped establish their two issues as key objects of knowledge among Western intellectuals, and contributed to institutionalizing them as
such in the Western academia. And of course, the interpretations of anti-Semitism and Jewish selfhood were immensely important in their own right. They are among the most substantial and rigorous examinations of the problems since the mid-nineteenth century. The interpretations are intellectual classics. They are noteworthy phenomena in the modern history of European ideas.

Each interpretation had its own central lines of analysis, arguments, and views. Lazare confronted anti-Semitism for the first time in the 1890s, as a participant in the effervescent currents of symbolism and anarchism. His initial encounter with the hatred was itself, in fact, hateful. For a time, he became a mouthpiece of anti-Semitism, indeed a frothing one, as he expressed, and actually reveled in, an increasingly aggressive hate. His was also a blatantly irrational hostility, and one that hunted desperately for a Jewish culprit—which it could accuse of evil and thereby rationalize and justify itself. But never embracing anti-Semitism without reservations, Lazare then embarked on a sustained effort to evolve an intellectually sounder position on it. He took it up as an object of study. He researched and analyzed its history until 1894, when he published his conclusions as *Antisemitism*. This path-breaking work elaborated an interpretation of its subject that consisted of five distinct ways of explaining its history and sociology. One root of anti-Semitism for Lazare was thus Jewish exclusiveness, which provoked throughout history the anger of Jewry’s enemies. Religious hostility was another, indeed the most fundamental, cause of it, as Christianity cherished a deep and often violent animosity towards Judaism—its parent and its perceived opponent. Then socio-economic factors fuelled the hatred in various historical settings. Their role in the Middle Ages was illustrated by popular grievances in times of economic distress, which,
arising from real difficulties unrelated to the Jews, were misplaced onto Jewish usurers, who were imagined—wrongly—as agents of oppression, but whom the populace could see in its daily life. In the modern period, the hatred of landed capitalists against their rival Jewish bourgeoisie and that of the gentile bourgeoisie for its Jewish members-cum-competitors further exemplified anti-Semitism’s socio-economic sources. Psychological forces—especially the ambivalence evoked by the stranger—constituted a fourth origin of the hatred. And besides the inner factors, political processes from the Middle Ages until Lazare’s own day—the supersession of the older, religious form of European state by its modern, secular successor, nationalism, and the continuing existence of Jewish distinctiveness—formed the last element of a powerful causal constellation behind anti-Semitism.

Lazare concluded his 1894 history with an optimistic coda. He proclaimed that anti-Semitism would very likely die out, and that its death would inaugurate global anarchy. The hatred’s explosion in the Dreyfus Affair, however, soon disillusioned him profoundly, and his easy optimism was replaced by a deep pessimism regarding anti-Semitism’s future. The hatred of the Affair in fact changed his approach to anti-Semitism. His conceptualization of it remained intact, as his thinking on it did not depart significantly from his study’s ways of explaining it until the end of his life. His views on the hatred were always located inside, as it were, the explanatory and ideational terrain delimited by the five conceptual tendencies. But the Affair modified substantially his attitude towards anti-Semitism. He thus repudiated it irrevocably, moving to the polar opposite of his initial championship of it. Its eruption, moreover, induced Lazare’s intense pessimism, as he became convinced that the hatred was not likely at all to
disappear in the foreseeable future. And this sense of doom now accorded with what his book had disclosed thoroughly—anti-Semitism’s very long religious roots and history.

But while the Affair left Lazare’s conceptualization of anti-Semitism unaltered, it revolutionized his views on Jewish selfhood. He initially believed in assimilation, advocating a discarding of a Jewish identity, and a determined embrace of a French one. The completely assimilated French Israelite was his ideal. But the Affair’s flood of anti-Semitism compelled him to reject emphatically this position. As the adequate response to the hatred he proposed his vision of a Jewish nationalism. It propounded a militant, resolutely and forcefully Jewish selfhood. Stressing anti-Semitism’s gravity, permanence, long religious roots and history, as well as Jewish pariahhood, Lazare demanded a bold defiance of the hatred. It must be met with an open, decisive, and unwavering affirmation of collective and individual Jewish identity. The assertive self Lazare envisioned and called for was an open-ended, dynamic one. It was a self-in-motion, whose defining element would be a development founded on cherishing and using creatively the Jewish national heritage. And the creation of these unfolding collective and personal identities would, furthermore, promote the establishment of a distinct Jewish national group. This formation would eventually take its place among the entities constituting the global federative society of the distant future. The nationalist self that Lazare advanced thus harmonized with his conception of world history, and with his beloved anarchist utopia.

A contemporary of Lazare, Proust also took up the twofold problematic that preoccupied the journalist for years. His Remembrance was a creative, impressionist and strongly psychological history of fin-de-siècle France. As a history, it could not but focus
on the Dreyfus Affair—the political crisis that utterly absorbed Lazare in its vortex, for a
time engrossed Proust himself, and rocked the Third Republic violently. The Affair, as
well as anti-Semitism and its related issue of Jewish identity, accordingly constituted a
major theme of the literary masterpiece. Proust explored the main effects of the Affair on
French politics and society, while also probing thoroughly the psychological
determinants of attitudes towards it. He treated anti-Semitism similarly, examining its
central echoes and dissecting the historical and psychological factors that characterized
and produced it. He presented it as both a destroyer and a magnifier of social distances,
and as omnipresent in gentile society. A plethora of forces fostered the hatred: its
inheritance, a long tradition of aristocratic and bourgeois anti-Jewish prejudices, an
individual’s anti-Semitic environment, social ambition, anxieties and fears of losing
social status and position to upwardly mobile Jews, resentment and envy of Jewish
success, and plain malice and cruelty. Proust also discerned a scapegoating mechanism
in anti-Semitism, whereby frustrations and anxieties produced by the obstruction of
social aspirations are displaced onto a Jewish target. He further showed that the hatred’s
psychosexual dynamics is one of ambivalence between attraction to, and hostility
against, Jews. Elaborating a parallel between homosexuals and Jews, he implied that
anti-Semitism springs from the closeness between similar, but also somewhat different,
individuals and groups. And depicting Jewish self-hatred, he suggested that it arises
from Jews’ internalization of anti-Semitic stereotypes and their subsequent displacement
onto other Jews in order to externalize their own status anxieties.

Besides scrutinizing anti-Semitism, Proust also interpreted Jewish identity. He
reflected and articulated forceful positions on the three main alternatives for it at the fin-
de-siècle: Zionism, an affirmation of a Jewish self in the manner of Lazare, and assimilation. Zionism was, for him, a profoundly unfeasible doctrine. If implemented, it would establish a Jewish homeland that would become a last refuge in times of crisis and despair, not a viable polity. Examining the second identity option, Proust showed that a self produced by an assertion of Jewishness, illustrated by Swann, was grotesque. Then exploring assimilation, he suggested that it created, as in the case of Bloch, a caricatural, and radically unstable, identity. Proust thus faulted all the principal options for Jewish selfhood in his historical context. He was convinced that identities founded on them were irremediably defective. Of partly Jewish origin, he himself followed what he saw as a much loftier path, embracing literary art as the exclusive source of his own self. Ultimately, he resolutely decreed in Remembrance that the identity of an artist was the only worthwhile and viable—and the most sublime—form of self.

Raised by Proust to the height of an apotheosis of art, the interpretation of anti-Semitism and Jewish identity was continued by the authors located at the second pivotal moment considered in this study: the cataclysm of the Second World War and the Holocaust and their aftermath. But the examination of the problematic assumed a drastically more somber mode. The scholars associated with the Frankfurt School and Arendt faced a radically different, exceedingly urgent, and incomparably graver task. They witnessed and experienced European anti-Semitism’s culmination into an historical disaster whose enormity was staggering. At the time, to intellectuals on both sides of the Atlantic, what had happened in Germany seemed incomprehensible. Arendt was fully convinced that the whole Western tradition had been ruptured irreparably. And her work, as well as that of the Frankfurt School, reflected the magnitude of the catastrophe.
The historical tragedy manifested itself in several important shifts in the idiom and concepts of the historical-psychological discourse on anti-Semitism. Notwithstanding frequent fears, pessimism, and condemnations of it, intellectuals at the time of the Dreyfus Affair generally showed a tolerant complacency towards anti-Semitism, viewing it as a fairly acceptable prejudice of gentile society. In the works of Proust and Lazare, a sense of intensely passionate outrage is simply absent; indeed, both authors actually re-iterated anti-Semitic ideas common at the fin-de-siècle. In stark contrast, the Frankfurt School approached anti-Semitism—unequivocally—as an explosive, mortal danger in modern mass society. Its associates conceived it as a deadly pathology. In their work, anti-Semitism was, as it were, medicalized, and they treated it accordingly as a lethal social and psychological disease in urgent need of a cure. In the writings of Arendt, this outlook of urgent gravity had its equivalent in the conviction that anti-Semitism contributed to the rise of a hitherto unknown kind of evil. The latter was embodied in a historically new, and unprecedentedly anti-human, form of government, aimed at nothing less than humanity’s destruction.

In the work of the Frankfurt School, the enormity of the historical outrage and the new sense of gravity appeared also in the form of another key discursive shift. This was what I call the disappearance of the referent of anti-Semitism. Before the rise of Nazism, intellectuals, such as Lazare, thought that Jews played a role in the presence of anti-Semitism. Even later, the psychoanalyst Otto Fenichel also believed that allegedly Jewish traits were a factor in its existence. The Frankfurt School intellectuals resolutely rejected all such notions. For them, Jews played no part in anti-Semitism. They were convinced that the hatred’s roots were to be found in the haters.
Finally, the magnitude of the historical catastrophe was reflected in—was in fact the main reason for—a central “gap” in the discourse on anti-Semitism articulated by this study’s intellectuals. This is the absence of a sustained exploration of the question of Jewish identity on the part of the Frankfurt School. Instead of grappling with the puzzles of selfhood, the latter engaged in a feverish hunt for remedies for the deadly disease of anti-Semitism. The quest for a viable Jewish identity was here replaced by an all too logical search for a badly needed cure—mostly because the historical situation had simply marginalized the issue of identity. Indeed, Arendt’s own confrontation with Jewish selfhood dates from before the Holocaust. During and immediately after it, what was needed desperately—above all—was a remedy and weapon against anti-Semitism.

And the Frankfurt School’s search for such a cure was resolute indeed. Having left Europe because of the Nazi plague, its intellectuals embarked in America on an historic effort to understand anti-Semitism. They produced the five-volume series *Studies in Prejudice*, while the School’s two leading figures—Horkheimer and Adorno—augmented even this massive, milestone work by elaborating a rigorously speculative, philosophical inquiry into anti-Semitism in the quintessential text of Critical Theory—*Dialectic of Enlightenment*.

Standing apart from the four psychologically oriented volumes of *Studies* was Massing’s *Rehearsal for Destruction*. It was a conventional history of political anti-Semitism in Wilhelmine Germany. A ground-breaking, solidly researched and analytically sound study that has become a classic in its field, it propounded a Marxist historical interpretation. Massing saw the rise of organized anti-Semitism in the Second Reich as a function of the period’s economic disturbances. He argued that the hatred
thrive among the economically insecure *Mittelstand*, while the country’s leading parties and rulers employed it as an instrument for acquiring political support. Significantly, this specific configuration of growth, popular support and instrumental manipulation of an organized anti-Semitism prefigured the hatred’s pattern of unfolding in German politics in the 1930s and 1940s.

While Massing continued the historical current of the discourse on anti-Semitism examined here, the other *Studies* resumed its other strand and dissected the psychology of ethnic prejudice. Löwenthal and Guterman’s *Prophets of Deceit* examined the contents of American fascist propaganda from around the Second World War, its techniques of psychological manipulation, and the psychological determinants of the propagandists’ popular appeal. The agitators, argued the authors, were fraudulent radicals who stirred up their audiences emotionally, but who did not fight for genuine social improvement. At most, they strove for changes in the ruling personnel. In their vituperations, they zeroed in on and attacked what they identified as multiple enemies: communists, “plutocrats,” “the corrupt government,” “foreigners.” The conjured visions of all the foes, however, had as their final referent the figure of the Jew. To explain the propaganda’s appeal and manipulative methods, Löwenthal and Guterman relied on Freudian psychoanalysis. They noticed, for instance, that the agitators described their enemies in terms of filth. This characterization was, for the authors, a projection of the propagandist’s and the listeners’ suppressed desire for dirt onto the screen of the foes. And its articulation, by evoking that urge, allowed the agitator and the audience to indulge in the desire and relish it, as they at the same time denounced filth’s alleged embodiments.
The other three volumes in *Studies* focused on the psychology of the main agent of ethnic intolerance—the prejudiced person. Most extensive was the analysis of the series’ flagship volume—*The Authoritarian Personality*. Authored by a team of scholars, it was based on information from more than two thousand research subjects. It was a work of then state-of-the-art empirical social science, employing extensively the latter’s research techniques and methods of analysis. Using, in addition, the theories of mid-twentieth-century psychology and of Freudian psychoanalysis, it constructed an elaborate psychological profile, one also outlining noteworthy intellectual features, of the potential fascist. According to the work, “the authoritarian personality” exhibited multiple characteristics that made its exponent susceptible to antidemocratic ideas. The main traits included: “conventionalism,” “authoritarian submission,” “authoritarian aggression,” “anti-intraception,” “superstition and stereotypy,” “projectivity.” The authors also found that a particular type of family showed a tendency to produce such pathological qualities. A familial milieu marked by discipline and relationships of dominance and submission was the kind that tended to breed the personality of authoritarianism. The study’s pictures of the potentially fascist psyche and mind and of their family breeding ground, together, constituted its sociological, intellectual, and above all psychological X-ray of the authoritarian individual. Having constructed its portrait, the work proposed potential remedies for ethnic prejudice, such as, for example, the refinement of psychological techniques for treating individual and group prejudice. Its conclusion, however, propounded that only a profound societal transformation would conclusively destroy prejudice and authoritarian character patterns.
Similar in focus and aim to *The Authoritarian Personality* was Bettelheim and Janowitz’s *Dynamics of Prejudice*. Concentrating on prejudice in general and anti-Semitism in particular among veterans, it too developed a portrait of the agent of ethnic intolerance. But it used a much smaller research sample, and set itself the more limited task of fathoming the social and psychological factors involved in prejudice, without elaborating an equally thorough profile of the bigoted person. The study concluded that the chief determinants of anti-Semitism, specifically, included: “feelings of deprivation,” downward “social mobility,” “rejection of controlling institutions,” “economic apprehensions,” and lack of “general optimism.” Its research also suggested that ethnic intolerance was associated with a dearth of emotional warmth in the family of the person infected with prejudice. Resembling then the bigger study, *Dynamics*’ examination of its own “authoritarian personality” also probed the familial environment producing ethnic intolerance, these two levels of analysis also providing, like the longer work, a portrayal both of the genesis and history, and of the “dynamics,” indeed, “of [active] prejudice.” And in a further similarity to *The Authoritarian Personality*, the volume outlined its own remedial vision for eliminating prejudice. It eschewed, however, ideas of a grand social transformation, advancing far more limited measures. Three of these were: “stabilization of employment,” “an extension of social security,” and changes in legal norms and practices aimed at promoting ethnic tolerance.

And augmenting further the investigation of the prejudiced person was Ackerman and Jahoda’s *Anti-Semitism and Emotional Disorder*. It was the third and shortest volume on the subject in the series, and it dissected anti-Semitism among people who had gone through psychoanalytic treatment. The authors found that the prejudice
was related to specific “emotional predispositions.” Among them were: “anxiety,” a lack of a coherent sense of self, an inability “to achieve satisfactory interpersonal relationships,” and “conformity” and “fear of the different.” As did *The Authoritarian Personality* and *Dynamics, Emotional Disorder* too probed the genesis of prejudice. Looking at the anti-Semites’ families, it concluded that most were marked by a lack of family cohesion and of warmth between the parents, while the child was often exposed to harsh discipline. Ackerman and Jahoda also claimed that anti-Semitism was the product of psychological defense mechanisms, which helped the prejudiced prevent the disintegration of their messy selves. Echoing *Studies’* repeated stress on its importance in the psycho-dynamics of prejudice, the authors argued that projection was one key defense mechanism which, while contributing to the salvage of personal identities, generated anti-Semitism. And the work finally contended that aspects of mid-twentieth-century American society fostered anti-Semitism. Features such as competitiveness, “alienation from the satisfactions of work,” atomization and isolation of individuals from one another, a tendency to use others as tools, and another tendency to consider marriage as an expedient “contract,” bred anxiety and “mass discontent,” which furthered anti-Semitism.

These were the works that comprised the Frankfurt School’s effort to understand anti-Semitism, and ethnic prejudice in general, by using the methods of research and analysis of empirical social science. This immense enterprise was supplemented by Horkheimer and Adorno’s inquiry into anti-Semitism, in their *Dialectic*. Written while the work on *Studies* was in progress, this iconic text of Critical Theory outlined five interpretations of anti-Semitism. The authors, for one, linked the hatred to the history of
Western capitalism. The system’s contradictions, they proposed, produced psychological stresses which formed a source and breeding ground for the prejudice. By generating the malaise, the economic order prepared those exploited in it to accept anti-Semitism, which constituted an outlet for their inner tensions. Conversely, the bourgeoisie were drawn to the hatred because the Jews’ own disadvantaged position within capitalism evoked their unpalatable awareness of being the exploiters; the Jews reminded them that they were the oppressors in the system. Anti-Semitism thus became a source of attraction both to the exploited and to the exploiters. Horkheimer and Adorno then reflected on anti-Semitism’s religious dimension. Christianity, they argued, contained a moment of deceit: its conversion of divinity into a human form, and its inability to guarantee its promised salvation were dubious. As the Jews did not accept the religion, they reminded its followers of its fraudulence, and became objects of Christian hatred. Another conceptualization of anti-Semitism centered on the notion of mimesis. According to the authors, imitation—of, for example, nature—characterized human behavior at a stage in Western history when fear marked human beings’ relationship to the natural world. The development of civilization forced humans to overcome this stage. Alleged “mimetic traits” of Jews, like “the singing tone of voice,” incited hatred in anti-Semites, who resented echoes of the long-outgrown era of dread. The concept of projection provided a further account of anti-Semitism. Horkheimer and Adorno conceived the hatred as a product of a kind of unbridled projection, whereby the subject did not merely externalize particular urges onto a suitable screen, but flooded the whole outside world with its “contents.” Fantasies of a Jewish conspiracy exemplify the pathological projection. And finally, the authors linked anti-Semitism to certain
malignant features of mid-twentieth-century Western, and American, society. Convinced that apparatuses of socio-economic, political and cultural domination—such as what they called “the culture industry”—tended to oppress human beings, they claimed that these apparatuses created clusters of ideas that they then offered to individuals, restricting their freedom to that of selecting only among the processed ideational collections. Anti-Semitism was no longer an autonomous idea; it was only a facet of the fascist cluster. From this perspective, the hatred, the authors suggested, could, indeed, be said to be waning.

Together with the dissection in Studies, Dialectic’s inquiry into anti-Semitism constituted the Frankfurt School’s historic examination of ethnic prejudice. It was the most extensive and comprehensive analysis of its kind until then. Similar in magnitude was the confrontation with the hatred and Jewish identity of the study’s last intellectual—Arendt. She devoted three landmarks in her work to interpreting the problematic: her biography Rahel Varnhagen, the tremendously controversial Eichmann in Jerusalem, and her magnum opus—The Origins of Totalitarianism.

While developing it in these three forceful studies, Arendt couched her interpretation of anti-Semitism and Jewish identity in two concepts that emerged as fundamental to her work—transcendence and embeddedness. Explicitly or implicitly, they constituted the fundamental conceptual framework of her confrontation with the two issues. Even if often unintentionally, she consistently attempted to understand the two questions in terms of transcendence and embeddedness, unmistakably situating her decades-long interpretation of them in these two main notions.
Arendt examined the problem of Jewish identity in her Varnhagen biography. The study explored its protagonist’s struggles to confront her Jewish origins and construct a workable self. Considering her Jewishness as a grave flaw, the salonnière first escaped and sealed herself off from the inhospitable world around her, converting her self into a self-contained monad of subjectivity. After her denied surroundings broke into and ruptured her closed-off identity, she abandoned it, and embarked on an opposite path—assimilation. But this alternative too proved wrong, as Varnhagen eventually realized that she was unable to erase her Jewishness totally. Towards the end of her life, she began to appreciate and accept it, embracing the part of herself she had once perceived as a disadvantage, and coming to identify as a Jewish pariah. For Arendt, the first two identities Varnhagen pursued were misconceived. Both were based on escapes from her Jewishness—from Jewish history and from her being a product of that history. The flights constituted a repeated, flawed transcendence founded not on a proper coming to terms with Jewishness, but on its evasion. Arendt proposed that a self constructed along the lines of Varnhagen’s third identity—that of a Jewish pariah—represented a viable form of selfhood. Her interpretation argued for a particular kind of embeddedness: an adequate understanding of Jewish history and—grounded on this comprehension—an embrace of that past, as well as a perception and acceptance of oneself as its creation. Such an enlightened, knowledge-based situating of oneself in history would provide the foundation for a positive transcendence that would produce a functional identity. The historical embeddedness had to found and prompt the forging of a distinctly Jewish self, which could—and should—be openly affirmed. This utilization of embeddedness and the formation of an assertive Jewish self constituted an emergence surmounting a Jewish
history of oppression, as well as one’s being its result—a propitious transcendence of both that would create a cogent and working Jewish identity. Varnhagen’s self of a Jewish pariah provided a model for precisely such a viable identity.

The concepts of transcendence and embeddedness defined Arendt’s examination of anti-Semitism as well. In *Origins*, she attempted to understand the phenomenon of Nazism, developing an emphatically unconventional interpretation. In it, she also re-thought and re-wrote the history of anti-Semitism. Famously interpreting Nazism as a novel form of political organization she termed “totalitarianism,” she saw the hatred as one of the new order’s core elements. And she conceived of totalitarianism as a radically destructive and genocidal form of transcendence. The novel system, she argued, had key precursors in the continental pan-movements. Fatefully, these already exhibited a form of transcendence: their anti-Semitism disconnected itself from the factuality of Jewish-gentile relations, while they aimed at seriously re-shaping the political status quo. Aside from these forerunners, the profound dislocations of modernity, and especially the dire socio-economic and political crisis in Germany after the First World War, hurled people into what Arendt called “loneliness.” No mere separation of people from their surrounding human community and historical context, this condition entailed an unhinging of the individual’s self from that context. The extraction of selves constituted a thoroughly negative form of transcendence, which in fact produced mental deformities. Moreover, it made those afflicted with it prone to Nazism. With the help of its virulently anti-Semitic ideology, Nazi totalitarianism drew the masses to itself and mobilized them for its own extremist purposes. It tried to explode and reorganize—to transcend drastically and fundamentally—its current historical context by pursuing global rule. At
its most evil, its concentration camps attempted an unprecedentedly anti-human transgression: “the transformation”—the transcendence—“of human nature itself.”

Conceiving Nazism as a pathological, transgressive, intensely evil transcendence, Arendt also saw in it a moment of embeddedness. The loneliness afflicting the modern masses, she argued, deleteriously affected their minds. It actually terminated thinking. The single activity left alive in the mind was logical reasoning—the logically consistent derivation of conclusions from premises. And these mental deformations exhibited a fateful correspondence. Nazi ideology was markedly logical, in the sense that its depraved ideas were logically consistent. Habituated to logical mental processes, the thought-deprived individuals were ready supporters of Nazism. Nazi totalitarianism caught such people in its (ideo)logical nets, embedded them therein, and mobilized and launched them into the transcendence towards its extremist goals. For those welded to the ideology, it provided their sole and last foundation of identity. Disentangling themselves from it was thus almost impossible.

Arendt dissected the ties between mental processes and ideology in *Origins*. She resumed the exploration of similar links in *Eichmann in Jerusalem*. X-raying Adolf Eichmann, one of the chief perpetrators of the Final Solution, she claimed that his main trait was his inability to adopt, and think from, another’s perspective. In her later work on the mind, Arendt argued that precisely the adoption of and thinking from others’ perspectives was an operation vital to the mental activity of judging. The ability to judge depended to a very significant extent on that perspectival kind of thinking. The study of the Nazi bureaucrat’s trial thus suggested that his judgment was impaired. *Origins* and *Eichmann* then, combined, elaborated another profile of an “authoritarian personality,”
one that focused on its mental traits, not on its psychological structure. For Arendt, its defects included the nonexistence of thinking, aberrant judgment, and naked logical reasoning—itself a symptom of the absence of mental activities.

Arendt believed firmly that Nazi totalitarianism was an unprecedentedly evil historical phenomenon. Its history was therefore an exceedingly tragic story of the reign of sheer horror. But despite the order’s deathly darkness, she still discerned some hope, some promise of a potential resistance of evil. That promise was contained in the mental activities of judging and thinking. For Arendt, judgment was either moral or historical; it was both our moral faculty and the one enabling us to gain historical insight. Judging was the mental activity humans engaged in both when making moral choices and when reflecting on the past. In *Eichmann*, Arendt argued that, during the Nazi regime, the impairment of judgment was a mass occurrence. Not only Eichmann, but the overwhelming majority of Germans lost the ability to exercise moral judgment. And yet, she claimed, a few Germans retained their ability to judge. Despite the crushing grasp of terror, they could still distinguish between right and wrong. Judgment, therefore, survived under Nazism. It constituted one hopeful shield against evil.

Another one was thinking. One main task of Arendt’s last work, *The Life of the Mind*, was to answer a question that had preoccupied her at the time of the Eichmann trial: whether thinking could neutralize evil. Her treatise articulated an affirmative reply. Thinking, she claimed, is an internal, mental dialogue of the self with itself. It is an endless conversation, and one in which the two dialogists—the self and the itself—examine each other. Involving oneself in what is morally objectionable would produce conflict in the mental dialogue, as the self’s dialogic other is likely to criticize it. The
self would rather avoid this internal quarrel, and, indeed, the habituation to both the
dialogue and to its breakdown into friction inculcated a fear of the inner other that could
prevent one’s involvement in immorality. For Arendt, an individual used to thinking
would thus be able to resist evil better. Thinking, like judging, was in this way a second
moral shield. And, both mental activities were means of resisting and escaping moral
iniquity. In this sense, they constituted two forms of a potential transcendence of evil.

These were the designs outlined by the tapestry of the discourse on anti-Semitism
created by the study’s intellectuals. But its discursive embroidery also showed defects
that damaged its representation. The flaws in the discussion of the hatred were many and
serious. They impaired and even destroyed it. And they stemmed from fundamental
facets of the authors’ defining intellectual perspectives—the stances of anarchism, the
apotheosis of art, Critical Theory, and Arendt’s understanding of the human mind and of
history. The perspectival components, moreover, connected the figures solidly to
important historical contexts that they inhabited. The elements showed a dual
significance, functioning as both contextualizing and subversive factors. They anchored
the confrontation with anti-Semitism and Jewish identity in the thinkers’ home contexts.
And they also thwarted it—transformed it into a misunderstanding.

A protracted effort, Lazare’s immersion into the two issues exhibited grave
epistemological deficiencies. While numerous, these inadequacies had two powerful
sources—sets of beliefs that haunted and repeatedly obstructed his work on the
problematic. They were anti-Semitism itself, and what is in many ways its opposite—
anarchism. They persistently damaged Lazare’s sustained confrontation with the poison
and with the related question of Jewish identity. The hatred saturated his first encounter with it, transforming him into its advocate. It then transpired in Antisemitism, distorting the study. Expressing again the prejudice directly, Lazare assumed that anti-Semitic notions had partial validity as tools of historical analysis. He allowed for example stereotypes about suffocating Talmudism to comprise and indeed dominate his explanation of anti-Semitism as a function of Jewish exclusiveness. And anti-Semitism stained, finally, Lazare’s Jewish nationalism. It surfaced even in this bold reaction against it as a denigrated other, tying the courageous vision inextricably to itself, corrupting and disrupting it.

Anarchism too proved troublesome. The rebellious impulse it shared with symbolism formed the context of Lazare’s initial anti-Semitic outbursts, contributing to their viciousness. It appeared also in his history, inspiring him to conclude the somber book with an optimistic, gratuitous evocation of revolution that exploded the study. Lazare then adopted anarchism’s theoretical vagueness, undermining the federative understanding of society and history that constituted the fundamental conceptual framework of his Jewish nationalism. More generally, the doctrine impelled him to conjure a nebulous—and spurious—dream of anarchist tolerance as a panacea for anti-Semitism and the puzzles of Jewish identity. This chimera loomed large particularly behind his nationalism. And it played a deeply negative role, as it broke off Lazare’s engagement with the hatred and Jewish selfhood. As if in an unselfconscious admission of defeat in solving the two issues, he opted for his elusive dream, thereby falling into an evasion of the problems. Propelled by anarchism, he chose to escape from the problematic.
But anti-Semitism and anarchism had an additional significance in Lazare’s work. They were principles that made him a figure of his time, as both were widely shared stances, defining features of turn-of-the-century European society, politics and culture. The former saturated and contaminated French politics at that time, giving rise to an organized, powerful movement, and even exploding into outbursts of violence. The latter became a widespread vogue in France, enchanting the country’s artistic avant-garde. These two factors thus linked Lazare’s confrontation with anti-Semitism and Jewish identity inextricably to his historical context. Borrowed from his milieu, refracted through his outlook, they shaped—and radically disrupted—his attempt to understand the two key issues. These forces, therefore, tended both to demolish Lazare’s efforts and to bind them to the environment of the European fin-de-siècle.

Similar patterns of disruption and contextualization appeared also in Proust. Unexpectedly, anti-Semitism played a part in his treatment of the twofold problematic as well. Together with Jewish identity, the hatred constituted a key object of reflection in Remembrance, but it also afflicted even this most monumental of literary works. Marcel deployed numerous anti-Semitic stereotypes, reiterating and perpetuating prejudices common in European politics, society, and culture. His intermittent anti-Semitism did not function as an obstacle that hindered analytically the examination of the twin concerns. It was, rather, a contaminant that directly poisoned and deformed the interpretation. And then, Proust’s engagement with Jewish selfhood was blighted by the espousal precisely of a principle that made of him an exponent of modern European literature—the notion that art is a lofty, sublime, almost divine pursuit. After a critical, and aloof, confrontation with Jewish identity, he fled determinedly into the ivory tower
of art. His resolute allegiance to an apotheosis of art prompted him to make a dubious leap into literature—a leap of intellectual evasion that shirked the problems of Jewish selfhood—and to leave these puzzles behind, without a resolution. Indeed, he criticized severely and brazenly dismissed the main alternative sources of Jewish identity at the fin-de-siècle: Zionism, assimilation, and a Lazarean affirmation of a Jewish self. In this way he actually exacerbated the conundrums of Jewish identity. His questionable flight into art thus left these issues not only unresolved, but even more acute and perplexed.

The deifying elevation of art was also a fundamental, characteristic and defining tenet of modern European literature. Its embrace anchored Proust in the intellectual-cultural context of modern European literary art, in fact making him a representative, indeed a foremost exemplar, of that art. The other subversive force in Proust’s encounter with the two issues—anti-Semitism—was also a powerful force in an important context—the politics, society and culture of the French, and European, fin-de-siècle. It thus linked Proust to this, second key setting. In a critical resemblance to Lazare’s work, then, these two factors tied Proust’s interpretation of anti-Semitism and Jewish identity to momentous historical contexts that he occupied. One of them a foundational element of his thinking, these historicizing forces, again echoing Lazare’s endeavors, also converted the writer’s understanding of the two problems into a misunderstanding.

Proust’s work on anti-Semitism and Jewish selfhood exhibited another crucial similarity to Lazare’s. Prompted by his perspective of an apotheosis of art, his indulgence in an artistic escape unwittingly followed the trend of a dream-like flight that Lazare’s quests had disclosed. Like the anarchist, the writer too escaped—not into a utopian doctrine, but into literature. But Proust’s getaway had an even further meaning,
showing important echoes in its turn. It actually prefigured a second re-emergence of the
same escapist and now fateful maneuver in the work of the Frankfurt School. The
School’s engagement with anti-Semitism was also marked by an escape: a leap into
theory.

The Frankfurt School’s examination of ethnic prejudice showed many other
deficiencies besides the intellectual escape. As with its French predecessors, two
fundamental constituents of the School’s distinctive perspective—the avant-garde
Critical Theory—disrupted its engagement with prejudice. The destructive perspectival
components were foundational tenets of the Theory. They were its ideological
dimension, and its proposed integration of social theory and empirical research. Both
principles impaired, even fatally, the School’s extensive analysis of prejudice.

Critical Theory’s ideological dimension subverted the investigation of ethnic
prejudice in many ways and on multiple occasions. It distorted Massing’s *Rehearsal for
Destruction*. The Marxist orientation of the study produced a focal skewing, as it
devoted inordinate attention to German Social Democracy’s attitudes *vis-à-vis* political
anti-Semitism in the Second Reich, to the neglect of other, crucial aspects of the hatred’s
history in the country around the *fin-de-siècle*. The Theory’s ideological side also
impaired *Prophets of Deceit*. Echoing its resolutely critical stand towards Western
society, Löwenthal and Guterman singled out the malaise of modern life as the ultimate
source of fascist agitation. They thereby made an unwarranted analytical leap, faulting
the general background of Western affliction, but failing to illuminate accurately the
immediate context of fascist propaganda and how it nourished the malignant agitation.
Even the main volume of *Studies in Prejudice—The Authoritarian Personality*—was marred by the Theory’s ideological factor. More specifically, an exaggerated view of modern Western, and American, society as showing fascist characteristics failed to cohere with the study’s rigorous, empirically grounded investigation. It distorted the examination by directly letting in ideological bias. It appeared in the form of unjustified, free-floating claims, about, for example, a standardization of American society and culture, which were unsupported by, and logically incongruous with, the conclusions based on the empirical research. And it also inspired assertions that conflicted with other arguments of the work, prompting, for instance, pessimistic contentions about ethnic prejudice in the book’s contemporary society that the analysis elsewhere opposed. The study’s conclusion, moreover, that only a societal reconstitution would abolish prejudice and authoritarianism was very much gratuitous. The volume’s analysis did not warrant this claim, which thus constituted an empty affirmation of a *deus ex machina* solution. Reflecting the Theory’s position of adamant critique was also an utterly crucial conflict between the work and another one of the *Studies, Dynamics of Prejudice*. While *The Authoritarian Personality* argued that non-conformity was related to ethnic tolerance, *Dynamics*, conversely, claimed that freedom from prejudice was linked to conformity. This was perhaps the greatest defect in the whole series, a momentous contradiction in which the two main studies of the prejudiced individual articulated diametrically opposite explanations.

Rounding off, finally, the series of flaws in *Studies* spawned by Critical Theory’s ideological dimension was Ackerman and Jahoda’s *Anti-Semitism and Emotional Disorder*. It too indulged in a negativism inspired by the Theory’s ideological side,
condemning what it saw as pernicious tendencies in the American family, and in American society at large, in the middle of the twentieth century. The work’s bitter criticism of the family lacked the foundation that would have justified it: a thorough analysis of the actual condition of the family institution in the United States at that historical juncture. No more warranted was the book’s dark view of mid-twentieth-century America. It was not based on rigorous investigations of the critical tendencies that the authors linked to anti-Semitism, whose deployment could have justified the condemnation of these trends as pathological, demonstrated more solidly how they bred the prejudice, and indeed proven more rigorously that they did so. The stern charges against American society did have a foundation, but one that was inadequate—the study’s miniscule sample and limited data.

Aggravating the damage of the Frankfurt School’s ideological dimension was its other disruptive perspectival facet. Its advocated fusion of social theory and empirical research also operated destructively in its investigation of prejudice. The proposed integration impaired Prophets of Deceit. While Löwenthal and Guterman elaborated a complex, rigorous, highly theoretical dissection of the fascist propaganda’s contents, appeal, and techniques of manipulation, they never supplemented their examination with an empirical analysis of its actual effects. The authors produced a conceptually dense scrutiny of the agitation, but they did not demonstrate if those exposed to it experienced it in the way they suggested. Intensely theoretical interpretation in their case did not cohere with down-to-earth research, supplanted it in fact, producing a conceptually weighty, but empirically free-floating, investigation.
An incongruity between theorization and research was also evident in *The Authoritarian Personality*. Besides distorting the study by reflecting the Theory’s ideological side, theoretical speculation produced ideas that did not synchronize with the findings of the empirical research, as they were unsupported by, and stood out from, the latter. Adorno’s views on social and cultural standardization exemplify this slippage too, as, besides reflecting Critical Theory’s ideological dimension, they were also the direct fruits of rigorous theoretical reflection—run somewhat rampant. Theory and empirically grounded analysis thus did not reinforce each other in the volume. Rather, a fissure emerged between them that rendered them incoherent.

*Emotional Disorder* too showed this kind of discord. Ackerman and Jahoda’s reproofs of American society, as we noted, were not substantiated adequately, and were thus partially gratuitous; and they were motivated by Critical Theory’s ideological factor. But the reproofs also betrayed a critical disjuncture between theoretical speculation and empirical research. The accusatory claims were not backed up solidly by empirical evidence. The negative portrait of America’s society did not have such an utterly indispensable foundation. Its substantiating basis was the limited accumulated information on the study’s own—and profoundly tiny—sample of individuals. Here rigorously theoretical interpretation ran away, as it were, from empirical research. And its flights produced and appeared as free-standing contentions, unsound arguments that weakened the work.

But the principle of integrating theorization and empirical research produced its widest divergence in the disparity between the analysis of prejudice in *Studies* and the reflections on anti-Semitism in *Dialectic*. The incoherence between research and
theorization surfacing in the series culminated in the discord between its own intense empiricism and the rigorously, highly speculative philosophical treatise. Perhaps the key flaw of Horkheimer and Adorno’s interpretation of the hatred was its lack of historical specificity. Their theoretical reflections explained woefully little about the rise of anti-Semitism in Nazi Germany, and indeed about the hatred’s history in any period and context. Moreover, the inquiry’s detachment from historical realities transformed it into an intellectual escape. Deliberately distanced from both empirical research and actual contexts, it constituted a solipsistic flight into theory. By indulging in such an exercise, the two Frankfurt School philosophers replicated the earlier choices of their two French predecessors. Horkheimer and Adorno also fled, only towards self-sufficient theoretical thought. And their escape was no less exalted than those of Lazare and Proust—and no less dubious.

The Frankfurt School’s examination of ethnic prejudice thus resembled the thinking of Lazare and Proust in its escapist tendency. But also similar to the work of the fin-de-siècle figures was the constellation and the operation of the factors that stymied the School’s dissection of the hatred. Intended to explain the prejudice and thereby contribute to discovering a cure for it, its analytical enterprise was founded on basic principles of its then cutting-edge epistemological perspective—Critical Theory. Precisely two of those tenets—a stance of resolute criticism of twentieth-century Western society and a call for an integration of social theorization and empirical research—became major obstacles in the investigation of anti-Semitism. Originally meant to enable social scientific inquiry, to confront and solve both theoretical and very real historical issues, these principles turned out to be analytically disabling. Aimed at
helping to find a remedy for the hatred, they ended up inhibiting the search for such a medicine, exactly when it was most urgently needed. And these troublemaking conceptions, moreover, anchored the Frankfurt School firmly in Western Marxism and in empirical, positivistic social science, two veritably central contexts of modern European intellectual history. As in the cases of Lazare and Proust, then, fundamental and defining constituents of the School’s distinctive perspective both connected it—and its work on anti-Semitism—to momentous historical contexts and reduced the largest scholarly undertaking until then to understand the hatred into a misunderstanding. Key perspectival ideas proved to be two-faced again, operating as both contextualizing and destructive forces.

And the two-facedness emerged, finally, in Arendt’s confrontation with anti-Semitism and Jewish identity. As we noted, she elaborated her examination of the issues in terms of the concepts of transcendence and embeddedness. In her work, she assigned the former an emphatically positive value, exemplified in her intense and famous stress on beginnings. The latter, as transcendence’s opposite, was necessarily negative, signifying, for instance, the absence of beginnings. These valuations notwithstanding, Arendt’s engagement with anti-Semitism and Jewish selfhood disclosed the concepts as radically ambivalent. They did assume their expected forms, but they also appeared in paradoxical, diametrically opposite guises. The supposedly bad embeddedness surfaced as a positive, propitious concept. Transcendence, by contrast, came to mean delusion and hopelessness, as it pointed towards auspicious choices that turned out to be unfeasible. Showing, moreover, an incomparably darker meaning, it became the equivalent of the unprecedented evil of Nazism. Most importantly, these conceptual ambiguities and
contradictions corresponded to breakdowns in Arendt’s interpretation of anti-Semitism and Jewish identity.

These ambiguities unfolded disruptively in Arendt’s examination of Jewish selfhood. Exploring Varnhagen’s identity struggles, Arendt characterized as misguided her protagonist’s choices of a flight into subjectivity and assimilation. These two quests of a viable self were in fact forms of transcendence—of detachment and escape from Jewish history and from Varnhagen’s being its product. Transcendence therefore appeared here as negative, as wrong and downright bad pursuits. Opposing these options was the alternative Arendt advanced. Paradoxically assigning embeddedness a positive value, she demanded an adequate understanding of Jewish history, which would then enable an embracing of it and a perception of oneself as its product. This situating of the self in context would found the transcendence of that context that would lead to the forging of the viable self of a Jewish pariah. This propitious form of transcendence, however, turned out to be a chimerical, unfeasible project. As Arendt envisioned it, it had to be based on a comprehension of Jewish history. But the acquisition of such a vital understanding emerged as impossible. It was rendered implausible by Arendt’s conception of judgment. In her inquiry into the mind, she conceived judging as the mental activity of historical insight, the faculty we use to evaluate and understand the past. Judging, in her scheme, depended vitally on one’s belonging to a human community; it was also dependent on general principles or examples, which one could utilize as criteria of evaluation, and, applying them to the past, appraise and understand it. In Varnhagen’s biography, however, all these indispensable prerequisites for judgment were non-existent. Neither a community, nor principles, nor examples were to
be found in the story of her life. She thus never possessed the aids that could have enabled her to exercise proper historical judgment, and to thereby acquire the knowledge of Jewish history requisite for constructing her identity of a Jewish pariah. Unsurprisingly, she never attained the adequate historical understanding she needed. Requiring such a comprehension, the identity that Arendt proposed as a viable form of self was forged without its epistemological foundation. It was thus deeply implausible, an illusory resolution to the conflicts of Jewish identity. And as it was constituted by, and resulted from, an overcoming of Jewish history, that transcendence too turned out to be illusory. It was a chimerical, defective, infeasible—a negative—project.

Similar ambivalences also impaired Arendt’s examination of anti-Semitism. The core of her investigation of the hatred was found in *Origins*, one of the first and most rigorous attempts to understand the Nazi regime. To explain it, she departed from conventional methods of historical analysis and forged her own historiographical approach. Conceiving transcendence as inherent in history—in the sense that events constitute entities that necessarily surpass, are always something more than, their contexts—she deliberately adopted that transcendence, disengaged the event of Nazism from its context, and set out to dissect this exceedingly pathological segment of history. Thus building transcendence into her method of analysis, Arendt interpreted Nazi totalitarianism as a radically destructive transgression, an unprecedentedly evil form of transcendence. But focused as it was exclusively on the particular historical development, Arendt’s approach led her to elide crucial historical contexts, which constituted vital components of the history of Nazi totalitarianism and anti-Semitism. These left-out contexts resurfaced in the interpretation, showing that Nazism was in fact
firmly embedded in them. Their appearances subverted Arendt’s claims, revealing Nazi totalitarianism as an historical development defined by contextual embeddedness. And the main source of these interpretative entanglements was Arendt’s transcendence-based method. Transcendence, then, emerged again as an illusory, faulty, and unworkable—as a negative—project. Only this time it showed defects not as a route towards a viable self, but as conceptual material forged into an historiographical method.

And transcendence turned out to be a chimera in Arendt’s views on the potential resistance of evil. Inside the Nazi storm of terror, according to her, a few Germans were still able to exercise moral judgment. These people thus, in fact, succeeded in resisting, in transcending, evil. And then, in theory, thinking, for Arendt, constituted a shield against evil. The mental activity of inner dialogue prepared the individual to escape from evil. But both of these hopeful visions of overcoming moral iniquity were destabilized fatally—in theory and in fact—by Arendt’s conception of judging and thinking. The few resisters of Nazism in Germany were placed in a condition that was similar to the earlier, hopeless situation of Varnhagen. Just like historical judgment, moral judgment also required a human community. It too depended on the presence of general principles, or of suitable examples that it could use to determine what is moral and what is not. The few Germans who escaped the grasp of Nazism did not have any of those necessary prerequisites of judgment. How their moral judgment survived—how they were, actually, able to transcend the grip of wickedness—thus remained a mystery. On Arendt’s conception of the mind, their judgment should have disappeared. Her inquiry into mental activities, conversely, proposed that thinking constituted, in principle, a means of withstanding evil. But what her analysis in Origins showed was that modernity
started destroying thinking before the Nazi regime. By the time Nazism had established and consolidated its hold on Germany, thinking had been radically undermined. The question of whether it could help individuals defy evil was no longer relevant, because it was threatened with extinction. The potential transcendence of evil that Arendt discerned in thinking too proved illusory. As with judging, the hopes it inspired also evaporated. In both cases, transcendence turned out to be impossible, a hopeless chimera.

Arendt’s interpretation of anti-Semitism and Jewish identity was thus obstructed and subverted by her conceptions of mental activities and of history. These two sets of views constituted her distinct intellectual stances, the distinguishing perspectives that characterized and defined her work. The standpoints incorporated concepts from continental philosophy, especially the thought of Kant, and from ancient Greek historiography. She borrowed—and in some cases re-thought, re-articulated and developed further—concepts from these two vital parts of Europe’s intellectual tradition, and worked them into her perspectives. This dialogic conceptual interaction anchored her thinking, including that on anti-Semitism and Jewish identity, in the two contexts of European historiography and philosophy. Moreover, as it reflected her philosophical training, while the two segments of the Western heritage exerted a powerful influence on academics and intellectuals in Europe around the middle of the twentieth century, Arendt’s conceptual interaction transformed her into a representative of both the German and the European academic and intellectual circles of that time. Her two distinctive intellectual stances thus tied her work on anti-Semitism and Jewish selfhood to historically significant contexts that she participated in and inhabited. And they
damaged, disorganized, and downright destroyed her sustained attempt to understand the two issues, transforming it into—one more—misunderstanding.

This model of contextualization and epistemological failure thus characterizes the engagement with anti-Semitism and Jewish identity of all the study’s intellectuals. In all of their sustained, devoted, arduous—indeed sometimes heroic—confrontations with the two issues, the main sources of trouble were basic elements of their intellectual perspectives. Foundational facets of their thinking were the forces that debilitated their interpretations of the critical problematic, and turned their historical-psychological discourse into a misunderstanding. These same destructive factors powerfully reflected critical, often immensely significant, historical contexts that the figures inhabited and even helped create. The damaging forces connected the figures firmly to these settings, frequently converting them and their work into the milieus’ exemplars. As this pattern operated in all of the interpretations of anti-Semitism and Jewish identity, it emerges as something hopelessly inescapable, an inexorable trap of sorts. It begins to resemble a fateful matrix, thwarting the authors’ examination of the two issues. The matrix suggests that both the intellectuals’ home contexts and fundamental aspects of their ideas and work were closely related to the failures of their attempts to understand their problematic. It exposes as epistemological culprits intellectual forces that were more intrinsic—to the figures’ thought and to Europe’s intellectual tradition—than what might have been expected. But then again, the supremely critical issue of anti-Semitism that the authors’ discourse attempted to confront was itself much more intrinsic to European history than what probably all of us would like.
This, then, is the landscape of ideas that a general, parting look at the study’s intellectuals reveals. From this final perspective, what are the grand panorama’s most notable echoes? Once it recedes from view, what are the implications of it that are worthy of remembrance? What, indeed, are those that are worth regaining?

A key one is a possible answer to the conundrum of anti-Semitism’s continuing existence. The discourse on the hatred created by the study’s figures was a truly monumental endeavor. It was constructed over the course of several decades, incorporated landmark works and avant-garde ideas, and its authors included some of the greatest intellectuals in modern European history. But despite its monumentality, the discourse was also, in many ways, a failure. It showed inadequacies and defects that fatally damaged it. The Frankfurt School hoped that it could explain the hatred, and that the explanation would then serve as a basis for the discovery of a remedy for it. But the endeavors of the study’s intellectuals did not fulfill such hopes. Over time, the authors conceived and classified anti-Semitism as a grave pathology, but they were unable to move it into the category of curable illnesses by explaining it conclusively. And several decades after their discourse, we are very much in the same position. For us too, anti-Semitism is a devastating scourge that we have not yet comprehended adequately. This deficiency of knowledge may well be a key reason why the pathology still afflicts us, all too often and very gravely, and despite the tremendous effort of the modern humanities, social sciences, and independent intellectuals—exemplified powerfully by this study’s discourse on anti-Semitism—to unravel the fateful conundrum of what it is.

Given, then, that the study’s figures failed to articulate a definitive remedy for anti-Semitism, what, in view of their discourse, are we to do with the hatred now? What
is the bearing of their work on potential strategies against, and solutions for, anti-Semitism—as an intensely critical intellectual problem, and as a very real evil? Are there any such solutions and what are they?

The intellectuals’ discourse on anti-Semitism, though showing many, critical and often fatal ruptures, did yield knowledge of anti-Semitism and Jewish identity. We do know more about both issues as a result of it—and we know them better. Parts of it did supply sound knowledge of the hatred, which we still find valid, rely on, and use. Its historical current offers good examples. Lazare’s *Antisemitism* is a well-researched book, which is a cogent part of its subject’s historiography. So too, and much more powerfully, is Massing’s *Rehearsal for Destruction*. But the work of our *dramatis personae* supplied—or so this study hopes—another category of insights, ones that the thesis tried to discover. This is a knowledge of the authors’ failures—of explanations and ideas that malfunctioned, showed defects, proved inadequate, and of how they did so. Because of the thinkers’ discourse, we know, hopefully, what did *not* work in attempts to understand anti-Semitism and Jewish identity. One product of the figures’ discussion is, perhaps, a negative knowledge—an understanding of past misunderstanding. Besides the discourse’s positive, “true” aspects, this too is knowledge. And perhaps precisely such a retrospective, historical understanding—of intellectual defeat—could eventually help explain anti-Semitism, and contribute to discovering a remedy for it.

A part of such a knowledge of epistemological defeat concerns the sources of failure. The confrontations with anti-Semitism and Jewish identity of the study’s intellectuals were undercut by some of their basic principles and assumptions. Not
insignificant notions, but ideas that were absolutely fundamental to their thinking, that
defined their thought, obstructed their engagements with the two issues. What is more,
these ideas connected the authors to momentous historical contexts that they inhabited.
They were contextualizing factors that pulled the figures towards the historical settings,
and tended to convert them into products and reflections of these milieus. The ideas were
thus both historicizing and destructive forces, linking the intellectuals to their home
contexts, and transforming their understanding of anti-Semitism and Jewish selfhood
into a misunderstanding. A key upshot, therefore, of the authors’ interpretations of the
twofold problematic is that, in efforts to understand and find a cure for the hatred,
foundational premises and tenets of our reasoning may well be critical obstacles standing
in the way of understanding. Moreover, the disruptive concepts and notions could be tied
to, or come from, the contexts we belong to, be they political, cultural, (social) scientific,
humanistic, or historical in general. Another lesson, then, is that a critical examination of
the originary foundations of our thinking, of the ideas that attach us to our intellectual
habitats and of how they do so, and of precisely how these environments influence us, is
an indispensable aspect of attempts at explaining the hatred. In the case of anti-
Semitism, critical self-reflection, not definite ideas, turns out to be a more solid, even if
inherently dynamic, foundation of understanding.

The knowledge—positive and, hopefully, negative—generated by the discourse
on anti-Semitism and reflexive thinking are aids that could be deployed in attempts to
comprehend the hatred, to resolve it as a fateful intellectual conundrum. For now, we do
not completely understand anti-Semitism, and do not possess totally effective remedies
for it. We will perhaps remain in this predicament until we conclusively explain the
hatred, so that the discovery of a treatment can then become possible. But in the meantime, we cannot—and we usually do not—stand idly by, as the evil spreads. There are things we can do to prevent it, alleviate its attacks, and even occasionally cure it. Educational approaches, such as organizing lectures and courses on anti-Semitism, may indeed be too inadequate for ferocious bigots, but they do tutor many into ethnic tolerance. Books and movies on racism, museums, exhibits and talks on the Holocaust, the establishment of institutions and organizations dedicated to combating ethnic prejudice and hatred can all weaken warped ways of thinking. Probably the most effective measures are stringent laws against racism and ethnic hatred, in all their forms. Relatively small scale strategies such as these can make an appreciable difference in fighting anti-Semitism. Perhaps, indeed, endeavors with a comprehensive, global, universalistic, or absolutistic scope and intent—such as projects aimed at providing a conclusive explanation of anti-Semitism, or ones proposing a fundamental societal transformation as its definitive remedy—are misguided. More specific, micro-level strategies, encompassing, at most, the nation, but, above all, focused on small groups and individuals, targeting particular anti-Semitic incidents and cases of lawbreaking, and envisioning fairly small, gradual, incremental improvements, may well provide the right approach to the hatred. These remedies do, in fact, work and have proven to be effective. Anti-Semitism is, indeed, very much alive, and very much destructive, in the twenty-first century, but ethnic tolerance, on an international scale, is much higher today than it was only a short few decades ago. Intolerance has diminished precisely as a result of implementing relatively limited remedial measures. And what is also worthy of reflection is that the main—if not the only—understanding of anti-Semitism these
methods in fact require is the limited one that it is a very dangerous disease. The discourse on anti-Semitism examined here articulated and advanced powerfully this conception. This may well be the key impression of it that is worth remembering, and worth regaining. Paradoxically, the weapons against anti-Semitism that have proven effective do not require a complex and rigorous understanding of it. It may well be, therefore, that such ponderous understandings are, in fact, superfluous. What the discourse on anti-Semitism of the study’s intellectuals suggests is that they, indeed, *are*, since they turn out to be misunderstandings.
Bibliography

Archival Sources

Bernard Lazare Papers. *Bibliothèque de l’Alliance israélite universelle*. Paris, France. The archive holds personal papers of Lazare, and notes and hand-written texts of his, in various stages of completion, related to his journalistic work and to independent researches (for example, historical ones) that he planned and pursued throughout his life.

Leo Löwenthal Archive. Houghton Library. Harvard University. Cambridge, MA. USA. The archive contains material from the Frankfurt School’s period of emigration to the United States. It holds correspondence and personal papers, as well as notes, drafts and various other papers related to academic work and projects, belonging to individuals, including Theodor W. Adorno, associated with the Institute of Social Research during those years.

Primary Sources


___. “De la nécessité de l’intolérance.” Entretiens politiques et littéraires (December 1891): 208-211.


___.“Michel Bakounine.” La Revue blanche (February 15, 1895): 175-178.


___.“Le Fédéralisme révolutionnaire.” L’Écho de Paris (December 12, 1895): 1.


Secondary Sources


