

and the SA band .... The German Evening, provided it is skillfully and grandiosely geared to producing a big public impact, primarily has the task of making the audience enthusiastic for our cause, and secondly to raise the money necessary for the further build-up of propaganda. The preparation of the village meetings should best be carried out in the following way: most effectively through written personal invitations to every farmer or inhabitant. In the bigger villages by a circular, which is carried from farm to farm by party comrades. For the meeting itself, the money question has to be considered. We are such a poor movement that every planning counts. Therefore, it is necessary to hold collections during all discussion evenings as well as in the large mass meetings, if permitted by the police - either in the interval or at the end, even when an entrance fee had been taken at the beginning of the meeting. In this way, surprising amounts can sometimes be got out of a meeting, especially when plates and not caps are used, in which trouser buttons and small coins can disappear unseen.<sup>2</sup>

The successes that the National Socialists gained with the rural peasants were not uniform by any means. The young agricultural workers seemed to accept and support the National Socialists, while the older peasants still supported the Landbund. The National Socialists still had a difficult time breaking into the largely Catholic areas, mainly due to a poorly conceived and executed campaign to win the Catholic vote. The innovation and dedication of the Agrarian Political office can not be understated. The National Socialists won the support of the rural population because they were quick to understand the needs of the people and efficient in organizing a campaign to fit those needs.

It is difficult to gauge the true success of the National Socialist propaganda effort from 1923-1933. For at the time there were no exit polls as the voters departed the polling places and record keeping on voting results varied from region to region and town to town. One can now only look at oral histories or broadly interpretive statistics that can be twisted. For me the numbers are simple; one must only look to the election results to see the successes. Compare the number of popular votes cast to the size of the National Socialist party. It is understandable that members of the NSDAP would support their own party, but why did so many others? The only answer is that they truly believed that the National Socialists had the solutions for the many problems plaguing the Weimar government. The propaganda machine convinced in 1933 44% of all Germans voting that National Socialism was the answer. From 1933-1945, as all governmental systems fell under National Socialist control, the propaganda control was tighter and the techniques became more efficient until it ensured that the German people would support, albeit passively, the dictatorship for another 12 years.

## PRELUDE TO THE HOLOCAUST: PRE-NAZI GERMAN ANTISEMITISM

Chris Sundheim

*Chris Sundheim, a graduate student, wrote this paper on German antisemitism for a course on Nazi Germany. This study attempts to trace the intellectual history of antisemitism in Germany through the writings of 18th and 19th century philosophers, among others. Also discussed are several major historiographical schools of thought.*

There is general agreement among European history scholars that Nazi Germany was a society saturated with rabid antisemitism. In the debate over the German Sonderweg or "separate path," a central question asks whether Hitler's Third Reich regime came to power as the result of a departure from the "natural" or "typical" road of Western European historical evolution.<sup>1</sup>

This query takes on special significance when applied to study of the Holocaust. The antisemitism<sup>2</sup> of Hitler's Germany is well known as the most obvious prelude to the Holocaust, which slaughtered six million Jews and roughly five million others between 1938-1945. What started as furious invective against Jews in German beer halls grew into codified prejudice, forced "relocation to the East" and, eventually, the murder of two-thirds of European Jewry.

But is the antisemitism that immediately preceded the Holocaust linked to previous episodes or figures elsewhere in German history? Or, more precisely,

<sup>1</sup> For a concise discussion of the *Sonderweg* question, see Jorgen Kocka's essay "German History Before Hitler: The Debate About the German 'Sonderweg'" in the *Journal of Contemporary History*, 23 (1988): 3-16. For wider discussions, see Peter Baldwin, ed., *Reworking the Past: Hitler, the Holocaust and the Historian's Debat* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1990); Charles S. Maier's *The Unmasterable Past: History, Holocaust and German National Identity* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988).

<sup>2</sup> The term anti-Semitism was coined in 1879 by Wilhelm Marr, an anti-Jewish activist in Germany, as a seemingly milder substitute for *Judenhass*, Jew-hatred. Application of the term exclusively to Jews is misplaced, of course, since the word "Semites" includes an entire family of Afro-Asiatic peoples and languages such as Hebrew, Aramaic, Arabic and Ethiopic. Some historians and Jewish writers have eliminated the hyphen to dispel the idea that there exists an object "Semitism" that "anti-Semitism" opposes or counters. (Dennis Prager and Joseph Telushkin, *Why the Jews?*, 199). This study will use the single-word "antisemitism."

does a thread of antisemitism run consistently through the German past, especially in the 19th century, when the first elements of Nazi ideology were emerging? This study aims to explore these questions.

Antisemitism has a history stretching back before Hellenistic times, but the treatment here will be limited primarily to 19th-century Germany. First, however, it is important to understand the roots of German antisemitism as they took shape in the early modern era, in large part with the teachings of Martin Luther. Then our focus will turn to the writings of major 19th-century German philosophers who promoted Enlightenment-era antisemitism and others who influenced the Romantic and Nationalist movements. Finally, we will examine the rise of racialist Jew-hatred near the end of the 1800s.

This paper seeks to argue that the German tradition of antisemitism, though it did not lead inexorably to the Holocaust, helped create the ideal intellectual atmosphere for the Nazi regime's racial precepts to form and flourish.

## I. PRE-MODERN ANTISEMITISM

Antisemitism stands alone as perhaps the world's oldest form of ethnic prejudice. The oldest reference to Jews in a non-Jewish source, the Mernephta stela, written by an Egyptian king about 1220 B.C., speaks of attempts to destroy them.<sup>3</sup> Although group hatred of "the other" has existed since time immemorial, no other form of hatred as been "as universal, as deep, or as permanent as antisemitism."<sup>4</sup> Jews have been expelled, at various times, from almost every nation where they have lived, from the Roman Empire in the first century to the modern Islamic states comprising most of the Middle East. Nearly every one of the world's greatest powers with a substantial Jewish population has regarded this minority as a pernicious enemy.

Christian hostility toward Jews grew (and indeed persists) out of a complex set of social and theological traditions. Jews, by their refusal to accept the Savior, represented an imminent threat to Christendom. Jews were said to have been principally responsible for killing Christ; they were the worst kind of heretics, seemingly unrepentant creatures who fed off the very blood of honest, faithful Christians. A corollary to these beliefs that gained gradual acceptance

3 Dennis Prager and Joseph Telushkin, *Why the Jews?* (New York: Simon and Schuster), 18.

4 *Ibid.*, 17.

held that Christ could not return in the Second Coming until Jews accepted the Christian Church's self-evident truths.

Germany has been no exception to the historical development of antisemitism. Martin Luther emerged as the first German theological figure to write at length about the Jews and their perilous relationship with Christians. In his early writings, Luther adopted a somewhat benevolent attitude toward Judaism, saying, in effect, that Jews needed the help of pious Christians to reform their ungodly ways. They were not inherently evil beings, he held. They were just slow to warm to fundamental Christian truths. They deserved charity for conversion.<sup>5</sup>

But by the mid-16th century, Luther had given up his initial hope that the Jews might be brought into the Christian community. Jews, he said, in league with the papacy, were abridging the Germans' Christian and political "freedoms." In 1543, Luther wrote that the Jews, having murdered Christ, were now determined to crucify the German people. They were extorting money from the German people through their greedy usury and denigrating German culture by their sheer presence and conspicuous "Jewishness."<sup>6</sup> Luther's hysterical essay "Against the Jews and Their Lies" accused the Jews of seeking to destroy not just Christianity, but specifically the German people. This vitriolic polemic foreshadowed the paranoia that would accompany later German antisemitism:

...the Jews are lords of the world and all the gentiles flock to them ... giving the noble princes and lords of Israel all they have, while the Jews curse, spit on and malign the Germans. ... They say that God is to kill and exterminate all of us Germans through their messiah, so they can lay their hands on the land, the goods and the government of the whole world. ...

We are at fault in not avenging all this innocent blood of our Lord and Churches and ... the blood of the children which they have shed since then, and which still shines forth from their Jewish eyes and skin. We are at fault in not slaying them.<sup>7</sup>

Luther spelled out how he thought Germany should go about eliminating the Jewish threat: "burn the houses and synagogues of the Jews; ban their rabbis under pain of death; withdraw safe-conduct rights for Jews on the highway;

5 P.L. Rose, *German Question/Jewish Question* (Princeton: Princeton University Press) 4-6.

6 *Ibid.*

7 Cited in Rose, 6-7.

8 *Ibid.*



confiscate their wealth and expel them from Germany." Luther compares the Jews to "mad dogs." They "have been and still are our plague, our pestilence, our misfortune!"<sup>9</sup>

Thus, according to P.L. Rose<sup>9</sup>, Luther began to forge aspects of a specifically German antisemitism. The traditional Christian stereotype of Jews as parasites and Satanic accomplices was melded with German sentiments of self-pity, victimization and xenophobia. Luther then gives shape to the first suggestions that Germany's prosperity is tied to her expulsion of the Jews. Rose, though he casts serious doubt on the "Luther to Hitler" school of German historical thought, recognizes in the two leaders uniquely German traits, despite the obvious distance in time and religious conviction. They were both nationalist charasmatics who staged revolutions that positioned "Germanness" and "Jewishness" as naturally opposing forces. Never could the two co-exist.

This concept of a Germany held hostage by the Jews seems to have received some of its earliest airings through Luther in the 16th century. But the idea resurfaced often, and it became an integral part of German Jew-hatred. The myth of Ahaversus, the Wandering Jew, was a popular vehicle to teach the evils of Jewish character. The Wandering Jew is a late medieval tale that reportedly demonstrates Jewish wickedness and proves that followers of Judaism are cursed by God Himself. A Lutheran cleric in 1542 attached the proper name Ahaversus to the myth after he met an aged, bearded Jew with the name in Hamburg. The Wandering Jew, according to the church's teachings, had jeered at Christ on his way to crucifixion at Golgotha. For his sins, God cursed the Jew to wander the world in a joyless existence until he might finally be redeemed at the Last Judgement.<sup>10</sup>

When the tale was published in 1602 as the Brief Description and Account of a Jew Named Ahaversus, it gave pause for reflection across Europe and ran through nearly 50 editions within a few years. The Wandering Jew myth in the

9 Rose's exhaustive *German Question/Jewish Question*, revised in 1992, is a useful but combative study of German antisemitism from Luther's time to the closing years of the 19th century. Rose's book is primarily an intellectual history of German antisemitism. He argues, in essence, that an unbroken chain of "revolutionary" antisemitic thoughts connect traditional and modern antisemitism. This thesis, not surprisingly, has provoked several strong retorts in the academic community, most notably Karl Menges: "A nother Concept in the Sonderweg Debate?" in *German Studies Review* 18 (1995) 2: 290-314.  
10 *Ibid.*, 23-25.  
11 *Ibid.*, 23-43.

18th and 19th centuries took many different shapes at the hands of German writers, poets and artists, but always kept its distinctly anti-Jewish themes.<sup>11</sup> It was, of course, only one of many such popular myths of the period that portrayed the Jews in such a negative light.

Ahaversus was not merely one wayward Jew who had heckled Christ. He represented the collective guilt of the entire Jewish nation, a sinfulness for which all Jews were expected to seek redemption. The Wandering Jew explained to many puzzled Christians the wandering, homeless Jewish nation. And its dramatic conclusion (that the Jew could be redeemed only through death) conjured violent solutions to the perceived problem. The tale also served as justification: The Jews were rightfully punished by the Creator by being allowed to live only in pain and oppression. Good Christians then would help enforce God's punitive measure by treating Jews with contempt.<sup>12</sup>

The Ahaversus myth in the late 18th and early 19th century acquired new aspects again to include *Verjudung*<sup>13</sup> and *Entjudung*, or "Jewification" and "de-Jewification." If the Wandering Jew represented the alien presence of Jews within German society, the *Verjudung* was the contamination of German culture with Jewish culture. This reverse assimilation alarmed Germans. They feared being the unwitting victims of a Jewish cultural attack that aimed to destroy the Germanic way of life. The most urgent imperative then was to expel the corrupting Jewish influences in waves of antisemitism.

One also should add to this matrix of ethnic and religious components the perennial questions of German national identity. Rose suggests that the search for German "authenticity" preoccupied many Germans; exactly what is German? they asked. The crude answer they received: "whatever is not Jewish." Thus, the German Question was inextricably linked to the Jewish Question. And the only answer to the latter was through drastic means that would purge Germany of its Jewish cancer. Luther had helped lay the groundwork for this

12 *Ibid.*, 40-43.  
13 Coined by Wagner in 1850, but the idea is at least as old as Luther's writings.  
14 *Ibid.*, 42-43.

outlook that Germany was in danger of destruction by a Jewish-Papist-Satanic conspiracy. As Rose writes, "This mythological universe, this state of mind, did not make Hitlerism inevitable—but it made it possible."<sup>14</sup> The 19th century would see German philosophers revisit these aspects of antisemitism and add to them new facets of race and secularism.

## II. ANTISEMITISM IN THE ENLIGHTENMENT

The ideals of the Enlightenment in 18th-century Europe embraced secular philosophy and cast doubt on old lines of religious separation. The Enlightened Philosophes considered Christianity a superstitious relic and an obstacle to advancement of the critical mind. This change in mindset improved the status of Jews throughout Europe to varying degrees. Until the 19th century, Jews lived in Germany only with the consent of kings, lords, princes and other nobles. German-Jewish communities were subject to myriad restrictions and exploitations. Pogroms, extraordinary taxes, limits on land ownership and bans on intermarriage with Gentiles were just a few of the most common prejudicial laws that applied to Jews.

With the end of the Napoleon Era in Central Europe, and the full spread of Enlightenment ideals, Jews were granted new freedoms in Germany. Western European leaders experimented with religious tolerance for a time. Jews in France, Holland, Austria and Prussia were granted basic citizenship rights, although not without opposition, as early as the 1830s and 1840s. By the Revolution of 1848, Jewish franchise was supported by many Christians. Jewish rights were codified by 1869 and included in the German Constitution of 1871.<sup>15</sup>

Much of the German antisemitism in the 19th century had as a chief component this question of Jewish emancipation and civil rights. In some corners of European society, Jews and Gentiles enjoyed exceptionally good relations free of the animosity and division that characterized previous social contact. Still, public opinion was fluid, and governmental tolerance waxed and waned throughout this part of the century.

Antisemitic Christian dogma was still in abundant supply, but it was

<sup>15</sup> Sarah Gordon, *Hitler, Germans and the Jewish Question* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), 7–8.

gradually being undermined by German thinkers, who, according to Joseph Katz, staged an "ideological counterattack," which sought to prevent Enlightenment-minded leaders from granting Jews full rights and privileges. They attacked Jews not for their religion alone but for their social strangeness.

This revision represents an increasingly secular brand of antisemitism. Enlightenment antisemitism moved away from the stereotypes of the Church, although many Christian ideas persisted in popular thought and continued to color perceptions of Jews.<sup>16</sup>

Many writers wrestled with the question of how Jews, who had lived for generations in relative isolation from the rest of society, could ever be part of a vision for an authentic, homogeneous Germany. Most authors who addressed this issue based their arguments on conversion of Jews to Christianity as the primary prerequisite for assimilation, if assimilation could ever be fully achieved. Central to these discussions then was whether the negative, anti-Christian characteristics of Jews were an innate and immutable trait or something that could conceivably change over time with teaching. This appeal to convert, however, did not stem from doctrinal conviction. It was to represent the Jews' sincerity in joining the rest of the German community.

Immanuel Kant and his friend Johann Gottlieb Herder were late 18th-early 19th century philosophers who condemned the Jews with an admixture of Enlightenment ideas and traditional prejudice. Their writings leave behind a puzzling record that at once embraces the idea of a universalist society welcoming all groups and yet condemns the Jews. Rose classifies Kant and Herder as "moralist" German thinkers. Their particular brand of antisemitism portrayed Jews as amoral beings, almost without feeling or emotion. Jews, they insisted, had no love, no honesty, no remorse and were incapable of appreciating the arts or engaging in useful work.

A notable aspect of their writings is the apparent guise of objectivity. Both men are decidedly hostile toward Jews, but their Jew-hatred is cloaked in a historical rationalism that seeks to explain the evils of Jewry with almost scholarly detachment. Kant, in his 1798 work *Anthropology*, writes:

Certainly it seems strange to conceive of a nation of cheats, but it is just as

<sup>16</sup> Joseph Katz, *From Prejudice to Destruction* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1980), 51–57.



strange to conceive of a nation of traders, most of whom — tied by an ancient superstition — seek no civil honor from the state where they live, but rather to restore their loss at the expense of those who grant them protection as well as from one another. ... Instead of vain plans to make this people moral, I prefer to give my opinion on the origin of this peculiar constitution of a nation of traders. ... [Kant argues that ancient Israel lay on the crossroads of commerce and that after their exile the Jews carried their trading habits across the globe.] ... The religious and linguistic unity of this people was not a curse but a blessing. ... The wealth of this people, calculated per capita, exceeds probably the wealth of every other people of equal numbers.<sup>17</sup>

Another antisemitic writer whose philosophy was to help shape German Jew-hatred was Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel. Hegel's writings on the Jewish Question were rooted in his philosophy of history and law, not so much in his well-known philosophy of religion. His outlook, however, is replete with apparent contradictions between a seemingly "liberal" philosophy of Jews as full citizens and Jews as social outcasts who should be rejected by their contemporaries.

Hegel thought Jews had outlived their historical purpose in ancient times. They were now ghosts of Ahaversus, a useless entity wandering without land or any earthly reason for being. Jews, having been outmoded by successive religions, belong to history. They are, he said, a "fossil-nation." This was yet another example of Jewish "stubbornness," the refusal to leave the world stage and pass into history.

All the conditions of the Jewish people, including the wretched, abjectly poor, and squalid state they are still in today, are nothing more than the consequences and developments of their original destiny — an infinite power that they desperately sought to surmount — a destiny that has maltreated them and will not cease to do so until this people conciliates it by the spirit of beauty, abolishing it as a result of this conciliation.<sup>18</sup>

Hegel also subscribed to the Kantian ideas that Jews, by refusing to accept the love of Christ, had become parasites on the Christian community. Without taking the Savior into their hearts, they are loveless and unloved. The only escape from this "animal existence" is a rapid, total emancipation, which, though it is not explained specifically, would seem not to differ much from conversion to Christianity.<sup>19</sup>

17 Cited in Rose, 94.

18 Cited in Rose, 111.

19 Rose, 109–116.

Hegel, however, supported civil rights for Jews. His liberal legal philosophy suggested that the state, as a power of reason and rationality, view all its inhabitants as relative equals. Rose attributes this apparent contradiction to a deeper respect for law, order and love of justice. It is not, he insists, indicative of any genuine sympathy toward the Jews.

Hegel often is described as more tolerant than most of his contemporaries in his rejection of antisemitism. Some historians who support this contention point to his liberal reasoning on civil rights and his condemnation of pogroms. But they overlook his fundamentally antisemitic social philosophy. Hegel may have indeed been more tolerant of Jewish participation in public affairs, but he still possessed a decidedly anti-Jewish view of European society.

Hegel, in his later writings, developed some level of "respect" for Judaism. His Jewish students, using Hegel's dialectic of history, told him the Jews persisted in the modern world because of their unique "life cycle." Judaism represents the purest form of monotheism, they said, and it is their special faith that has permitted Jews to survive without a state. This and other character re-evaluations even led Hegel to write that perhaps perceived Jewish "stubbornness" was actually an "admirable firmness."<sup>20</sup>

Still, it would be a mistake to assume that Hegel shed his anti-Jewish persona in his mature writing. Hegel did not subscribe to the sharpest forms of antisemitism; he sought to understand Judaism, not just to destroy it. His most important contributions to the German antisemitic tradition may have occurred later, when other philosophers expanded on many Hegelian ideas regarding the Jews.

Hegel's influence was enduring. His teachings acquired a following among several other notable 19th-century German writers, who called themselves Young Hegelians. Their numbers included names such as Karl Gutzkow, Heinrich Laube and the political tracts of Moses Hess and Karl Marx. Young Hegelians did what their role model had avoided doing, except perhaps in his very early writings: to link the Jewish stereotype of egoism and domination with Jewish economic selfishness and financial parasitism. This was a

20 Rose, 112–113.

21 Ibid., 116, 252–278.

seemingly natural extension of Hegel's original thoughts, although whether he is truly responsible for it is open to question.<sup>21</sup>

Herder held to similar anti-Jewish lines of reasoning, although, as Rose and Katz argue, he also is frequently misinterpreted to be sympathetic to the Jews. He subscribed to the now-familiar stereotypes of Jewish rootlessness and honorlessness. The problem, he said, in political terms, rests with how many Jews Germany may tolerate:

The Jewish race is and remains in Europe an Asiatic people alien to our region. . . . Whether [Jewish] law and the manners of thinking and living which spring from it belong in our states is no longer a dispute of religion where meanings and beliefs are under discussion, but a single-sided question of state: How many of this alien race, existing under such an alien national constitution, accustomed to such particular manners of thinking and living, pursuing certain business and no others — how many may be dispensed with, how many are useful or detrimental to this [italics Herder's] and not to any other state — that is the problem.<sup>22</sup>

Herder speaks eloquently about a Europe where "one will no longer ask who be Jew and who be Christian."<sup>23</sup> But implicit in this vision of a tolerant society is the requirement that Jews shed their Jewish identity. Only by ceasing to be Jews may they become part of the larger human community.<sup>24</sup>

The influential nationalist Johann Gottlieb Fichte represented an extreme view, that Jews could never truly overcome their Jewishness. The heretical characteristics of Jews were so fundamental to their being as to be beyond modification. Fichte's overall question was this: "Can the Jew break through 'the mighty obstacle before him — which looks insurmountable — in order to achieve love of justice, love of man and love of truth?' Fichte's own answer held that such a Jew would be a "hero and a saint." He could scarcely believe that such a Jew existed anywhere. Fichte believed that, because of their closely held ideas, Jews should be given only basic human rights<sup>25</sup> and "the only way to

22 Cited in Rose, 103.

23 *Ibid.*, 99.

24 See also Katz, 65–70.

25 Although Fichte held to distinctly antisemitic beliefs about Jewish character, he supported human rights for Jews. He was clear, however, in his opposition to civil rights. A fuller discussion of Fichte's beliefs regarding Jewish rights, particularly while he was rector at the University of Berlin, can be found in Paul Sweet's essay "Fichte and the Jews: A Case of Tension Between Civil Rights and Human Rights," in *German Studies Review* 16 (1993) No. 1: 37–48.

26 *Ibid.*, 57.

give them citizenship would be to cut off their heads on the same night in order to replace them with those containing no Jewish ideas."<sup>26</sup>

Kant and Herder, and Fichte to a lesser extent, built on old prejudices to put together a largely secularized form of antisemitism. Their anti-Jewish ideas reinforced old stereotypes, giving them new potency in the Age of Enlightenment. Although Christian doctrine still underpinned many of their themes, history and secular philosophy, not purely religious teachings, provided a generous amount of "evidence" as well. This gradual change in antisemitic rhetoric was critical as Jew-hatred moved from the circles of religious and social discussion to the political arena, where it would take on more importance for conservatives beginning in the mid- and late 19th century:

### III. ANTISEMITISM IN THE NATIONALIST AND NEO-ROMANTIC MOVEMENTS

Before antisemitism became a political tool, however, it was to play a distinct role in the Nationalist and Neo-Romantic ideals that permeated German thought throughout the post-Napoleon era. Unlike the 18th century's first-generation Romantics, post-Enlightenment Romantics struck back at the movement's reason and rationalism and especially its anti-religious ideology. Devotion to the Christian faith was a necessary part of Nationalist Romanticism. It was, in fact, such an integral part of "Germanness," that many Romantic Nationalists considered Christian truth to be acquired quite naturally by any full-blooded German. Jakob Fries held that Christian ethics were so thoroughly absorbed into the German national culture that they were a subtle, yet indispensable, part of a "secular" national spirit. This gave new significance to the Jews' refusal to convert.<sup>27</sup>

Many writers such as Saul Ascher, Jakob Fries and Friedrich Ruhs, began to promote the ideas of the Volk, or German folk community. They looked back to the Middle Ages, Nordic heritage and even to Roman times in a search for national and ethnic identity. Their publications still demanded that Jews accept Christianity, but the Romantics who attacked Jews had more in mind than just religious conversion.

27 Katz, 76–77; Rose, 117–132. See also Peter Pulzer, *The Rise of Political Anti-Semitism in Germany and Austria* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988), 31–34.

The Neo-Romantics stressed a life guided by feeling, by the "inner man" and his indomitable German spirit. Modernity, industrialization and materialism marked the "dead-end" of a genuine culture. The emphasis was a retreat into full, unrestrained emotions and traditional rural values.

George Mosse has argued that antisemitism was not merely a sidelight to the larger volk movement. It was a principal ingredient. The Jew represented, in no small measure, the antithesis to these ideals. Jews were unfeeling and spiritless. They stood for what Germans most feared and despised: materialism, urban living and the strict rationalism that could not appreciate beauty or truth.

German Neo-Romantics believed that authentic cultures possessed, at their core, a collective human soul, the volk. Jews, by their unscrupulous character and their irreligious ways, could not join in this cultural unity. They were forever outsiders and imminent threats. Here again we see German society and Jewish culture positioned as colliding forces. This clashing of values also reinforced the idea that Jews aimed to destroy Germany. Their stark differences undermined the precious folk community.<sup>28</sup>

The movement toward German liberalism in the 1830s-1850s, deserves some attention as it regards antisemitism. At first blush, the very word "liberalism" would seem to suggest an endorsement of Enlightenment principles of tolerance, rationality and a social world free of religious division. But a brief closer look at German liberals clearly calls this concept into question. Even individuals with otherwise tolerant views of European culture and society cast a jaundiced eye toward the Jews.

The standard liberal opinion at this time held that the only realistic answer to the Jewish Question lay in the Jews' acceptance of traditional German mores, laws and customs — in other words, conversion to Christianity. Liberal critics of Judaism avoided condemning the Jews on religious grounds. Instead they judged Jews as destructive in the economic, social and political realms.

Many liberal writers, too, shrouded their Jew-hatred in supposedly scholarly "social science" works that claimed to explain the alien traits of Jews and their incapacity to become part of the larger European community. Liberal writers decried Jews as eternal outsiders but had different ideas about any movement to franchise Jews or grant them other civil rights. Many liberals, like Fichte, just

wanted to grant Jews only human rights. But others would grant them full citizenship rights as a means of integrating them in a practical way with the rest of German society. Alexander Lips wrote that the Jews could never achieve the standard of human perfectibility because their customs were stuck in the ancient past. J.B. Graser, a Bavarian liberal like Lips, wrote about Jews' inability to change and their strange dedication to earning through trade, rather than more labor-intensive work.<sup>29</sup>

#### IV. RACIALIST ANTISEMITISM

A critical chapter in the development of modern German antisemitism came in the mid- to late-19th century in the form of "racialism." Though racialist anti-Jewish arguments would receive their fullest endorsement from Hitler's Nazi Party, they first appeared in the prejudice-charged atmosphere of pre-Imperial Germany. Arthur de Gobineau's essay on the superiority of the Nordic-Aryan race appeared in 1848, and its basic tenets were to resurface in the works of Houston Stewart Chamberlain, Alfred Rosenberg and a host of others.

Wilhelm Marr, who is widely believed to have created the misnomer term "anti-Semitism," breathed new life into racialist theories in 1867 with his book *Der Sieg des Judentums über das Germanentum*<sup>30</sup> which went through 12 editions in six years. He was a journalist who, after losing his newspaper job, apparently blamed his dismissal on the Jewish monopoly of the press. Marr's rhetoric proposed to change antisemitism from a religious-philosophical matter to a question of race and ethnic purity. The time was ripe. Many Germans were increasingly indifferent to religious issues, and pseudo-scientific social Darwinism also was gaining favor. Marr, in his own time, was never particularly active in antisemitic politics, but he laid the framework for racialist arguments to gain a wider following.<sup>31</sup>

The arguments advanced by racialist antisemites are familiar to most students of the Nazi Era and the Holocaust. The Aryan races are superior in moral conduct and genetic composition to Semitic peoples, especially Jews.

29 Katz, 147-155.

30 "The Victory of Judaism Over Germanism, Regarded from the Nondenominational Point of View."

31 Pulzer, 47-50.



The Aryan is honest, pious and hard-working; the Jew is an unfeeling, back-stabbing scoundrel who makes his living at the expense of Gentiles.

German racialism was most often associated with nationalism and closely linked to the notion of the German folk. In a sense, racialism was where the concept of the folk became fused with allegedly scientific theories of nature and ethnic makeup. Racialism was built not on religion, but on mythological ideas of race, the folk community, blood and natural law. Racial thinkers saw all cultures and peoples as being governed by these unchanging "laws." Ethnic groups could be organized and ranked according to these laws, each with its own role in human affairs. Individuals could only hope to live and achieve as nature dictated. Antisemitic racialists treated this theory as scientific fact, a guiding principle for the preservation of European, and especially German, civilization.<sup>32</sup>

With these lines of racial division drawn so clearly, a chief concern for racial antisemities was preventing "blood pollution" or the contamination of one race with the traits of another, lesser group. The Jews, with their reported plans to swallow and "Jewify" German culture, were seen as the largest threat. Elimination of this Jewish threat was also the key to national survival and success. Hermann Ahlwardt wrote in 1890: "The people which first and most thoroughly rid itself of its Jews and thus opens the door to its innate cultural developments is predestined to become the bearer of culture and consequently the ruler of the world." Racial antisemitism, then, with its psychological and political rationale, could be manipulated for an aggressive ideology of nationalism and even imperialism.<sup>33</sup> Hitler simply recast this concept in his own language in *Mein Kampf*: "A state which in the days of race poisoning endeavors to cultivate its best racial elements is bound to become some day the master of the world."<sup>34</sup>

#### V. A NOTE ON THE HISTIOGRAPHY OF GERMAN ANTISEMITISM

The academy has produced an abundance of literature on antisemitism in Germany and throughout Europe in the centuries before the Holocaust. The fact that antisemitism colored European attitudes toward Jews is not in dispute, but historians debate the extent to which this prejudice penetrated all levels of

32 Massing, *Rehearsal for Destruction* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1949), 82-83.

33 *Ibid.*, 83-84.

34 *Ibid.*

society. And they search for the defining trait or traits of German antisemitism that seem to have been a main component of the Holocaust.

One of the most controversial themes on this topic is found in Paul Rose's book *German Question/Jewish Question: Revolutionary Antisemitism from Kant to Wagner*. Rose's ideas have been liberally mentioned in this paper, so it is only fitting to examine briefly criticism of his thesis. Rose's argument is built upon the notion of "revolutionary" German antisemitism that stretches from Luther's writings of the early modern era to prominent late 19th and early 20th century figures.

"Revolutionary" antisemitism, as Rose defines it, should be understood not to mean only antisemitism that is associated with political revolutionaries but has "the broader meaning of an antisemitism that stems from visions of a new world and a new man and from intellectual as well as political revolution."<sup>35</sup> It is this new world view, coupled with a distinctly German self-image, that creates revolutionary Jew-hatred and, as the subtitle suggests, links Kant to Wagner. Rose brings the Holocaust into this matrix by submitting that Jewish "emancipation" by assimilation was analogous to eliminating Jewish identity. This evaporation of Jewish religion and culture, he contends, was an obvious invitation to genocide.

The main problem with the book, says Karl Menges, is Rose's reductionist thinking that seeks to find a direct connection between the German Question, Nazi ideology and the Holocaust. The apparent unifying element, Rose argues, is German "revolutionary" antisemitism. Menges responds with several valuable case studies of Rose's analysis showing what Menges considers "methodological inconsistencies" and "grotesque distortions" of historical facts.<sup>36</sup>

Writes Menges, "To satisfy his [Rose's] need for explanations, he invents continuities that don't exist. Worse, he accuses some of the best minds in German intellectual history of having paved the way for the Holocaust."<sup>37</sup>

It is difficult not to see some validity in Menges' critique, but he appears perhaps to have misread the Rose thesis slightly. Rose is not suggesting a direct, inescapable link between Kant and Auschwitz. He only argues that a peculiarly

35 In Rose, 16-17, footnote 18.

36 Menges, "Another Concept in the 'Sonderweg' Debate," in *German Studies Review* 18, No. 2 (May 1995), 301.

37 *Ibid.*, 309.



German strain of antisemitism existed through the 19th century and helped precipitate the nation's surrender to National Socialism. Rose is careful not to suggest support for what he calls the "Luther-to-Hitler" school of German intellectual history. Certainly the antisemitism of early modern times and the Nazi period shared key characteristics, but even Rose, with his vaguely defined "revolutionary" yardstick, avoids tracing a pathological connection between two radically different men living in and leading Germans of two exceptionally different periods.

As for the criticism that Rose has needlessly maligned the contributions of great 19th-century German philosophers, one need only re-examine Rose's excerpts of their essays. For all their humanist ideals, these were clearly men who clung to many traditional conceptions of Jews. While antisemitic remarks may constitute only a relatively small fraction of their writings, it still testifies to a pervasive bigotry, especially among well-educated Germans. If these deeply intellectual writers and their elite contemporaries thought nothing of expressing such an animus, we may cautiously postulate that much of the German populace might hold to similar notions. Full treatment of these questions cannot be addressed here, but the social backgrounds and lack of advanced education may have rendered many common Germans in the 18th and 19th centuries more susceptible to age-old hatreds. Their bigotry might have been less tempered with Enlightenment teachings.

Many historians besides Rose and Menges have endeavored to trace the intellectual heritage of German antisemitism. Indeed, German history offers a unique case study of group hatred, its many forms and impacts. Many writers, however, do not offer an opposing view of important German thinkers who did not exhibit conspicuous Jew-hatred. Sarah Gordon in her Hitler, Germans and the Jewish Question<sup>38</sup> suggests that antisemitic volkish authors were not the only intellectuals in Germany. Many prominent thinkers did not share the antisemitic outlook of their countrymen, including names such as G.E. Lessing, Friedrich von Schelling, Wilhelm von Humboldt and others.<sup>39</sup>

Another bold new argument connected to this question is Daniel J. Goldhagen's Hitler's Willing Executioners: Ordinary Germans and the Holocaust

<sup>38</sup> Gordon, 26-29.

<sup>39</sup> See Daniel J. Goldhagen, Hitler's Willing Executioners: Ordinary Germans and the Holocaust New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1996. Pp. x., 622.

just published earlier this year.<sup>39</sup> Goldhagen is chiefly concerned with the behavior of common Germans during the war, but his elaborate analytical framework explains many of their actions with the proliferation of "eliminationist" antisemitism, which, he says, was alive in all corners of Germany and at every social level in the 18th and 19th centuries. Goldhagen writes that antisemitism was a "culturally shared cognitive model" throughout the pre-war period that created in the collective German mind the image that all Jews deserved to die.

He also makes a strong argument that the burden of proof in the study of German antisemitism should rest with scholars who insist that Jew-hatred was only a fleeting sentiment that appealed only to a limited slice of the population. For years, this task has fallen to writers who believe the prejudice was widespread. They have had to piece together "proof" of antisemitism, when, Goldhagen insists, traditional methods do not yield the full picture.

Antisemitism was so culturally ubiquitous that its presence leaves little documented evidence. Germans, for the most part, did not take time to record or discuss that which was so generally accepted as to be beyond special mention. Much of that evidence, Goldhagen argues, usually stems from times of national or social crisis, when Germans were more likely to castigate Jews. No one has adequately demonstrated that feelings of tolerance toward Jews came close to equalling, let alone eclipsing, the well-known prejudice against Jews.

Goldhagen spends less than 100 pages discussing pre-Nazi antisemitism, but his book makes one additional point that deserves consideration, particularly in light of Rose's thesis. Goldhagen, like Rose, writes that the antisemitic remarks of comparatively liberal Germans suggest that almost no part of the German populace was without a certain amount of Jew-hatred. Although this use of the term "liberal" as a labeling device opens a host of other questions, Goldhagen's essential statement is that even those intellectuals who were typically tolerant of Jews, "friends of the Jews," still subscribed to the core of antisemitic beliefs and attitudes.<sup>40</sup> If the most broad-minded, most progressive Germans displayed these antisemitic values, what reason (what evidence?) exists to provide an ideological balance?

German antisemitism was not monolithic. Many Germans accepted it, and

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, see especially pp. 56-61.

a few, no doubt, did not. But it is difficult to argue that these countervailing forces had any lasting effects, especially against the overwhelming chorus of anti-Jewish voices. Why did not more of these tolerance-minded intellectuals protest actions taken against Jews? Why do we not see more writers attempt to sway public opinion the other way, to dispel antisemitic and racist notions? Complete answers must be left to another study, but, until then, it seems safe to assume that antisemitism, whether "revolutionary" or "eliminationist" or another derivative, pervaded 19th-century German society.

\* \* \*

We have seen how antisemitism began in ancient times and became interwoven with the German religious outlook in the early modern era. Martin Luther's Christian antisemitism condemned Judaism as a refutation of Christian truths. Jews, furthermore, were godless destroyers of German culture. Almost 300 years later, the Age of Reason celebrated secularism. Its intellectual forces slowly changed German antisemitism from a doctrinal judgement to a rationally structured group prejudice. The Nationalist and Neo-Romantic movements in 19th-century Germany reacted against Enlightenment values and, at once, renewed parts of Protestant antisemitism while continuing to purvey socioeconomic Jew-hatred. Near the turn of the century, racist antisemitism emerged under mythological theories of ethnicity and "natural law." Jewish blood threatened to corrupt the pure "Aryan."

Adolf Hitler and his fellow Nazis left few clues regarding who among 19th-century intellectuals influenced them most. We may make educated guesses, but the historical record offers few specific names and titles. Even if we knew Hitler's reading list, we could not safely suggest that a certain 19th century author is, on a philosophical level, directly responsible for the Nazi persecution of Jews. The ideological factors that led to the Holocaust are entirely too many and too complex for such a theory.

Study of the Holocaust is, even to the best scholars, a frustrating attempt to explain the inexplicable. And yet we are obliged to look for some reasons. The six million Jews murdered by the Nazis did not die from sudden, unexpected or unseen forces. They were killed at the climax of a reign of terror that needed public support or at least acquiescence. Although the Holocaust was unprecedented, it was not without precursors. The German tradition of antisemitism

was doubtless one of those preludes. Lucy Dawidowicz succinctly recognizes this relationship:

The Final Solution would not have been possible without the pervasive presence and the uninterrupted tradition of antisemitism in Germany. The exposure of the German people for generations to conventional antisemitism in its manifold forms—political, nationalist, racial, cultural, doctrinal, economic—evenually rendered them insensitive to Hitler's radical and deadly brand of antisemitism.<sup>41</sup>

A popular and unbroken legacy of antisemitism in pre-Nazi Germany created the ideal climate for Hitler's virulent Jew-hatred to prosper. Attempts to link Hitler's antisemitic invective directly with 19th-century writers are typically oversimplified. The reductionist "Luther-to-Hitler" school of German intellectual history creates connections where no formal relationships exist. Pre-Nazi antisemitism did not make the Holocaust inevitable, but it did lay the prejudicial groundwork to make genocide possible.

41 Lucy S. Dawidowicz, *A Holocaust Reader*, p. 24.