

# *German Jewry as Mirror of Modernity*

## *Introduction to the Twentieth Volume*

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### I

The culmination of two decades of fruitful activity constitutes an achievement worthy of celebration in the lifetime of any young institution, but also a fitting occasion to appraise the impact of its original goals and purposes. On the face of things, the "annual collection of Essays on the history and activity of Jews in Germany during the past century" – as the subtitle of the volumes of the *Leo Baeck Institute Year Book* characterises the series in which the present collection is the twentieth – provides significant contributions to the history and, above all, memory of a great segment of the Jewish people which, along with several others, met its end in the catastrophe that overcame the overwhelming portion of European Jewry during the Second World War. To the scholar and the student of history, as to the survivors and descendants of that particular segment of modern Jewry, indeed to anyone concerned with understanding the story of that tragedy and with the preservation of the deposit of the rich and multifaceted experience of that body of Jews, the activities of the Leo Baeck Institute, especially its scientific publications, provide sufficient justification of the enterprise. The *Year Book*, the *Bulletin*, the annual memorial lectures, the many scholarly volumes issued by the Institute on a host of subjects provide the most scintillating possible tribute to the vision and determination of the founders of the Institute, the planners of its activities, and the persons responsible for the implementation of its programmes.

To confine ourselves for the moment to the *Year Book*, a mere glance at the table of contents of each volume should dispel the need for any further rationale for such collections or for any hermeneutical statement that will link this already vast collection of researches, documents, photographs and bibliographies with any wider, more encompassing, frame of reference. The time has long since passed when historians should feel required to demonstrate the legitimacy of their pursuit by explicating the relevance or utility of their findings and interpretations. But, in reality, for all their scholarly character, the publications generally and the *Year Books* especially are of great moment to a much wider group than the professional or the specialist. To anyone for whom German-Jewish history has any special significance – and the volumes of the *Leo Baeck Institute Year Book* prove beyond need for further argument that German-Jewish history is of significance not only to anyone concerned with any aspect of modern Jewish history but to everyone concerned with German history and with the history of modern Europe generally – the materials of the twenty volumes are a virtually inexhaustible treasure trove of information and interpretation that has earned for the series an everlasting place in the annals of scholarship.

If any evidence is required for the impact of the aims and activities of the Leo Baeck Institute – as described in the *verso* of the title page of the *Year Book* – it may be quickly encountered in the vast bibliographies that have been a regular feature of each of the volumes in this series. But the point is now demonstrated graphically and quite immediately to readers of the present volume in the papers incorporated in it from two sessions in conferences of general historical scholarship held since the nineteenth volume was compiled: one at the Braunschweig Historikertag of 1974 and the other at the 1974 annual meeting of the American Historical Association in Chicago, both of which were co-sponsored by the Institute and both of which testified, through the authorship of the papers as well as their contents, that German-Jewish history was a vital key to major aspects of German history in the last one hundred and seventy-five years. There may be a bitter irony in the fact that it took the tragedy of the Holocaust to gain for German Jewry even *recognition* as not only a legitimate but indeed as a vital subject of study for anyone who would understand the course of modern German history. Moreover, it may be idle to speculate whether German-Jewish history would have aroused such widespread and diversified study had the Institute not existed or gained the record of achievement that it has. But the fact is that German-Jewish history has now become a subject of wider and more intensive study than that of any other European Jewish community. And however this phenomenon is to be explained, the impact of the Institute, of its library, its conferences and its publications have quite patently enriched and set the tone for much of the research conducted throughout the world.

The study of history, it is universally acknowledged today, cannot be divorced from its *Sitz im Leben*. The fact that German-Jewish history remains a subject of living interest that is gaining ever wider recognition is testimony to the moral fibre of the men and women who, having survived the Nazi horror, in 1955 organised “for the purpose of collecting material and sponsoring research into the history of the Jewish community in Germany and in other German-speaking countries from the Emancipation to its decline and new dispersion”. Given the patently delicate and volatile nature of the subject of these volumes, one cannot but take note of the dispassionate tone that pervades them. After all, the fact underlying them all is *Tragedy, Calamity, Catastrophe*. Such a series would have required no apology had it comprised one extended dirge and indictment of Germany, of Europe, of Christendom, of modern civilisation. To some, indeed, the volumes bespeak an eerie quality of unreality in their depiction of “the past in a detached, impartial spirit, *sine ira et studio*”,<sup>1</sup> for even a twenty-volume jeremiad could hardly have sufficed to give adequate expression to the pain – and, yes, let us confess, to the condemnation of humanity – that anyone even thinking about the subject must of necessity feel. But, on second thought, the atmosphere of elegant decorum and self-restraint that one encounters on every page, the triumph bespoken by this posture over the forces of brilliantly orchestrated hate and brutality, is in itself a deposit of the Jewish experience

<sup>1</sup>The quotation is taken from the opening passage in the first essay of these volumes; Selmar Spier, ‘Jewish History as We See It’, in *LBI Year Book I* (1956), p. 3.

generally and most notably of the German-Jewish experience. Sheer sentimentality, however genuine and merited, is, in the final analysis, of limited durability and communicability. The bald truth, however difficult to absorb, is, if properly recorded and preserved, ineluctable, even if only the few will agree to confront it. But in the final analysis, it is on such that the preservation, cultivation and transmission of civilisation depends, and it is they that volumes such as these reflect and address.

The achievement is all the more notable in view of the "bad press" that German Jewry has had in recent literature. Eastern Europe has had great spokesmen who have taken upon themselves to be affectionate memorialisers: S. J. Agnon, Lucy Dawidowicz, Hayyim Grade, Abraham Joshua Heschel, Jacob Shatzky, Mark Zborowski, to mention only half a dozen of the legion who have attempted to preserve the warm flavour of a great Jewish civilisation that was totally wiped off the map of the earth. The memory of Germany, by contrast, has generated no wistful literature of nostalgia. To be sure, certain aspects of German-Jewish life have evoked fond and inspiring memorials. The moving papers on the typology of German Jewry in volume XIX of the *Year Book*, not to mention the tributes and profiles of many charismatic persons and institutions, prove that Germany was not merely the home of a community careening to destruction. However, it remains true that invidious evaluations of the two great segments of European Jewry are still the dominant ones. On the whole, German Jewry has been perceived in the terms made renowned by such great scholars as Jacob Katz and Gershom Scholem, to wit, as a society that lived on internal contradictions that could not possibly be resolved. As we shall attempt to emphasise, the record articulated in these volumes can and should generate not only a more complex and balanced perception but a new respect for German Jewry coupled with sympathy and even empathy.

It is relatively easy to point to the shortcomings and short-sightedness – perhaps even blindness – of much of German Jewry and its leadership to the realities that should have been apparent to them in every quarter of their lives. On the other hand it was German Jewry that provided Jews everywhere with mature alternative models of Jewish response to modernity, from radical assimilation to militant Zionism and neo-orthodoxy, as well as a fresh rediscovery of the Jewish past and reinterpretation and reformulation of the foundations of Jewish identity and commitment. It is to the everlasting credit of the Leo Baeck Institute that it has enabled those who would seek to understand this portion of the Jewish past, without prejudice or the bitterness generated by the hindsight elicited by catastrophe, to do so.

In this connection, a very special salute must be accorded to the original editor of this series, Robert Weltsch, who provided the introductory essays to all of the volumes prior to this one. Dr. Weltsch's essays are a unit unto themselves, which, read consecutively, provide not only a fine entree to each of the volumes but a penetrating commentary on many aspects of modern Jewish history and, above all, of the inner cultural, institutional and spiritual life of German Jewry. Many of the major spiritual and ideological issues that confronted modern

European Jewry – East and West European Jewry, but most of all those Jewish communities living within the orbit of German culture – are raised and analysed in these essays.

However, *au fond*, what stands out most poignantly in Dr. Weltsch's essays and pours into the body of the volumes is what many have come to identify as a classical Weltschian posture of unshakeable pride coupled with unflinching dignity and self-control. Weltsch's essays articulate some of the great expressions of synthesis of Judaism, Jewish nationalism, German culture and universalism that were bespoken in the lives and works of the aristocrats of the Jewish spirit in German-Jewish life – men such as Franz Rosenzweig, Martin Buber and Leo Baeck, to mention only a few.

The indomitable Jewish dignity and determination that Dr. Weltsch maintained in the *Jüdische Rundschau*,<sup>2</sup> over which he presided as editor from 1919 to 1938, and that sustained untold thousands by his controlled but unmistakable defiance of the monster, have never failed him. To him all students of Jewish history will for ever be indebted, if only for his unflinching activity during and after the calamity to preserve and to penetrate the legacy of the great German-Jewish community, to which he migrated from Prague, and to the shaping of which he himself contributed so much. His perception of the goals of the Arden House Conference conducted by the Institute in 1973<sup>3</sup> reflect his profound understanding of the enduring challenge embedded in the German-Jewish experience to all Jews even long after the eclipse of any real German-Jewish community or German-Jewish history. He has understood that the calamity that befell German Jewry, and indeed all of European Jewry, has not really terminated the historical chapter and process of which German Jewry was a pivotal part. Robert Weltsch awaits the encompassing – and I am sure he would insist, dispassionate – study of his long and fruitful career which has stimulated so many other persons, movements and institutions. Anyone even remotely familiar with his activity knows that a study of Dr. Weltsch must inevitably not only examine his own life and work but also provide a major commentary on Jewish history in the twentieth century. Can any man ask for more?

As Weltsch approaches his eighty-fifth birthday, it is only fitting that World Jewry take note of this pillar of strength, wisdom and dignity, and say to him, in the words of the poet Bialik to Ahad Ha'am (1903): "*Sa' berakhah ha-moreh, sa' berakhah.*" Great and many are your rewards, not the least of which is this monument of continuity – yes, of enduring vitality – to a culture and history of which you were one of the most responsible fashioners and spokesmen. May those who continue your labours be worthy of the standards you have set.

<sup>2</sup>See *Encyclopedia of Zionism and Israel*, ed. by Raphael Patai, 2 vols., New York 1971, s.v. *Jüdische Rundschau* and Weltsch, Robert. Cf. also the passing reference in Lucy Dawidowicz, *op. cit.*, *infra*, n. 5, pp. 176 f. How vital and illuminating a thorough study of Dr. Weltsch's life and work would be may be gleaned from the brief references and remarks by Walter Laqueur, *A History of Zionism*, New York 1974; cf. index, s.v.

<sup>3</sup>See Fritz Bamberger, 'The Arden House Conference. "Exploring a Typology of German Jewry"', in *LBI Year Book XIX* (1974), pp. 9 f.

The history of German Jewry during the last two centuries provides not only a fascinating story of one segment of modern European Jewry but a luminous cross-sectional specimen of the Jewish encounter with the forces of modernity generally in modern Europe. Put differently, the history of the Jews of Germany and of German-speaking areas is significant not only for an understanding of the Jews (and, to be sure, of the general population) of those areas, but also because it provides an excellent introduction to, and point of focus on, all of modern Jewish history. Virtually every characteristic associated with the Jews of Germany has its analogue and parallel in the history of the Jews of Central and Eastern Europe: enlightenment, assimilation, conversion, religious reform, nationalism, social mobility, rediscovery of the Jewish past, articulation of Jewish culture in modern terms and so on endlessly.

To be sure, analogue and parallels in no way mitigate the enormous differences that one encounters between different groups of Jews. No aggregate of parallel phenomena can blur the vast differences in life-style and in Jewish expression between the Jews of Galicia, for example, and the Jews of Germany, despite the close contacts between many Jewish intellectuals of those two areas. Markus Jost and Leopold Zunz could have close ties with Nachman Krochmal and Salomon Judah Loeb Rapoport, but the disparities in their concerns and goals, let alone in the external circumstances that governed their lives, were at least as great as those that drew them together. Accordingly, it would be a gross distortion of history to study all of European Jewry together, or even to stress the common elements in their various confrontations with the forces of modernity at the expense of the specific and singular characteristics and events within each community. On the other hand, it remains true that the Jewish encounter with modernity in Germany generated reactions and expressions within the Jewish as well as the Gentile communities that are strikingly reminiscent of parallel phenomena in the Austro-Hungarian Empire and in Polish-Russian domains. The similarities were consequences of the two sets of factors that combine to the making of a genuine Jewish history: the first, Gentile policies with respect to, and attitudes towards, the Jews, which for all their variations from one locale to another had common foundations and many common forms; and second, Jewish responses to the fact of their Jewishness, which for all their varieties both within one community and in different areas, drew their energies from common foundations and from sources of inspiration that transcended geographic and linguistic boundaries. Jewish responses must, of course, be subdivided into the *category of Jewish flight from active Jewish identification* – and beyond a certain point such a response ceases to be the concern of the student of Jewish history as an effective element in collective Jewish behaviour – and responses in Jewish terms, i.e., responses made to assert and assist in the preservation and cultivation of a distinctive Jewish group.

Clearly, then, Jewish history cannot be reduced to any single set of factors, whether it be Jewish faith and the internal Jewish drive for survival, on the one hand, or antisemitism or Jew-hatred, on the other. This is as true for Germany

as for Eastern Europe. Indeed, not even the combination of these two sets of factors, I believe, really exhausts the sources of energy that have combined to give the Jews everywhere a sense of corporate destiny and relationship. Now, if there have always been forces sufficiently strong to enable Jews far removed from each other in experience, collective memory, language, area of habitat, economy and social class to identify, in however attenuated a fashion, with all other Jews as members of one people distinct from all others – in a word, to feel that for all the disparate elements in their regional experiences and responses, they are justified in claiming a Jewish history common to them all – how much more is this true of Jews, even those of different social class and educational attainment, of one political, geographical and linguistic orbit. In our case there is a discrete unit of study that we must classify as German-Jewish history that is important for itself and important for Jewish history generally. Platitudinous this may be, but how often it has been ignored every student of Jewish history knows only too well. In sum, the drives, both external and internal, making for a sense of Jewish destiny – and that, after all, is predicated in large measure on a sense of common history – were largely the same everywhere. Inevitably, the responses by Jews in one area, such as Germany, will often appear to have striking resemblances to the responses of Jews in others, but they can never serve as a surrogate for the intensive study and analysis of Jewish responses to the environment and to internal drives in any other specific, clearly delineated area where Jews constituted a self-conscious group.

History remains the story of change and of specificity. But for a people whose history is fragmented by many factors far beyond the “normal” state of affairs obtaining with other historically related groups, viz., by diverse geographic, linguistic, social, political, and economic factors, the common assumes a degree of importance even beyond those which are seen by historians of large political-linguistic units, in which the local dialectical, religious and economic interests are also at least as centrifugal as they are centripetal. It is in this sense that I have stressed that German Jewry provides an illuminating specimen of, and point of perspective on, the general European Jewish confrontation with, and response to, the forces of modernity – to nationalism, industrialisation, urbanisation, social stratification and upheaval, secularisation, religious reform and so on. On the other hand, these remarks are also meant to be a flat repudiation of those who would seek to describe modern Jewish history without analysis in depth of the *two* sides in the life of so crucial a Jewish group as German Jewry. To the Jew of German origin, this may appear all too obvious. But much modern Jewish historiography has not yet, I believe, come to genuine grips with these principles.

Accordingly, whether the reader approaches the vast collection of materials contained in the twenty volumes of the *Year Book* out of an interest in German-Jewish history or in modern Jewish history, generally, he must come prepared with a contextual framework in which to absorb the rich materials. The latter may well, indeed hopefully will, compel the student to amplify, modify or discard much of the intellectual baggage with which he approaches these materials. That indeed is one of the measures of worth of any new publication.

But the material is enriching in direct proportion to the propaedeutic bedrock with which the student will have come to the new materials. What will be suggested here is one possible approach to these materials.

## III

A coherent frame of reference is clearly provided by the terminal points of modern German-Jewish history – the beginning, expressed in the quest for Emancipation, and the end, or final liquidation. However, both beginning and end as well as the fifteen decades of intervening history, must be seen from two separate aspects, neither of which in and of itself suffices to give a coherent picture of German-Jewish history. But of the two, it is the environmental framework – the political, economic, linguistic and social – that underlies all further study.

It was in Germany that the vision of total equality and the accordance of full civil rights to the Jews was first articulated some one hundred and ninety-five years ago; and it was in Germany exactly one hundred and sixty years later that the total liquidation of the Jews through physical decimation was openly and unequivocally expressed and adopted as a policy of state. Our terminal points are, accordingly, Christian Wilhelm von Dohm's *Über die bürgerliche Verbesserung der Juden*<sup>4</sup> and the Wannsee Conference of January 1942.<sup>5</sup> Ironically and tragically, both visions, the one of complete freedom and the other of total annihilation, were motivated by one underlying and indeed common goal, and that was the elimination of the Jews as a discernible and effective corporate entity on German soil.

Obviously, there is a qualitative difference between Dohm's vision of the ultimate elimination of a significant Jewish presence in Germany through *bürgerliche Verbesserung* and the Nazi programme of a total and final "solution". However, it is, I believe, possible to understand much of modern German-Jewish activity and of modern German history generally only by keeping in mind the underlying and enduring common purpose and drive both of advocates of Jewish rights and of antisemitic ideologies during the last one hundred and seventy-five years of German-Jewish history. Both groups drew their inspiration from common assumptions, which, when stripped of all circumlocutions and methodological qualifications, proclaimed that residual loyalties to Judaism constituted an insuperable obstacle to the incorporation of the Jews into German

<sup>4</sup>Two vols., Berlin 1781–1783. For the latest discussions of Dohm, see A. Altmann, *Moses Mendelssohn: A Biographical Study*, Philadelphia 1973, pp. 449 f.; Jacob Katz, *Out of the Ghetto: The Social Background of Jewish Emancipation, 1770–1870*, Cambridge, Mass. 1973, ch. V; *idem*, *Emancipation and Assimilation: Studies in Modern Jewish History*, Gregg International Publishers 1972, pp. 21 ff.

<sup>5</sup>For the latest treatment, superseding all others, see Lucy S. Dawidowicz, *The War Against the Jews 1933–1945*, New York 1975, ch. 7. Clearly, even these are but approximate terminal points. Mendelssohn's vision of, and plea for, civil equality antedated the work by Dohm, but with the latter's work the drive enters the arena of general history. As for the end, Mrs. Dawidowicz makes it clear that the final solution had been put into action before January 1942. Wannsee is now merely a symbolic catchword.

society on an equal footing with Gentiles. Conceptually, racial antisemitism merely added a demonic dimension by contending that residual loyalties, since they were biologically rooted, were fundamentally ineradicable. But that Jewishness in any form was an insidious element hostile to the modern nation and to the progress of humanity became part of German *Völkisch* axiology. Jewishness by definition was sinister, and to many Germans, the more masked and externally attenuated the Jewishness, the more insidious the threat of corruption to Germany and its civilisation.<sup>6</sup>

For a moment, indeed, during the riotous upheavals of 1848, it appeared to many German Jews that the liberal wagon to which they had hitched their cause would steer them into an age of total equality, when the whole ugly record of the past would be relegated to the realm of memory. Indeed, the sporadic attacks against them by reactionary mobsters only fired their faith and determination further. But the political reversals that quickly surfaced the following year can be seen today for what it really bespoke. External progress and legislative concessions would disguise and delude many about the impassable divide separating German and Jew.

If, accordingly, it is evaluation from a Jewish perspective that the student of history seeks, he is driven, it seems to me, to the conclusion that ultimately the most implacable enemies of a genuine and dignified Jewish presence in Germany were the German "liberals", who no less than conservatives and populists were simply incapable of shedding the widespread German postulate that Jews as Jews were ultimately unassimilable, if not legally, at least socially.<sup>7</sup> Werner Sombart, for example, could shamelessly disavow any fundamental hostility to the Jews; his "findings" and conclusions were, in his view, but objective and diagnostic. In short, modern German-Jewish history, by which I mean Jewish response to social forces whether corporately or individually, was largely determined and, accordingly, structured by the need (or the desire) to cope with the reality of Jewish alienation. The Jews never ceased to be a "problem" or "question" to Germans, and Jewishness, accordingly, soon became an obsessive problem to the Jews themselves. "Wie es sich christelt, so jüdet sich es" inevitably became true to some degree for every Jew of German society and drove Jews to a variety of courses that have become the subject of study of scholars in diverse areas – from theology to politics and art. To annotate these statements would require classification of much of the material comprising the twenty volumes of the *Year Book*, not to mention the countless studies of every aspect of Jewish life in Germany and German-speaking lands in the last one hundred and seventy-five years and more. It is this underlying motif in modern German history that provides the most significant and most encompassing element for the construction of a frame of reference by which to study German-Jewish history.

<sup>6</sup>For a brief but lucid treatment, see George L. Mosse, *Germans and Jews. The Right, The Left, and the Search for a 'Third Force' in Pre-Nazi Germany*, New York 1970, esp. chs. 2, 3 and 4. Cf. also *idem*, *The Crisis of German Ideology. Intellectual Origins of the Third Reich*, New York 1964.

<sup>7</sup>On the whole question, see the penetrating study by Uriel Tal, *Christians and Jews in Germany. Religion, Politics, and Ideology in the Second Reich, 1870–1914*, transl. by Noah Jonathan Jacobs, Ithaca, London 1975.



Such a perspective, it seems to me, provides a valid and utile taxonomic handle with which to approach and absorb many of the diverse studies incorporated in these volumes. Obviously this perspective cannot overlook the history of political, economic and social change that determined the life of all Jews in Germany and enabled a not insignificant number of Jews to attain not only general culture but wealth and political influence. But one distorts Jewish history as well as German history if one does not take account of the pervasive atmosphere in explaining the behaviour of, and German attitudes towards, the Jews who rose to great public heights, such as the Bleichröders, the Rathenaus, the Cassels *et alii*.

To understand these phenomena one must describe the specific characteristics of the contemporary German environment. But to comprehend the roots of the prevailing German mentality with respect to the Jews in depth, one must go back not only to the Enlightenment, to Romanticism and to Idealism, but to the Middle Ages, for major residual elements of Christian ideology with respect to the Jews survived and exercised influence down to Weimar days and beyond.<sup>8</sup> Thus the Leo Baeck Institute's publications, while focusing on the fate of modern German Jewry must of necessity allow – indeed, encourage – scholars to probe into layers of history that antecede and transcend the purview of the Institute's specific purposes.

There is no end to the uncovering of antecedents. For all the pre-modern roots of latter-day movements and ideologies that scholarship may quite properly detect, there is no gainsaying the reality of major new developments in the life of the Jews of Germany in the last one hundred and seventy-five years. If one is to begin with a major development in the atmosphere of Europe, and more particularly of Germany, in order to understand and explain the changes in Jewish status and behaviour, the most reasonable point with which to begin is, of course, the Enlightenment.

Confining ourselves to its implications for Jewish history, the significance of Enlightenment and nineteenth-century German thought about the Jews and Judaism was two-fold. In the first place, it sounded the death knell for the medieval framework of Jewish life, internal as well as external, in Germany. To the Jews, it opened the possibilities of a new horizon of freedom and advance. It also furnished an atmosphere of uncertainty for the Jew with which he never quite learned to cope. Thus the Enlightenment provided along with the hope of emancipation a theoretical underpinning for a vast anti-Jewish literature and for persistent resistance to total acceptance of the Jews. In this respect, the studies of Reinhard Rürup,<sup>9</sup> two of which are included in the present volume, and the struggle for Jewish emancipation in Baden are particularly illuminating and illustrative, for they demonstrate the moral-political bankruptcy of German liberalism in the face of the dominant prejudices.

Given this frame of reference, one appreciates the significance for German-

<sup>8</sup>Cf. Hans Liebeschütz, 'The Relevance of the Middle Ages for the Understanding of Contemporary Jewish History', in *LBI Year Book XVIII* (1973), pp. 3 ff.

<sup>9</sup>Cf. also Reinhard Rürup, 'Die Judenemanzipation in Baden', *Zeitschrift für die Geschichte des Oberrheins*, CXIV (1966), pp. 241 f.

Jewish history of the vast amount of nineteenth-century Gentile scholarship and reflection on Judaism. Much of this expression was part of the renewed interest in the origins of Christianity, and much part of the relatively new quest for the origins of religion and the dynamics of culture generally. Inevitably, the Jew found his tradition being evaluated (under the guise of description) and more often than not with invidious comparison with other cultures and religions. In this connection, as in so many others, a key figure was the arch-philosopher Hegel. In view of the authoritative impact that Hegel's reflections on history and theology had on virtually all subsequent German thought in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, however removed Hegel himself may have been from any direct involvement with the Jewish struggle for acceptance, indeed however repelled he may have been by German political behaviour with respect to the Jews, his thought must be studied as part of modern Jewish history – for it both reflected as well as shaped the dominant mood and ultimately pervaded every treatment of the Jews and Judaism.<sup>10</sup> Hegel is particularly significant and characteristic, for his civilised attitude towards Jews and his simultaneous disdain for Judaism were pregnant with significance for German attitudes and for Jewish responses to the prevailing mood. It may be idle and demagogic journalism to implicate Hegel, Mommsen, Burckhardt and Meinecke with direct responsibility for the catastrophe of modern Jewry, but the historian cannot overlook the role that their ideas played, irrespective of the intentions of their authors. Not all expressions were quite as rancorous as the von Treitschke-Graetz controversy,<sup>11</sup> but the underlying soil was the same: a stone wall of fundamental disdain and hostility summed up in a phrase that became a catchword epitomising fundamental alienation and incompatibility – *Judenfrage*.<sup>12</sup>

However, this is only one aspect of the overall frame of reference suggested here. Far more tragic and pathetic is the record of Jewish efforts to respond to this challenge, to overcome what amounted to a demonic miasma that could not be penetrated. In retrospect one sees that the despair that engulfed educated Jews with aspirations for creative careers turned into an epidemic of obsessiveness. The wave of conversion and intermarriage that began early in the nineteenth century and never came to an effective end until the collapse of the Weimar Republic is a story that is too well known to require documentation here. Two particularly pathetic case studies of extreme Jewish response are provided in papers of this series. The one is a study by H. G. Reissner of early Jewish attempts to eradicate the “deep seated malignancy” of Jew hatred. The terse catalogue of names of the participants in the effort and of their fates is electrifying,<sup>13</sup> for clearly the situation confronting many Jews demanded

<sup>10</sup>Nathan Rotenstreich, ‘Hegel’s Image of Judaism’, *Jewish Social Studies*, XV (1953), pp. 33 f.; Shlomo Avineri, *Hegel’s Theory of the Modern State*, Cambridge University Press, 1972, ch. 2. On Hegel’s own posture toward Jews, see *ibid.*, p. 120 n. 12 and esp. p. 170; Hans Liebeschütz, *Das Judentum im deutschen Geschichtsbild von Hegel bis Max Weber*, Tübingen 1967 (Schriftenreihe wissenschaftlicher Abhandlungen des Leo Baeck Instituts 17).

<sup>11</sup>Cf. Michael A. Meyer, ‘Great Debate on Antisemitism’, *LBI Year Book XI* (1966), pp. 143 f.

<sup>12</sup>See Jacob Toury, ‘“The Jewish Question” – A Semantic Approach’, *LBI Year Book XI* (1966), pp. 25 f. and especially 25 f.

<sup>13</sup>H. G. Reissner, ‘Rebellious Dilemma: The Case Histories of Edward Gans and some of his Partisans’, in *LBI Year Book II* (1957), pp. 170–193.

nothing short of suicide, either physical or symbolic. No less pathetic is the study of Lamar Cecil in this volume<sup>14</sup> on Jewish efforts at the end of the nineteenth century and early parts of the twentieth to gain *de facto* acceptance of what they had achieved *de jure*, only to encounter a loneliness far more frustrating than their pre-emancipated ancestors had ever had to endure.<sup>15</sup>

## IV

From the perspective of Jewish history, all that we have established thus far – assuming, of course, that our perception is a valid one – is but the outer framework of German-Jewish history. Under the heading of *outer framework* we include all legislation pertaining to Jews, Gentile-German attitudes and activities with respect to Jews, and, finally, the discernible reactions of Jews to these phenomena, whether these reactions were expressed in migration, social mobility, political organisation, polemic and self-defence, or flight from Judaism and Jewish identification.

However, from the perspective of Jewish history itself, there is a second current which, while to some extent a derivative of the outer framework and one that was forever shaped by it, was made up of an entirely different, and quite discrete, body of data that were generated by quite different, purely Jewish, considerations. In other words, it is a story unto itself, although it can neither be critically recounted nor understood without reference to that part of German-Jewish history which we have insisted is really part of German history. But, *au fond*, it is quite a separate history, indeed, all the more genuinely Jewish history, for its bearers and fashioners were conscious of their activity as Jews and motivated by Jewish considerations. Albeit the history of a sub-culture, as modern parlance would classify it, it is not entirely intelligible as an aspect of German culture. It had its own wellsprings of energy and was shaped as well as motivated in no small measure by internal and autonomous drives and purposes.

It is especially in this respect that inner German-Jewish activity provides a window to – as well as a mirror of – the Jewish encounter with modernity. The frame of reference that we are now attempting to identify represented part of the age-old process of Jewish exegesis and internal communal adjustment to a new era and to new circumstances. In this case, the yardsticks for response derived from Jewish commitments and from the Jewish historic experience. What we call inner German-Jewish history is part of the continuing process of *midrash* and development, and applies to communal institutions no less than to texts and ideas.

In a discussion of this point, my colleague Ismar Schorsch graciously added that for all the changes that the German-Jewish communities sustained in the century and a quarter before their decimation, they remained to the very end,

<sup>14</sup>'Jew and Junker in Imperial Berlin', pp. 47–58.

<sup>15</sup>For a fine study of the Jewish attempts to cope with this framework, see Ismar Schorsch, *Jewish Reactions to German Anti-Semitism, 1870–1914*, New York–Philadelphia 1972.

and quite formally, continuations of the medieval pre-emancipation *Gemeinde*. Thus, German Jewry never became an amorphous group even structurally and retained a real hold on its constituency.<sup>16</sup> Hence, the changes within it are also part of this *midrashic* development. Clearly, the German environment would constitute a crucial element in the response, but the Jewish heritage was at least an equally important factor.

Obviously, it is quite impossible to determine with any measure of precision how much of any German-Jewish activity was governed by considerations of the wider German milieu and how much by inner Jewish drives and aspirations. The responses of any group, even of any mature individual, are too complex to be totally and neatly unravelled. Nevertheless, we must insist on the reality of a German-Jewish internal life and on the legitimacy of its claim to its own corporate history and to its share as a component in modern Jewish history generally. I belabour the point a bit over-strongly perhaps, for owing to a variety of reasons, it is that part of German-Jewish history that I believe it is fair to say has not yet won the place it deserves in contemporary Jewish historiography and has accordingly not yet been absorbed by Jews who are not of German origin or who lack some special interest in German-Jewish history. To put it bluntly, German-Jewish culture and communal life have not yet attained the place in the collective Jewish memory that East European Jewish history has. (To be sure, even that history is still orientated by considerations that validate the neglect of whole areas of Jewish activity, but that is a story unto itself.)

Such neglect is regrettable not only because of the injustice to German-Jewish history, but also because it obscures the enormous impact that German-Jewish cultural activity had not only on Jewish life in America and in Israel, but also on modern thought generally. One need but mention Franz Rosenzweig, Martin Buber and Gershom Scholem to realise how important German-Jewish history is for an understanding of modern culture generally, let alone Jewish culture. And these men, even to the extent that they were rebels against established institutions and modes of thought, were part of a long and colourful history. They were, in a profound sense, its products as well as its final architects.

As in the case of the broad historical framework which the studies of the *Year Books* have greatly illuminated, so in the case of the inner history of German Jewry, the Leo Baeck Institute's publications must be approached with a new perspective into which to fit the many fragmentary materials of which any view of history is ultimately composed.

Here, again, it seems to me, the logical point of departure is the Enlightenment, but in this instance as an intellectual current that swept over many segments of European Jewry with no immediate relationship to what was transpiring in the world at large. In Italy, Galicia, France and Germany, Jews in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries were examining their tradition with

<sup>16</sup>Cf. Kurt Wilhelm, 'The Jewish Community in the Post-Emancipation Period', in *LBI Year Book II* (1957), pp. 47 f.

new critical methods and evaluating it by new criteria. To be sure, many of these new techniques and evaluations had been derived from the outside, but once appropriated they became the vehicles and substance of purely internal Jewish concern. Wherever this new current made inroads into the Jewish community there was a discernible change in the expression of Jewish yearnings, and often also of Jewish behaviour. Most palpably there was a restiveness against the restrictions that were imposed on Jews by society at large and a desire for a new freedom, which, in the first instance meant release from the rabbinic form of self-rule that governed Jewish life. The challenges to Jewish tradition and traditional modes were everywhere very much the same. It was the Jewish responses that differed so markedly in the different areas of Jewish concentration.

To elucidate some of the contrasting reactions, perhaps it is best to begin with a general description of the metamorphosis that overcame European Jewry and brought about the dissolution of the medieval framework of Jewish life generally. Then, in order to put our thesis about German-Jewish development into bolder relief, we will describe first the general outlines of the East European Jewish response to the new universe of discourse that was rapidly altering the perspective and life-style of an ever mounting number of Jews.

It was not political emancipation or the quest for it that set in motion the great wave of Jewish revolt against rabbinism and the religious framework of life within which it determined the life-style of European Jewry. Rather it was the other way around.<sup>17</sup> It was the mounting renunciation of rabbinic values and authority in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries that impelled Jews in ever growing numbers to seek some escape from, and alternative to, traditional Judaism as they knew it. Put in a nutshell, secularisation and assimilation preceded emancipation; it was secularisation and antinomianism, at least in rabbinic terms, that first impelled Jews even to seek political emancipation.

One need no greater proof of the disintegration of Jewish life than the manifestations of demoralisation and antinomianism which historical scholarship has established as major waves in Eastern Europe: crypto-Sabbatianism, Frankism, early Hasidism, Haskalah. Indeed, Professor Scholem has cogently argued that there was a progressive connection between the first two and the latter two. The denominator common to all of them was a despair with, and renunciation of, the halakic framework that had previously determined every aspect of Jewish life. Krochmal, Chajes, Erter, Rapoport were the final products of a process of change, not its heralds or progenitors. Large numbers of Jews, of whom only a tiny fraction were intellectuals in any sense of the word, had decided to seek new avenues of fulfilment and gratification outside the pale of what rabbinic authority had regarded as legitimate.

Very much the same process, to be sure with some local variations in detail, was simultaneously taking place in Western Europe. Here, too, widespread

<sup>17</sup>Students of Jewish history will easily detect the deep indebtedness of these observations to Yehzekel Kaufmann, *Golah ve-Nekhar*, 2 vols., Tel Aviv 1929–1932, II, chs. 1–2; Azriel Shohet, *Beginnings of the Haskalah Among German Jewry* (in Hebrew), Jerusalem 1960; Gershom Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, 3rd edn., New York 1961 pp. 299 f.; *idem*, *The Messianic Ideal in Judaism*, New York 1971, pp. 78 f.; *idem*, *Kabbalah*, New York 1974, pp. 287 f.

defiance of rabbinic authority and open violation of accepted Jewish norms, including conversion to Christianity, became increasingly noticeable. The quest for general culture and for a new social, religious, economic and political freedom pervaded Jewish communities, and the remonstrations of rabbis and traditionalists against these trends were futile. In a word, Mendelssohn, even under the most extreme evaluation, must be considered a very conservative Jew. He, too, was but a mild symptom of a process, not its architect or advocate.

In short, the forces of modernity – secularisation, spiritual autarchy, the quest for economic advancement along with political equality – had breached the walls of the ghetto and stimulated considerable numbers of Jews to strive to eliminate completely all barriers impeding their advancement. The early German-Jewish religious reformers merely reflected the spiritual metamorphosis that the Enlightenment had wrought in them and an effort to find some Jewish alternative to the vacuum that they encountered in their own lives. In Eastern Europe, too, Jews like Krochmal were seeking Jewish alternatives to paralysis and dissolution. Indeed, the inner history of all European Jewry in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries can be summed up as a series of efforts to find a substitute for the Jewish communal framework which had first disintegrated in consequence of internal Jewish revolt and which then had to contend with mounting physical attack from the outside and progressive spiritual defection from within.

In the nineteenth century European-Jewish intellectuals who sought some form of Jewish regeneration all advocated modernisation of Jewish life. Modernisation meant changes in modes of speech and dress, change in economic pursuit, change in orientation to world culture. The quest, then, cut across borders, but the form that the Jewish quest took differed with locale, and in large measure because of the divergent Jewish perception of the Gentile world with which the Jews came into direct contact.

In Eastern Europe the Jews were confronted by a new Russian nationalist policy which made any and every effort at modernisation of Jewish life politically and culturally irrelevant. Nothing that the Jews would do short of ceasing to exist would ameliorate their collective condition. Moreover, East European Jewry found the world surrounding it not only hopelessly closed but fundamentally inferior. There was no Russian middle class to speak of to which the Jew could look as a model and yardstick by which to measure attainment. The Russian aristocracy was beyond contact, the masses (and the clergy) fanatical, repulsive and ignorant. Russification was not an ideal with which the average Jew could ever really sympathise. (While in Poland, to be sure, the picture was considerably different – and Jewish assimilation in Poland especially between the two Wars is a story that remains to be told – the fundamental hatred of the Polish masses and later of the Polish government for the Jews made Poland and its culture objects with which relatively few Jews could identify.) It is, I believe, fair to say that the overwhelming number of Jews perceived the East European environment as one of implacable hostility. In a society where pogrom and wanton oppression had become policies of state, socio-political meliorism was a pipe dream. In Eastern Europe, there were but three realistic alternatives open

to the Jews: orthodox intransigence, which for all its fanaticism had a dignity, learning and faith that, during the First World War and later, shook a few German Jews to the foundations; revolution, in which Jewish identity attained a new messianic, ethical, quasi-prophetic dimension; emigration. Zionism was basically a secular solution born of despair with Europe that combined some elements of social revolution with emigration. Its special emotional appeal lay in its reappropriation and infusion of renewed dignity into classical elements of Judaism that were now perceived and identified as the hallmarks of a normal nation and that, in consequence, lent the movement a sense of Jewish pride and confidence. To be sure, the possibility of a secure and dignified life as a corporate minority, in other words, the possibility of attaining recognition as a Russian or Polish Jew, in which the Jewish component of one's life – as formulated by the Jews themselves – would serve as a base for ethnic-cultural autonomy as well as a legitimate anchor for citizenship and civil equality was advocated by some and, as is well known, was even endorsed by the Minorities Treaty of 1919. The hope went up in smoke not only in Poland but in Soviet Russia as well. In any event, to the East European Jew the only real alternative to the extremes of orthodoxy or apostasy was some form of *secular* messianism or nationalism – Socialist, Communist, Zionist, Yiddishist. Religious reform as a response to modernity was irrelevant, for there was no East European Christian parallel to speak of, certainly none that would really tolerate Judaism in any form. What is more, religion in all its manifestations had become synonymous with political stagnation and cultural paralysis.

Paradoxically, it was only in America, where some of the German-Jewish responses to modernity were striking new roots, that Jews of East European extraction would find religious ethnicism – largely in the form of Conservative Judaism – an attractive and viable form of Jewish identification.

A sufficiently different set of circumstances confronted the German Jew to generate different types of response to the inroads of secularisation. The forces of internal disintegration and the spirit of hostility to Jews and Judaism may have been much the same, but there were countervailing factors that stimulated quite different Jewish forms of expression. In Germany the Jews encountered a Gentile group that aspired to culture and sought to get the Jew to absorb that culture. As the Jew changed, i.e., to the degree that he absorbed German culture, so would doors open to him. At least so Germans professed. *Bürgerliche Verbesserung*, it should never be forgotten, was understood by enlightened Christians as well as by Jews as a two-way street. German society would have to change for the better, too. While Jews in Germany were seeking to restore the vitality of their tradition by reform and reformulation, by the reconquest of a healthy past that would sustain a pride in a present and future open with potential, at that very time Germans – Deists, Christians, Romantics, Idealists – were engaged in the very same quest for Germany. It was not only Judaism that was invited and challenged to improve itself. Germany as a whole was in quest of “regeneration”. In hindsight, it is easy to detect and to identify insurmountable blocks that militated against the absorption of Jews on an equal footing with Germans. Many Jews perhaps intuited this early in the nineteenth century

and took the "logical" course of abandonment of Judaism. But most German Jews did not despair of social and political progress, by which they would finally overcome the alienation of centuries, until much later. Until the days of the Nazi Regime most German Jews had reason for hope that liberalism would triumph over bigotry and irrationalism. What better proof did German Jews need than what they had achieved within their own community and the palpable change for the better in the physical conditions of life?

All shades of German Jewry, to the extent that they affirmed their Jewishness – not merely refrained from renouncing it or denying it, but affirmed it – insisted on affirming it in terms that articulated Jewish commitments in ways and in terms that did not require abdication of intelligence or radical separation between the Jew and humanity at large. Whatever else German Jews sought to be as Jews, they passionately sought to be urbane Jews and urbane Germans, loyal and dignified *citizens* with a distinct identity as Jews.

This passionate quest frequently rubbed Central and East European Jews the wrong way – and not without cause. *Ostjuden* and German Jews irritated each other for reasons that are today quite intelligible. East European Jews often found the inner life of German Jewry impenetrable and irrelevant, although it was from the orbit of German culture that many of their own leadership drew much of their training and inspiration. East European Jews often perceived the acculturation of German Jews as evidence of a progressive programme of total assimilation and German-Jewish articulation of their Judaism as governed primarily, if not exclusively, by apologetic considerations.

To be sure, there were real irritants that inhibited many *Ostjuden* from trying to penetrate the all too frequently encountered surface of German-Jewish stiffness, downright arrogance, particularly towards East European Jews, and above all, totally different style of life. German Jews, for their part, had their own bill of grievances against East European Jews, whom they often found to be uncouth, uncultured and offensive. Clearly, these stumbling blocks were not all pure fantasy, on either side of the fence. But, in reality, they were but the superficial manifestations of far more profound – and far more meaningful – differences in perception of the Gentile milieu and consequently in approach to the task of shaping a politically viable and intellectually acceptable approach to Jewish life in the modern world.

It is noteworthy that of the many responses to modernity expressed by German Jewry, and these were many and quite different in form and content, orthodox withdrawal to a totally insulated world was not one of them. In this respect Isaac Bernays had set the tone, and Samson Raphael Hirsch was no different from Abraham Geiger. The machinery of state and ideologues of society held out hope for some genuine negotiation and compromise, if not too often for genuine dialogue. The German university may not have provided the most welcoming atmosphere to the Jew, but it did provide him with a *Kultur* which he found ennobling, with which he could identify, and which left room – at least in the view of many – for the retention of the Jewish name, identity and sense of Jewish purpose. What the Jew had to provide was an acceptable form and formulation for his own tradition. This the Jew found



necessary for *himself* at least as much as for his Gentile neighbours. And it is this that the preponderant portion of German-Jewish internal activity in the nineteenth century was about. The cue and guidance were provided by Moses Mendelssohn, or at least it was thus that his strictly Jewish writings – his translation of the Bible, his *Biur*, his *Jerusalem* – were perceived and utilised.

Critical scholarship became the first significant effort at a meaningful Jewish response to a wave of Jewish defection early in the nineteenth century and to the intellectual climate that had made traditional form and theory obsolete. This effort at regeneration and reaffirmation of the Jewish legacy became the outstanding and characteristic feature of German-Jewish leadership of every hue and cast.

The first aspect of German-Jewish scholarship that strikes the observer is the methodological maturity of its practitioners from the very moment of their adoption of the technique. Leopold Zunz became the paradigmatic model of the craft and his technique and posture are evident in the works of such disparate giants as Moritz Steinschneider, Julius Aronius, Moritz Stern, Yitzhak Baer and Gershom Scholem, to mention but a few. Bibliographical thoroughness, tireless efforts towards the recovery of lost documents, meticulous dating of the materials, publication of carefully edited texts, philological exactitude in interpretation – all these and more became the hallmarks of German-Jewish scholarship.

No area of the Jewish past was immune to fresh examination, interpretation and re-evaluation. But since for all its pretension to objectivity, no great scholarship is really totally free of some *Tendenz* – even granting its unconscious role in the mind of the scholar – the real question is what German-Jewish scholarship hoped to achieve by its research and publication. Fortunately, we do not have to speculate too much, for one of the singular features of German-Jewish scholarship was its ingenuousness; if anyone pretended about his real motives, it was not Zunz, Geiger, Frankel, Graetz or David Hoffmann – indeed, to name some of their contemporary heirs, not Albeck, Baer, Scholem or Salo Baron – but Moritz Steinschneider, the would-be mortician of Jewish learning and literature. If Steinschneider deserves any reproach, I submit, it is for his *dissimulating* contention that his work aimed at giving Judaism a decent burial. But Steinschneider was a maverick in many ways, not the least of which was his compulsive scholarly fecundity, and why should a culture be evaluated by its eccentrics? To cite another example, the pessimism and Jewish ambivalence of such men as Markus Jost are today not only intelligible, but have their counterparts in some members of every great scholarly tradition.

The roots of German-Jewish scholarship were, to be sure, not really indigeneous. It had great antecedents in sixteenth-century Italy and a more immediate source of direct inspiration in the pioneering scholarship of the Jewish intellectuals of Galicia. But German-Jewish scholarship rapidly outgrew its models and attained a self-sustaining independence and continuity that were unmatched anywhere until the Jewish resettlement of Palestine and the birth of the State of Israel. Moreover, it set the style – even linguistically! – for Jewish scholarship in the Austro-Hungarian empire and became the training ground

for many East European *yeshiva bahurim* who sought to substitute critical scholarship for mere learning, even of the secular kind.

In short, if one wishes to understand the history, techniques and quests of modern Jewish critical scholarship anywhere, including the United States and Israel, one must look to Germany.

While German-Jewish scholarship covered the whole field of Jewish activity and thought, some of its most impressive and enduring contributions were in areas of classical rabbinics and of medieval Jewish literature. All German-Jewish scholars – even those who proclaimed loudest that Judaism was the most authentic representation of the Biblical faith and ethic – understood full well that it was not in Scripture itself so much as in its exegesis that the message of the Bible achieved any real impact on society. In the exegetical process, in other words, in rabbinism, they rightly discerned the repository of the dynamics of Jewish religious history. Accordingly, if Judaism was to develop and gain a fresh relevance for contemporary Jewry, it could do so only by developing in the spirit and by the laws of its own inner history. Hence, each school of scholar-theologians – Reform, Historical, Orthodox – sought to pinpoint and describe the structure of rabbinic faith and literature, and thereby to gain not only new insight into the sources themselves but the foundations for legitimatising their respective religious responses to the contemporary world. No one school attained a monopoly on excellence in this area of research. The study of post-Biblical literature and religion was illuminated by brilliant fruits of research from the pens of leaders of all three tendencies in German Jewry. Indeed, even today no student of rabbinic culture can consider himself initiated into the techniques and problems of rabbinic research in all its aspects and ramifications without having studied the works of Frankel, Geiger, Hoffmann, N. Brüll, Bacher, Isaac Hirsch Weiss, Ludwig Blau and, of course, the architectonic genius in all areas of Jewish history, Heinrich Graetz. Any rabbinic scholarship of consequence of our own age builds on the foundations of these probes into “the sea of the Talmud”.

From one perspective, these men were but continuing and refining the techniques of rabbinic study that had been pursued by scholars from the Middle Ages down to those of their own day, the disciples of Elijah of Vilna and the new critical scholars of Galicia. Hence, the rabbinic scholarship of the nineteenth century was aeons ahead of the pioneering scholarship then being cultivated in Germany into other ancient civilisations. The Jewish scholarship may not have attained some of the polish and refined techniques that were being applied in the study of Greek and Roman classics, but, on the other hand, it was hardly as immature as students who even today come to the field from the outside seem to think. It had its own tools and techniques that were often inaccessible to the tyros with a Ph.D. who presumed to pass judgment on the form and substance of Judaism on the basis of the New Testament, Church Fathers and the principles of comparative religion. On the other hand, it cannot be denied that even the most penetrating Jewish critical scholarship in this area was in part polemically motivated. It admittedly hoped to provide massive refutations of the Christian versions of the history of Judaism and simultaneously a rationale

for the various Jewish versions of rabbinic development. What should never be overlooked is that for all their break with traditional methods and perspectives, each of the great scholars was simultaneously representing his school as the most authentic link in the chain of *rabbinic* tradition. They all remained to the last proud *rabbis*.

The study of medieval literature and thought had a somewhat different overtone. Doubtless, the emphasis here, too, was in no small measure motivated by apologetic and political considerations. After all, it was the medieval experience to which German Romantics turned to discover the authentic expressions of the German *Volk*, and since Jews were trying to gain recognition and legitimacy for their tradition – cf. Zunz's *Etwas zur rabbinischen Litteratur* – it was only natural for German-Jewish scholars to seek creativity and cultural variety in the works of their own medieval ancestors – poets, philosophers, mathematicians and exegetes. However, even had they not been quite openly motivated by ideological stimuli of their cultural *Umwelt*, and even without conscious effort at Jewish “me-too-ism”, the inspiration and stimulation of the scintillating models of German scholarship into medieval history would inevitably have alerted Jewish scholars to the potential riches hidden in the deposit of medieval Jewish religious and cultural activity.

But in truth German-Jewish scholarship was at least as inwardly orientated – indeed, I believe it can be argued, far more so – as outwardly. German-Jewish scholarship sought to provide a new spiritual framework for German Jewry by rediscovering a colourful, variegated and coherent Jewish past that would also provide the rationale for variety, orderly change and development within the modern Jewish community. German-Jewish scholarship was a massive effort at reinfusing vitality into what many Jews had understandably come to regard as a fossil that was totally irrelevant to contemporary spiritual life. In the re-conquest of the past and in the mastery of the dynamics of history – of law, liturgy, philosophy – the scholars hoped to provide the rationale and motivation for adherence and the guidelines for a spiritual rebirth and future creativity. Zunz never pretended otherwise, nor did Geiger or David Hoffmann or Martin Buber or Franz Rosenzweig or Harry Torczyner. *Literaturgeschichte*, *Ritusgeschichte*, *Religionsgeschichte* were all orientated towards parallel goals.

Despite all the ulterior motives of this scholarship, and in the face of all the modern criticism that has been directed at it, one can only stand in awe before the effort at objectivity and critical analysis of areas that were so precious to the scholar. That their objectivity fell short of perfection is well known. That it, nevertheless, succeeded in attaining the levels that it did should never be overlooked, for this too was in part a consequence of the German *Sitz im Leben* of their work.

Jewish scholarship in Germany – and one, alas, must add: for all intents and purposes in Germany alone – was also intimately connected with theology and philosophy. In this respect, the model of the German university, where the dividing line between scholarship and creative thought was often a very thin one – and this was true not only of theological faculties but of law, history, art, sociology and political theory – dovetailed remarkably with the history of

Jewish tradition. The great Jewish spokesmen of the Middle Ages – Saadiah, Rashi, Abraham ibn Ezra, Maimonides, Don Isaac Abravanel – often functioned simultaneously as communal leaders, scholars, philosophers and creative liturgical authors. German-Jewish religious spokesmen now sought to provide the new synthesis that would make Judaism a legitimate component of contemporary Germany as well as of the historic Jewish tradition.

Much has been said in derision of the efforts of some German-Jewish theologians to mute and even eliminate the national elements in Jewish liturgy and ritual and to substitute, especially for traditional Jewish messianism, an abstract concept of Jewish mission and universalist prophetic ethic. This ideology is widely pilloried for having sapped Jewish community life of its vital marrow and of an underlying commitment to the unity and continuity of the Jewish people. However, it is too often overlooked that this was but one of several ideologies of Jewish life in modern Germany; and that the fundamental weakness, even sterility, of this posture not only became evident to many German Jews by the beginning of the twentieth century, but was actually repudiated from the outset by those scholars who formed the first rabbinical seminary in Breslau under the leadership of Zacharias Frankel. As a case in point, von Treitschke may have been a Jew-hater, but he knew how to read a history book; he understood very well what Graetz's gut conception of Jewish history and the Jewish people was. Graetz could not sunder Judaism from the Jewish people, and his monumental *Geschichte* will for ever remain not only one of the classic expositions of Jewish history, but one of the great nineteenth-century affirmations of the national and religious integrity of World Jewry. However alone he had to stand in a public polemic that all German Jews, Graetz included, would have preferred to avoid, he had the courage to stand up to his opponent without flinching or cringing. When the chips were down, the enduring reality and legitimacy of the Jewish people would be affirmed by many a German-Jewish spokesman long before political Zionism had been born.

On the other hand, if the goal of the study of history is to understand as well as to know, the time has come for us – who live in an age when classical Reform theology has become a historic memory – to attempt to appreciate the role it sought to play in all sincerity in the context of German-Jewish life in the nineteenth century (and in the context of its American offshoots as well).

It is, I submit, a partisan and myopic perception of classical Reform theology and eschatology that evaluates it as basically and essentially apologetic and Gentile-orientated. Certainly such considerations were in the minds of Reform spokesmen, for they passionately sought to put an end to their alienation from society at large. On the other hand, it was not this motivation alone that impelled them to call Berlin or New York their new Jerusalem. The fact is that they and their constituencies had despaired of, and ceased to believe in, the possibility of a physical in-gathering of the Jewish exiles with a return to an earthly Jerusalem. Given this new vacuum in belief, some other rationale had to be found for Jewish steadfastness and separation from the majority. Mendelssohn himself had had to face up to the issue: given the "universal" acceptance of Biblical monotheism and its prophetic ethic, why preserve cleavages that were

not only divisive but invidious? Once Christianity had been shorn of its medieval Christology and magical sacramentalism, and perceived afresh as the supreme expression of *humanitas* or total submissiveness to a transcendent master, what need was there to keep mankind divided? How cogent and effective the argument was should be evident to any dispassionate observer of Jewish mass behaviour in the last two centuries. Classical Reform sought an answer, one that would provide not only a Jewish *raison d'être* but a sense of proud service to mankind at large. In one form or another, it was this that all German Jewish theology sought to do. Neither Abraham Geiger nor Samson Raphael Hirsch would flee from the challenge. They sought to speak to Jewry in contemporary form and with cogent arguments that could simultaneously be proclaimed to the world at large.

German Jewry at its best was not an apologetic Jewry. Leo Baeck took on Adolf von Harnack in a public forum, with a vigour and dignity that gained him eternal renown, without the remotest hope of convincing a single Christian. But he did assume the obligations of *philanthropia* by providing *consolatio* (in the classical philosophical sense of these terms) to his own community. This is the import of the history of more recent German-Jewish theology, from Hermann Cohen to Martin Buber and the later Leo Baeck himself. Ultimately, the only tenable posture for a minority people such as the Jews – even of the State of Israel – to adopt in a world that sees no room for them (and often convinces Jews to that effect) is to try afresh in every age to formulate in transcendent terms the reason for its continuity.

Nor can the efforts, however unacceptable they may be to us, in any way be dismissed as futile. Whatever actually triggered Rosenzweig's own affirmation of Judaism, he, too, had to take a stand on the place of the Jews and Judaism in the context of a world with an enduring Christian majority. The German Jew could not ignore the world, and he would, accordingly, not pretend to his fellow Jews that they could afford to ignore it. The ethics and theology of each age may soon become part of the soil of the past. But, like the Torah itself, the teachers of every age must speak in terms apposite to their present, or, as the medieval philosophers interpreted a classic rabbinic phrase, in the language of men.

In this context, the great rabbinical schools of Germany, of Breslau, the *Hochschule* and the Hildesheimer Seminary of Berlin, were not only or even primarily professional schools. They were the seedbeds of scholarship and of learning, which in Germany achieved the harmony that is so often missed in contemporary universities. These seminaries were classical Jewish universities, for they bridged between the Torah of Shem and the wisdom of Japheth. Moreover, they provided the link between critical scholarship and faith. Ultimately, even they became too stolid and remote to satisfy the needs of thinkers such as Rosenzweig and Buber. Hence, the latter and others devised new educational modes and institutions that produced many a creative disciple. To them even philological criticism had arrived at a dead end. What emerges in sum is a pulsating quest for new forms of conquest of the essence and the essential of the old. It may have been but a handful who were directly involved in these enterprises, but their impact was enormous.

There is an irony in the later phases of this Jewish activity, for ultimately German-Jewish intellectuals who had staked so much in rationalism and liberalism were progressively impelled to affirm a Jewish romantic approach in which the authentic spirit of the Jewish people (read: *Volk*) would be upheld against the nomian disciplines of rational philosophy, orderly halakhah, and critical exegesis. Germany became the breeding ground for sympathetic re-evaluation of all that Graetz had condemned – mysticism, hasidism, messianism, the Jewish “free spirit”. In consequence, a new sympathy for the native genius of the Jewish people as an enduring force was proclaimed to Jews who had long sought to sweep these populist “aberrations” under the rug. While loudly protesting a greater objectivity in the study of the Jewish past than displayed by classical *Jüdische Wissenschaft*, even these later scholars could hardly conceal their goal of providing educated Jews with a new source of pride in their people and its past, and by implication, new sources of hope for totally new dimensions of creativity. For those who cared to read the record of Jewish religious expression afresh the continuity of Jewish history became not an accident or the tool of a dominant rabbinic class but a repository of vast resources of energy and imaginative powers that belied everything that Hegel and his disciples had said in their characterisations of Judaism.

In the light of this renewed affirmation of the continuing vitality of the Jews and Judaism, of the reality of the Jewish *élan vital*, it is no wonder that Zionism soon became among many German Jews not a mere political course of escape from the malignant hatred embedded in German culture, which it indeed was to many German-Jewish students, but a programme of national resurgence of profound spiritual dimensions.

## V

The threads of German-Jewish history are by no means exhausted by the external and internal frameworks the outlines of which we have sought to sketch. There was a second Jewish community that may have no real place in Jewish history except as a vital statistic. That group was made up of the *religionslos* and *konfessionslos*, the Jew whom everyone knew was Jewish but who, for his part, refrained from identifying himself as a Jew but simultaneously scorned the invitation to join the camp of Christendom. It was a group of Jewish universalists – neither Jewish nor Christian, but a modern *ethnos triton* that was a people unto itself. Often, but by no means always, politically radical, this group has become renowned as having contributed so much to art, even more to art history and to criticism, literature, journalism, science, jurisprudence, sociology and philosophy. So neutral was this group ethnically and religiously that its origins were of consequence only to antisemites and psychoanalysts. These men, it may properly be said, found in the Weimar Republic the soil and climate most conducive to their burgeoning. Thus, it came about that Peter Gay could write an engaging work entitled *Weimar Culture*<sup>18</sup> without

<sup>18</sup>*Weimar Culture. The Outsider as Insider*, New York, London 1968.

mentioning Jews, although it is "Jews" who make up much of the fabric of his story and analysis.

The story of Weimar, I suppose, can be read in a number of ways. It can be evaluated as the story of what, from a classical Zionist perspective or from a socio-economic perspective articulated by Hannah Arendt or from an orthodox Jewish theological perspective, can properly be called a Jewish *danse macabre*. It can be read simply as the tragedy or indictment of Western secularism. Clearly, even this series of alternatives does not begin to exhaust the list. Whatever the vantage point from which the record is read – and who can possibly read it without confronting the challenge of its failures? – ultimately the story must be classified as one of the tributaries of that endless river called Jewish history. Accordingly, however removed its Jewish expatriates were from the mainstream of Jewish history, until Nazism forced many of them back, their story is really very much a part of Jewish history – of the Jewish effort to break what many regarded as a demonic fate that could be overcome, and to fashion a world where the exalted visions of Isaiah 2: 4<sup>b</sup>, 11: 1–9 and Micah 4: 3–5 (in a secularised form, of course) could be turned into realities.

For some for a while, they indeed were realities or at least the heralds of them. And now that Freud has made us aware of the driving power of people's origins, even when the participants themselves are unaware of them, who can today under these free-floating artists, intellectuals, businessmen and politicians from the intricate web of Jewish history? They are part of the story, and they are, accordingly also within the legitimate purview of the studies of the Leo Baeck Institute.

These are some of the reactions that a renewed encounter with two decades of research and expression in the *Year Book* and other publications of the Leo Baeck Institute have evoked in one reader. The renewed encounter and fresh reflection have compelled him – and will, perhaps, stimulate others – to try to identify the threads connecting the hundreds of disconnected studies in the *Year Books* to each other, to German-Jewish history, to Jewish history as a whole, more especially to modern Jewish history and finally, to modern history generally. If these reflections are valid, hopefully they will provide a point of departure for fresh re-examination of Jewish history in other areas and other periods.

History does not repeat itself, nor does it provide any sure guide to the present or the future. But the history of a people is forever operating within and upon the group. The raising of that history to a conscious collective memory is in itself a reflection of the vitality of the people and of its collective will and dream. If the Leo Baeck Institute has in any way contributed to making German-Jewish history part of the kinetic collective memory of the Jewish people, and of others interested in its history – and I am one of the many for whom it has clearly done so – it has done the supreme honour not only to the man for whom the Institute is named but for all those who conceived it and made its work possible. May we hope that the twentieth year is but the end of the Introduction and the transition to a new chapter of study, memory and vitality.

