From Prejudice to Destruction
Anti-Semitism, 1700-1933

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VOLTAIRE

VOLTAIRE DID MORE than any other single man to shape the rationalistic trend that moved European society toward improving the status of the Jews. 2 Voltaire was, by his own definition, a Deist. He continued to develop the Deistic trend of thought where his English predecessors had left off. His vigorous effort to undermine the authority of the Church and to make tolerance prevail in matters of opinion and belief was nourished by his Deistic outlook; that effort began in the early 1750s, when the Deist movement in England was unmistakably declining. Until that time Voltaire had wished to excel only as a writer, philosopher, and historian. From then on, he saw his principal role in the public struggle for religious tolerance. 3 Voltaire lived in England from 1726 to 1731, and the contact he had with several Deist leaders reinforced his reservations about the teachings of the Church and Christianity. Voltaire had already developed a rationalistic world view, 2 although he did not arrive at his practical conclusions for social reforms based on rationalism until two decades later, when he was in his mid-fifties. Perversions of justice stemming from intolerance—the most famous being the death sentence on the Protestant Calas in Toulouse, who was suspected of murdering his son because the latter allegedly planned to convert to Roman Catholicism—roused Voltaire to depart from his passive course. He also felt that the Church's restriction on freedom of thought was too heavy a burden for the citizens of France to bear indefinitely, and that the time had come to take action. Therefore, Voltaire began to wage total war against what had been the founding principle of society and state—that is, the faith, ceremonies, and ritual of

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Roman Catholicism. In articles, letters, and poetry, and in the Encyclopedia published from 1751 to 1772 by d'Alembert and Diderot, two of the leading rationalists of the time, Voltaire ridiculed the stories of the Bible and the Gospel. The customs of earlier generations seemed absurd to the enlightened mind of the eighteenth century. The religious commandments and laws were deemed meaningless, and even contrary to accepted morality. And worst of all were the miracles in which, according to dogma, the faithful had to believe literally.

This work of Voltaire's was not innovative in content. He quoted the English Deists extensively, not so much to give credit to the originators of an idea, as to give his arguments the added authority of such writers and thinkers as Toland, Shaftesbury, and Bolingbroke, who at that time were more highly respected than he. 4 Voltaire wanted to show that in England, which was regarded by many of the enlightened in France as the free state par excellence, anyone could criticize the accepted principles of faith without personal risk. In fact, Voltaire and the other French philosophers were more critical of Christianity than their English colleagues. Moreover, the French went further than the English in their social aspirations. There is no indication that the English sought to uproot the foundations of the Church. Their intentions leaned more to the theological: to achieve the right to interpret the Christian tradition in a radically rationalistic manner or to disregard it entirely and to base their ethical system on a secular footing. The French writers, and above all Voltaire, were militant thinkers raising their voices in a battle cry against a regime that was founded on principles of deceit. Voltaire's slogan "Ecrasez l'infame!" whatever it means, 5 is a call to the community of the enlightened to do away with prejudices and to uproot superstitions, and these terms included anything not consistent with common sense.

The French went further than the English in one more respect: they expanded the use of intellectual criticism. The rationalistic system of thought had made great strides during the first half of the eighteenth century, and the many trends of that development converged in Voltaire's brilliant mind. Others paved the way for him, but he is the one who gave historical writing a new basis. 6 Voltaire reached a new understanding of social dynamics and of the alternating ascent and descent of cultural creativity. This versatile writer is also regarded as one of the first ethnologists or anthropologists by virtue of his efforts to explain the cultural traits of tribes and peoples as natural phenomena that operate according to certain definable laws. Voltaire also took this anthropological approach in dealing with the history of nations, including that of Biblical Israel and the Jews of the Middle Ages and later generations. Christian historians looked at Jewish history from a theological point of view, with faith in the prov-
Identical nature of the Jews, who had at first fulfilled a divine mission and ultimately suffered their punishment for rebellion and betrayal of their role.

The criticism of the earliest Deists undermined this faith, thus destroying the basis for the theological explanation of the history of Israel and its destiny. For want of another explanation, writers who had abandoned the faith on which the traditional concepts were based continued to use the accepted clichés. This conglomeration of theological-religious language and rationalistic criticism is to be found even in the writings of Spinoza and recurs in the writings of most of the English Deists. Voltaire, however, uses the language of theologians only tongue-in-cheek, as will be demonstrated below. He himself is not in need of this crutch. He explains the phenomena of Jewish history, ancient or modern, in the same way that he explains human history in general: by inquiring into the nature of human societies and their variations. In Voltaire’s teaching, rationalism became dialectic: with one hand, the rationalists erased the Christian tradition that had previously explained Jewish existence and given it the status of a divinely forsaken community; with the other they created a system of concepts suitable for characterizing Jews as despicable by their very nature.

Voltaire employed the same realistic terminology to reevaluate Judaism as he used in his general historiography. The nature, source, and significance of this terminology deserves consideration. The bonds of a new study of human society, which we call ethnology or anthropology, first appeared during the Renaissance. With the discovery of America, the Far East, and Africa, the horizon of Europeans widened, as they were introduced to innumerable tribes and peoples that lived by cultural patterns totally different from those known in Europe until that time. The variety of cultural patterns found in the world, as revealed by travelers and missionaries, aroused doubts as to whether all the peoples of the world had evolved from one source, as held by Biblical tradition. Furthermore, even had man derived from a common origin, he had become variegated under the influence of environment and time. When confidence in accepted explanations was undermined, new questions arose: What forces had shaped society and culture? What transformations had taken place? What factors were involved in such changes and transformations? The explanations given for these phenomena did not rest, of course, on scientific method, and for the most part they were no more than assumptions and guesses. The courage of writers and thinkers in using uninhibited speculations characterizes, for better or worse, the first generations of the Enlightenment.

The enterprise of describing the characteristics of societies and cultures in order to understand their formation reached its height in Voltaire’s writings. His book Essai sur les moeurs et l’esprit des nations is an attempt to expose the basic characteristics of the European peoples by tracing their evolution while ignoring the details of their history. In this enterprise, as in his other historical works, Voltaire used various principles of analysis without methodically examining their nature and validity. He was aware that the results of earlier stages could be seen in subsequent stages, and thus when he describes the history of the peoples of Europe, he first turns backward and sketches the histories of China, India, Persia, and the Arab countries. Generalizing, he establishes that physical and moral causes influence the formation of the character of all peoples.

Simultaneously, he used such terms as l’esprit des nations and l’esprit du temps in order to demonstrate that the cultural patterns, laws, and customs of a particular period constitute an integrated, self-explanatory system. The common denominator of all these basic concepts is that they serve to explain historical phenomena naturally, without reference to the supernatural explanations of Christian tradition which were accepted at face value by previous generations, including that of Voltaire’s youth. The new historical perception cast aside the idea of Providence; it rejected the assumption that the Jewish people were destined to play a special role in guiding mankind, which role the Catholic Church, in its theology, claimed to have taken over. Not only were these theological precepts disqualifed as tools for understanding history, but they also were conceived as outmoded fundamentals of the ‘spirit of the times’ of past eras. When Voltaire, in his militant years, fought to uproot dogmas and subvert Church rule, one of his principal weapons was the new historical perception. Indeed, this perception was supposed to provide a natural explanation for what was considered until then the product of divine inspiration. The history of the Jewish people, the bearer of revelation until the coming of Jesus, and the history of the Church thereafter were presented as a part of human history—to be understood and explained by the same criteria as the general history of mankind. Jewish history, in any case, gained attention in Voltaire’s descriptions as the history of a people of antiquity. However, the fact that the Jewish people were the source of the Christian faith that he despised heightened his interest in the history of Israel but diminished at the same time his ability to approach it calmly and objectively.

Outwardly, Voltaire pretended to adhere to the revealed nature of the Bible as required by the dominant Church. In the numerous articles he wrote about the Bible, expressing historical and moral criticism in the style of the Deists, he repeatedly declared, either at the beginning or end of each article, that as a Christian he was obliged to believe literally in the revealed writings. He pretended to bow his head in reverence before the divine wisdom, which could alter the laws of nature or perform acts in...
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credible by human criteria. However, as a historian, Voltaire declared his right to judge matter according to his own light: to verify the truth factually, and to evaluate actions morally. In this way Voltaire saved himself from the accusation of heresy and saved his books from the omnipresent eye of the censor. At the same time, Voltaire gave a hint of his real opinion on the historical reliability of Biblical stories and the moral level that prevailed in the sacred book on which Church authority rested.

In fact, all of Voltaire's historical work is a polemic with Christianity, even when it deals with topics far removed from the Biblical world or free Jewish or ecclesiastical history. When he considers China and finds there only quiet, tranquility, and the highest morality, his critical stance is unmistakable: he wants to demonstrate that it represents a people of happy destiny because it built its worlds on belief in a supreme power—like that of the Deists—but without reference to irrational dogma or meaningless ritual.

In Voltaire's day, modern historiography was still in its earliest stage: the crystallization of its basic categories and the development of its critical tools emerged alongside implicit philosophical and social trends. Voltaire's historical view of the world in general and his description of Judaism in particular are by-products of the philosophical and public controversy in which he was involved. The historiographer had only begun to forge the instruments of his craft; he had not yet reached a respectable degree of objectivity.

Voltaire reveals his subjectivity, in fact his arbitrariness, even in his evaluation of historical evidence, finding some sources reliable and others suspicious. On the issue of the formation of the Jewish people, he shows a preference for the testimony of Greek and Roman historians over the Biblical account of Jewish tradition. Originally, the Israelites were a nomadic Arab tribe living in the Sinai Desert; if they were in Egypt at all, they were expelled because of leprosy, as recorded by Abydon, Teodorus, and others. The patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and perhaps even Moses, never lived at all. Voltaire finds countless contradictions in the Biblical account of their history and abundant occasions to scoff at the deeds attributed to them. Many of the stories produce an ethical revulsion in the enlightened scholar. Abraham turns over his wife to the Pharaoh for money, acts cruelly towards his son Ishmael, and is willing to sacrifice his son Isaac like the barbaric peoples who practice human sacrifice. Moses orders the execution of a multitude because of the golden calf; there is the revolt of Korah and the affair of the Midianite women. The conquerors of Canaan perpetrated their cruelty: they also deceived the Gibonites, much as their ancestor deceived his brother Esau, his own father Isaac, and his father-in-law Laban.

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The actions of Biblical characters, regardless of whether their historical existence is in doubt or not, were not considered by Voltaire for their own sake but in order to exemplify the low ethical level of the people whose imagination created them or among whom they lived. Voltaire was well-versed in the Biblical scholarship that had been developed in the generations before him, just as he knew Christian exegesis and theology. However, he lacked a precise method of research that might have enabled him to arrive at definite and well-founded conclusions. In fact, he took his arguments to its predecessors and allowed the famous claim of his statement and theories from his predecessors, especially the most of his books, difficult to resolve differences between facts or verify hypotheses. His primary interest was in seeking factual truth in describing the dominant morals and opinions of the Biblical period to represent the spirit of the Jewish nation. Having portrayed the spiritual image of the nation, he left free to judge them by the rationalist ideas he advocated.

The evaluation was made on the basis of various criteria. The first was that of morality. On the surface, recognition of differing conducts and changing morals is part of Voltaire's historical method. Nonetheless, Voltaire did not fail to define an ethical norm binding for all generations; when he found historical figures who did not meet that norm, he judged them harshly. He finds the generations of the Bible guilty not only of cruelty and deceit, but also of sexual promiscuity, upon which he frowned sternly. He disapproved of the polygamy of the patriarchs and the kings, and even judged Ruth's conduct, in trying to ensure that Boaz would marry her as next-of-kins, by eighteenth-century standards "which may be no piper, but are at least more decent."

The second criterion for evaluating the acts of past generations was reason or by superstition? To Voltaire, superstition applies to any ceremonial or ritual act that serves no clear purpose and is done only to appease God according to the anthropomorphic perception. God would not command man to perform meaningless acts. The very concept of a God that commands ritual acts, such as sacrifices, circumcision, and the Sabbath, and prescribes penalties as severe as capital punishment for their violation, is an offense and an abomination to the Deistic God, who was removed from the world of human action. Needless to say, by this criterion, Biblical figures appear to be sunk in the deepest depths of superstition. Voltaire heaps ridicule on Biblical commandments and prohibitions: the ritual of sacrifice, public ceremonies, and individual duties.

The ritual acts that really are a part of the Jewish religion do not suffice: following Deistic scholars who preceded him, he includes human
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Voltaire's third criterion is scientific and cultural productivity. As Voltaire dismisses the value of practical religion in the life of a people, he attributes the highest value to art, literature, science, and technology, that is, to everything that gives man power over nature or improves his life by giving it an added aesthetic dimension, elegance, or beauty. He recalls the peoples of antiquity by their accomplishments in these areas. He praises the Chinese for the technical inventions that advanced agriculture, enabling the creation of great cities in their country. He celebrates the Greeks for their artistic creativity during the Golden Age. He glorifies the Hellenism of Alexandria for its advances in science and technology. In the history of the Jewish people, Voltaire finds almost no contributions of this kind; and when he does, he attributes them to the influence of surrounding peoples. The Israelites of the Biblical period were neither artists nor artisans. Did not Solomon rely on Hiram of Tyre to build the Temple? Does not the Book of Samuel record that those dwelling in the mountains lacked even the simplest iron implements with which to make a plow? The Israelites were no more than nomadic shepherds, or at best the most primitive of farmers. They showed no trace of scientific awareness of the laws of nature: instead, they believed in a divine source for phenomena like rain and the rainbow. The role of the doctor who is familiar with the body of man and the cause of his illness was filled by priest or prophet—those ready to take advantage of man's weakness to reinforce his faith in their own supernatural power. 

The final criterion by which Voltaire evaluated peoples and cultures was political: the ability to sustain a proper political system. Voltaire is not considered a systematic political thinker; he had only a secondary interest in the problems of state and government. Nevertheless, he took note of the ability of peoples to create order by authority and law and to withstand external attacks on the commonwealth, and he regarded the absence of this capability as a defect in a nation's character. The exile of the Jews twice from their land was clear evidence that they lacked the qualities necessary for sustaining a state. The Jewish army was never well-organized or well-trained. The commanders knew little strategy, and the soldiers showed little courage. In essence, the Jews always learned toward trade and money-lending, occupations that required far different qualities from those of the soldier or statesman.

Voltaire seeks to prove the Jews' lack of political talent by reference to the beliefs of Biblical Judaism. He accepted the prevailing view of Christian scholars that the Old Testament knew nothing of immortality; and, much to our surprise, he regards that as a serious flaw. Hardly an avid believer in immortality himself, Voltaire did share the Deistic belief in God, but was

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Voltaire's argument toward the metaphysical principles of faith, finding them possibly false, and certainly unprovable. The reasons for his zeal for faith, possibly false, and certainly unprovable. The reasons for his zeal for faith, possibly false, and certainly unprovable. The reasons for his zeal for faith, possibly false, and certainly unprovable. The reasons for his zeal for faith, possibly false, and certainly unprovable. The reasons for his zeal for faith, possibly false, and certainly unprovable. The reasons for his zeal for faith, possibly false, and certainly unprovable. The reasons for his zeal for faith, possibly false, and certainly unprovable. The reasons for his zeal for faith, possibly false, and certainly unprovable. The reasons for his zeal for faith, possibly false, and certainly unprovable. The reasons for his zeal for faith, possibly false, and certainly unprovable. The reasons for his zeal for faith, possibly false, and certainly unprovable. The reasons for his zeal for faith, possibly false, and certainly unprovable. The reasons for his zeal for faith, possibly false, and certainly unprovable. The reasons for his zeal for faith, possibly false, and certainly unprovable. The reasons for his zeal for faith, possibly false, and certainly unprovable. The reasons for his zeal for faith, possibly false, and certainly unprovable. The reasons for his zeal for faith, possibly false, and certainly unprovable. The reasons for his zeal for faith, possibly false, and certainly unprovable. The reasons for his zeal for faith, possibly false, and certainly unprovable. The reasons for his zeal for faith, possibly false, and certainly unprovable. The reasons for his zeal for faith, possibly false, and certainly unprovable. The reasons for his zeal for faith, possibly false, and certainly unprovable. The reasons for his zeal for faith, possibly false, and certainly unprovable. The reasons for his zeal for faith, possibly false, and certainly unprovable. The reasons for his zeal for faith, possibly false, and certainly unprovable. The reasons for his zeal for faith, possibly false, and certain
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Voltaire has a Rabbi from Smyrna say: "Our enemies regard us as guilty of robbing the Egyptians, of slaughtering several small nations in the towns, we besieged, of being base usurers, of offering human sacrifices, even eating of them as Ezekiel says. We were a barbaric people; but would it be just to burn the Pope and all the Monsignori of Rome because the first Roman king popped the Sabines and plundered the Sannites?" In this case Voltaire absolves his contemporaries Jews from the responsibility for sins attributed to their ancestors, as rationalistic ethics required. On other occasions, however, he ignores historical distinctions and treats the Jews of every generation as a single entity, as in the following example: "But what shall I say to my brother the Jew? Shall I give him dinner? Yes, provided that during the meal Balaam's ass does not take it into its head to bray; that Ezekiel does not mix his breakfast with our dinner; that a Jew does not come to swallow one of the guests and keep him in his belly for three days; that a serpent does not mix into the conversation to seduce my wife; that a prophet does not take it into his head to sleep with her after dinner, as did that good fellow Hosea for fifteen francs and a bushel of barley: above all that no Jew make a tour round my house sounding the trumpet, making the walls come down, killing me, my father, my mother, my wife, my children, my cat and my dog, in accord with the former usage of the Jews." Facetious though this passage may be, it expresses Voltaire's opinion that the Jews of every generation are tainted by the same defects as their forefathers. To cite another example, Voltaire describes the Egyptian magicians who with their spells duplicated everything that Moses did. He concludes his description with the following caustic note: "It was only in the matter of lice that they were outdone; for that reason it has accurately been said that the Jews know more than any other people about this profession." Voltaire's emphasis bridges the periods, encouraging the reader not to distinguish between the slaves of the Exodus and the eighteenth-century Jews whom the author seeks to condemn. Regarding the prophecies of the Jews, Voltaire says: "The prophecies, which they understood only literally, prophesied on a hundred occasions that they would be the masters of the world: however, they never possessed more than a tiny corner of the Earth for a few years; today they haven't even one village of their own." The distinction between past and present is entirely blurred.

Jewish history was also conceived as a single historical unit both by Jewish tradition and by Christianity, the latter, of course, regarding the appearance of Jesus as a decisive turning point. However, while the traditional concept, Jewish or Christian, was that the unity derived from a divine mission, Voltaire explained it in terms of permanent qualities deeply rooted in the spirit and character of the people. Evidence of these characteristics could be taken from any period in the history of the people: after all, personification is essentially an external matter, and time creates no barriers between generations. Consequently, Voltaire's method allowed him to transfer his data from one period to the next and to attribute to the Jews the basic characteristics of the Biblical people to later generations. Likewise, it was hardly surprising to find the converse: qualities discovered in later periods are attributed to Biblical Jews. That Jews are drawn to money and power, their occupation in the Middle Ages and modern times, and their role in the Talmudic and medieval periods fulfilling the models of the Messianic era did arise. These were the bases for the Christian polemic contending that the Jews sought world domination. Ex post facto, polemists found supporting material for this view in the Bible as well; Voltaire accepted their Christian accusations and incorporated them in his rationalistic indictment.

This last example elucidates the historical background of Voltaire's attitude toward the Jews. Without a doubt, Voltaire's primary aim was to combat the dominant religion by challenging the foundations of a Church built on the concept of Biblical revelation. He forged the intellectual tools for this project while developing his rationalistic historical method. However, in order to achieve this goal Voltaire had to reduce the stature of the Jewish people, denigrating their culture as of no value, ridiculing their character, and mocking their hopeless dreams and unfounded pride. Moreover, this depreciation applied not simply to a small group of people in antiquity, but to a community extant in eighteenth-century Europe, which Voltaire by no means ignored. Voltaire had contact with several typical Jews of his time: in London in 1726 he met a Jew by the name of Medina on whom he had a French bank-draft, but whom he found bankrupt. When in Potsdam, in the 1750s, he had some shady business dealings with one Hirschel from Berlin, against whom he got himself involved in an embarrassing lawsuit, this hardly increased his affection for his antagonist's co-religionists. However, as Voltaire's biographical data bear out, his attitude toward the Jews is not to be attributed to such experiences. Voltaire's first evident derogation of the Jews precedes his incident with the banker Medina by four years. In 1722, he gave Cardinal Dubois information tending to arouse suspicion that Solomon Levy, a Jew from Metz, engaged in espionage for the Austrians. Voltaire spiced his report with notes having no bearing on the individual concerned, but defaming Jews as a whole. Voltaire speaks of "the Jew's talent for being accepted in and expelled from every place." "The Jew does not belong to
any place except that place in which he makes money: would he not just as easily betray the king on behalf of the emperor as he would the emperor for the king?'' In these early notes, Voltaire's gusto in listing the faults of the Jews—faults that relate not to the individual, but to the entire group and tribe—is glaring. Voltaire's image of the Jews was that nurtured by the Christian mind for generations: a species alienated from the community, strange in language and customs, sunk in obscurationism and adhering to an anachronistic tradition, devoted to their brethren in the extreme but hostile to those around them, with whom they have no contact other than in business dealings, usury, and dishonest trade. Because of this image, Christians felt a sense of superiority, if not hatred, ridicule, and mockery, toward the Jews. Christian tradition appended to its image of the Jew the idea that the depravity of the Jewish community resulted from their great sin, thus justifying at the same time the Christian emotional attitude toward the Jew. Voltaire, like his fellow rationalists, omitted the theological explanation; he offered a characterological-historical one in its place. However, despite the change in reasoning, neither the general image nor its accompanying evaluation was modified. Voltaire, like a pious Christian, held that the Jews were a community of wretches and second-rate; likewise, he remained faithful to the collective animosities that he inherited from his early Christian upbringing and from which he was never prompted to free himself.

Voltaire's adherence to remnants of the Christian tradition and its emotions it engendered could be seen as contradicting his position in general, which stressed severing these ties. However, abandoning the dogmatic content of a tradition does not always assure liberation from the emotional attitudes related to it. Indeed, Voltaire was able to support his hostility to Judaism within his new value system. Antagonism toward Judaism throughout its history served brilliantly for the purpose of fusing Christianity and the Church. Thus, Voltaire could, without conflict, at one and the same time abandon Christian tradition while maintaining a negative attitude toward Judaism.

Moreover, Voltaire hardly sought earthshaking changes in society and politics. He questioned neither monarchy nor the institution of nobility, nor even the privileged position of the wealthy bourgeoisie over the lower classes, the peasants and the masses. He fought the arbitrariness of the regime and the fanaticism of the Church, which often joined forces to abuse the individual unjustly. Voltaire devoted himself passionately to the defense of such individuals, as he did on behalf of the Cazes family. His hope for the future was that as a result of the spread of knowledge by philosophers like himself, the abuses of the authorities would cease and the state would be governed by the enlightened principles of humanity and tolerance. In Voltaire's vocabulary, as in the terminology of his generation, a philosopher was not a thinker attempting to decipher the secrets of the universe and of man, but an enlightened man who acted according to reason, without relying on the dogmas, beliefs, or rituals of a positivist religion. He regarded all these as superstitions, the products of the weakness of men intellectually immature. Primitive man encountering the phenomena of nature—rain, thunder, and lightning—was awed by the wonder of life and death. He drew conclusions from his experience of the unknown and discovered the existence of a superior power who was the cause of the universe, nature, and man. But his anthropomorphic mind was not satisfied by that conclusion; he also attributed the discovery of these phenomena and their details to the will of the Supreme Being and his providence. Consequently, he sought a way to influence that being—through prayers, sacrifice, or ingratiation—that he might make the rain fall, grant the suppliant long life, or give him prosperity and wealth. The desire to obtain God's favor was the source of the ritual that or- ornated positivist religion. It was nothing more than superstition, the product of ancient man's confused, anthropomorphic conception. "The advantage of the philosophers, a few of whom were to be found in every generation of the philosophers, but who in the eighteenth century constituted a whole community, was their liberation from superstition. The masses would continue to adhere to superstition forever.

In his social philosophy, Voltaire remained aristocratic; yet he placed enlightened philosophers capable of pure reason at the top of his social pyramid at the expense of the hereditary nobility. He did not foresee any developments that would ever change this situation. The enlightened philosophers would remain a minority, while most of the world would continue to wallow in the depths of ignorance and would never throw off the yoke of positivist religion. "The Jews were lumped in this latter category by Voltaire, and he neither saw nor sought the possibility of their improve- ment, whether through education or through political or social emancipa- tion.

It is important to take note of the period and to realize that in Voltaire's lifetime, the question of emancipating the Jews had not yet been raised. The precursors of that line of thought—in the works of Locke, Toland, and possibly Montesquieu—were not known to many at the time, and certainly not to Voltaire. The enlightened writer had in fact en- countered a new type of Jew who had acquired a European education and even contributed to European culture: Isaac Pinto, a philosopher, economist, and prolific author, attacked Voltaire for his defamatory remarks about the Jews in the Encyclopédie. Pinto pointed out that at least among Sephardic Jews there were educated and enlightened individuals.
who could compete with their Christian colleagues. Voltaire's answer was that if there were such, they were welcome to join the community of philosophers. However, such individuals, he claimed, were exceptions, while the majority of the Jewish community was no different from the ignorant masses. It was this majority, and not individual exceptions, whom he judged harshly.  

With this remark, Voltaire, as it were, opened up the way for a vision of the Jew's future in enlightened society. Hints of that vision appear in Voltaire's writings not because of a conscious search for a solution to the Jewish problem, but because of the internal logic of his new system of thought. The abandonment of Christian theology destroyed the justification for the existence of the Jewish nation as testimony to the truth of Christianity. Likewise, it eliminated the basis for the hope that the Jews would eventually recognize this truth and accept Christianity. A new solution to the problem of the future of the Jews had to replace the Christian expectation of their conversion. If the negative evaluation of the nature of the Jews was correct, but the ideological reason for their existence was no longer valid, they become a strange social phenomenon, harmful and lacking any justification. What then was to be done with this community, lacking in culture and human values from its inception, and now dispersed throughout the world, having become a paradigm and byword for its extreme ignorance and its social relation to its surroundings. 

The alternative of naturalization presented itself to Voltaire when he witnessed the enactment of the "Jew Bill" in England in 1753. Voltaire recounted the episode in his history, but it is clear that he sided with the proponents of its repeal and doubtful whether it occurred to him that naturalization might be a general answer to the question of the Jewish entity. He incidentally suggested the possibility of the return of the Jews to their own land, but this was little more than a light-hearted flash, hardly a proposal worthy of examination.  

In only one instance does Voltaire consider the question of the continued existence of the Jewish community among the peoples of Europe. In the supplements to the Essai that were first published in 1761, the question arises from the description of the fate of the Gypsies. What could testify better to Voltaire's view of the Jews' place on the social scale? He regarded the Gypsies as a remnant of Egyptian and Assyrian pagans, removed from their homes and carrying with them their faith and the beliefs of the sorcerer, the magician, and the witch doctor: "This race has begun to disappear from the face of the earth because recently men have become disenchanted with sorcery, tulsmans, augury, and possession by devils." The spread of the enlightenment had reduced the Gypsies' source of income and consequently they were disappearing. As a direct continu-
Part II: Germany, 1780-1819
4 Ideological Counterattack

JOHANN EISENMENGER AND VOLTAIRE were only separated by one generation. When Eisenmenger died in 1704, Voltaire was a boy of ten. Nevertheless the mental worlds they inhabited were as far apart as East and West. Eisenmenger was completely immersed in the theological world of the Middle Ages, while Voltaire was the harbinger of the modern age, the age of reason. The place of the Jews on the fringes of Christian society was permanently fixed in the concept of theological doctrine. The link of the Jew with Scripture, the validity and sanctity of which was acknowledged by the Christian also, assured him of a right to exist, albeit a relative and limited one. If the Jews were disparaged and accused by Christians, this was because the Jewish tradition confronted the parallel Christian one. Certainly it was the Jewish tradition—Talmudic Judaism in all its literary ramifications and moral and practical expressions—that served as the sole and almost indispensable authority for the arguments of Eisenmenger against Jews and Judaism. Scripture, which was to serve Voltaire for his scornful denigration of Judaism and its adherents, found no place in Eisenmenger’s argumentation.1

Eisenmenger’s and Voltaire’s systems of thought appear to contradict and exclude each other not only by their cognitive contents but also by their social purposes. Eisenmenger intended only to strengthen the accepted attitude of the Christian world to the Jews and to justify their being kept in an inferior political and social situation. Voltaire’s line of thought was associated with a drive for changes in the basic elements of society and particularly in the relation of Jews to society. As is well known, it was
change that triumphed; less than a generation after Voltaire’s death in 1778, a fundamental shift took place in the status of Jews in France and other European countries: the process of naturalization had begun. This shift in the lot of the Jews was a direct result of a fundamental transformation that swept the countries of Europe and found expression and focus in the French Revolution. The change, in fact, was a mighty departure, not only from Eisenmenger’s ideas but also from Voltaire’s. Nevertheless, the ideas they had held were not consigned to limbo, for much theorizing and discussion, lively verbal battles and polemics, accompanied the emancipation of the Jews. The words of the accusers echoed throughout this polemic and shaped the modern anti-Semitism of later generations.

The first legal act granting the Jews living in a European state the right to regard themselves as permanent residents of the country was the Edict of Tolerance issued by the Austrian Emperor Joseph II in 1782. This royal decree affected the Jews of Vienna, Lower Austria, Moravia, and Hungary. Contemporaries interpreted the edict as an expression of the emperor’s will to some extent to regard all the Jews of his lands as subjects of whose welfare he was responsible, just as he was responsible for subjects of other religions or classes. The emperor’s contemporaries did not even contemplate full equal rights for all citizens; to Jews, the very fact that the emperor acknowledged their right to be permanent residents was revolutionary.

Joseph II’s issuance of his Edict of Tolerance did not remain an isolated event. Two years later Louis XVI promulgated a law recognizing the Jews of Alsace as subjects of the king of France. Five years later, when the French Revolution eliminated classes and granted equality to all citizens, France had to choose between two alternatives: recognizing the Jews as equal citizens or expelling them. The latter possibility was raised only theoretically. In effect, the National Assembly’s decision to recognize the Jews as citizens of the state was the only possible course. Moreover, legislation in all the countries that came under French hegemony between 1792 and 1814—Holland, the Rhineland in Germany, Westphalia, Switzerland and northern Italy—followed the pattern set by the French. Other countries like Baden, Württemberg, and Bavaria followed the Austrian pattern, recognizing the citizenship of the Jews, although restricting their rights to some degree. Prussia, still independent though defeated by Napoleon, resolved on internal reforms, the granting of citizenship to Jews being one of them. At any rate, by the end of the Napoleonic era all the Jews of western and central Europe had become citizens or subjects of the states in which they lived. Historians thus rightly include this era in the period of emancipation. These events do not indicate an anti-Jewish mood, rather, a desire to...
but it arose once again in 1806-1807 when Napoleon reexamined the Jewish question and their enemies saw an opportunity to drive the Jews from the status they had attained.

As we have seen, the French pattern of naturalization of the Jews was followed in other countries as well; everywhere, opponents expressed hostile opinions on Jews and Judaism. In the Dutch National Assembly, which finally granted equal rights to the Jews in 1796, there was no lack of critical voices and reservations. Likewise in the Rhine countries, Westphalia and Frankfurt, the granting of citizenship to the Jews was not achieved without opposition. In this respect Prussia was unique. There, the debate on changing the status of the Jews continued from the death of Frederick II in 1786 until the granting of citizenship in 1812. Throughout that time the pros and cons were argued back and forth among the ministers and civil authorities. Moreover, the public had taken an interest in the Jewish question even earlier, as we have seen, and for a special reason. Indeed, in the capital, Berlin, Jews and Christians enjoyed social contact the like of which was not to be found elsewhere. Here one could find Moses Mendelssohn, friend and associate of the great Gentle thinkers and writers. Salons in Jewish homes were frequented by Christian intellectuals and people of standing. Consequently, strong social pressure was exerted to bring about equality in the political sphere as well. Yet the governmental apparatus operated slowly: sometimes the efforts for reform would seem to decline, and at other times they would be renewed. The intensity of the public polemic also varied. It would increase whenever ideas of reform seemed about to be realized, particularly in the period 1803-1805. The principal antagonists of the Jews were Karl Wilhelm Friedrich Gatterer, Ernst Traugott von Kortum, and Christian Ludwig Paalzow. These were no more than occasional writers, who even in their own day carried little weight; but some of the great thinkers of the period also contributed to the debate on the Jews: Herder, Kant, and Fichte. Herder did so with a detached, though unfavorable, investigation; Kant with Christian avarition in a philosophic guise; and Fichte with a high degree of passion and deep hostility.

Much of what was said against reform was in fact no more than a repetition of what had been said previously to justify the pariah position of the Jews. Despite the spread of rationalistic enlightenment, many still maintained the traditional Church view that the Jews were destined to dispersion, oppression, suffering, and degradation for the unatoned sin of having rejected Jesus. In 1785 the Academy of Sciences of Metz invited responses to the question whether there was a way to make the Jews of France, that is, of Alsace, more productive and happier. Most of the respondents replied that it depended entirely on the authorities. Only they

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**Ideological Counterattack**

I could grant the Jews that citizenship that would inevitably lead to their betterment and happiness. However, one respondent, faithful to Christian doctrine, held that if the Jews should achieve citizenship the Church would lose one of the proofs of its truth: the manifest victory of the Church over the pagans, the despicable synagogue. *The theologian and scholar Jean An- dré de Luc took a similar stand in the polemic over David Friedländer’s open letter to Provost Teller in 1799, at the height of the struggle of Prussian Jews for citizenship. Friedländer tried to circumvent the problem of naturalizing the Jews by implying that they were among those who rejected Friedländer’s accepting his doctrine. De Luc was among those who rejected Friedländer’s conversion to the Protestant church, but without accepting his teaching. In Berlin, he proposed that they join the Protestant church, but without accepting his teaching. In Berlin, he proposed that they join the Protestant church, but without accepting his teaching. In Berlin, he proposed that they join the Protestant church, but without accepting his teaching. In Berlin, he proposed that they join the Protestant church, but without...*
places where the name of Eisenmenger was unknown as can be seen from the polemics over the "Jew Bill" in England in 1753. However, in Germany the argument was associated with Eisenmenger's name. His words were adduced in support and doubtless lent not a little weight to the charge.18

The negative image of the character of the Jew, especially from the moral aspect, was reinforced by the Deist literature. Although this was not written in order to indict the Jews of that era, it was easy to turn it to the advantage of the polemic opposing the enfranchisement of the Jews. The contemporary Jews were presented in anti-Jewish literature as the descendants of the uncultured and immoral children of Israel whom the Deist was, a relic of the Jewish law had implanted the idea in the Jews that they were the chosen people, superior in status and rights to the rest of humanity. This was the source of the Jew's tendency to keep apart from their neighbors: not to eat with them, to shun them socially, and not to intermarry with them. This social isolation was also the source of the Jewish double standard of morals—which recognized no obligation to act with integrity and decency toward the non-Jew. Some claimed that the Jew was completely amoral, politics with him replacing morality, his sole interest being egotistical.19

The controversy between the advocates and opponents of Jewish enfranchisement revolved around the question whether the alleged negative characteristics of the Jews were a permanent part of the nature of the people or could change with time and circumstances. So long as Jews and Judaism were judged from the standpoint of simple Christian doctrine, moral improvement was believed to be dependent on the Jew changing his faith and embracing Christianity. When attention passed from religious differences to the Jews' distinctive cultural and moral attributes—according to the rationalistic and Deist systems—then the question was whether Jewish propensities were immutable and permanently irrevocable in the Jew. The tendency of the opponents of the Jews was naturally to assume this immutability. Karl Wilhelm Friedrich Graftenauer, in the title of one of the most venomous books of the era, Concerning the Physical and Moral Characteristics of Contemporary Jews, hinted at the inflexibility of the Jewish mentality, but he was also ambiguous. He spoke of Jews ridding themselves of their corrupt qualities, and he admitted that he himself knew Jews who did not possess the murderous characteristics of Jews in general. On the other hand, he held that a Jew remained a Jew even if he became a Christian. Christian preachers boasted in vain of their success in converting Jews: their baptism was as effective as "trying to wash a blackamoor white."20 Friedrich Buchholz also refuted the efficacy of con-

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version as a means of purifying the Jew of his corrupt qualities: "The Jew will not renounce Scholastik on account of baptism. If he should refrain from every other kind of bantering he will make the sacrament itself the object of commerce."21 In contrast, Friedrich Traugott Hartmann saw conversion as the only way for the Jew to rid himself of his burdensome heritage. Not that Hartmann attributed any cleansing power or other religious significance to baptism. He added certain negative strokes of his own to the likeness of the Jew as it was portrayed in Deistic literature. The Jews celebrated their own festivals; they had their own jurisprudence and relied on concepts of justice and equity that differed from all those about them. Even more, the Jews gave great significance and religious force to all manifestations of the isolation of their community. Jewish isolation being religiously sanctioned, there was no hope that it would just disappear or be rooted out through internal reform or pressure or coercion from without. Hartmann saw no remedy for the Jew apart from his accepting Christian-ity, and even then not as an act of conversion—a genuine change in conviction and being born again, which is the traditional Christian concept—but as a declaration of accepting the laws of the state and society. "The matter does not depend on baptism but on the fact that the Jew in saying 'Baptize me' says simultaneously: 'I obey the laws of the state, I undertake the duty of observing the rules laid down for the good of the state; I shall fulfill the duties incumbent upon me at all times."

The young Fichte's view was much more extreme. He felt that the characteristics of the Jew were so anchored in his nature as to be beyond modification or eradication. Fichte found two faults in the Jewish mentality: adherence to a dual morality and belief in a misanthropic God. The first accusation is a central theme in Christian anti-Semitism, as we have seen in Eisenmenger's teaching; the second dates from ancient times and was revived by the English and French Deists. Fichte's question was: Can the Jew break through "the mighty obstacle before him—which looks insurmountable—in order to arrive with justice, love of man and love of truth?" In answer, Fichte asserted that such an individual would be a "hero and a saint" and that, Fichte, would not believe that such a man existed until he saw him with his own eyes. Because of their deeply rooted ideas, the Jews should be granted only elementary human rights and "the only way to 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."22 The shocking image of decapitation drew the ire of Fichte's critics. However, the import of this passage is not in the literal denotation of the language, but in the thought that it conveys. Fichte wants to say that the ideas in the head of the Jew are so essentially a part of him that they could only be changed by a physiological transformation.
The controversy over the ability of the Jew to freeing himself of his distinguishing characteristics affected the individual Jew, because in order to make the attempt he had to isolate himself from his community. Some Jews did isolate themselves, but the Jewish community in general evaded no signs of disintegrating, continuing to appear to the outside observer as a distinct and closely knit social group. Their cohesion was seen by the opponents of the Jews as an obstacle to their absorption into state and society. Hartmann included this internal Jewish cohesion among the phenomena that, since religiously based, would perpetuate their isolation. 11 Ernst Traugott von Kortum spoke of "the extraordinary unique esprit de corps which unites Jew with Jew, despite their dispersion." This writer dilates upon the reaction of Jewish communities whenever any one of their members suffered even a trivial injury—as though each and every cell in the national Jewish body felt the pain of every other. Underlying this caricature was the outstanding solidarity that distinguished the Jewish community before the process of disintegration began. One who saw these Jewish characteristics as immutable found it difficult to believe that the Jews could ever be integrated into another people or group. The conclusion was that Jews would still preserve their internal unity even if they came to stand on an equal plane with all other citizens; in brief the Jews constituted a "state within a state." 12

The expression "a state within a state" came into vogue in the 1780s. 13 The first to make use of it in anti-Jewish attacks was Johann Heinrich Schulz. However, the expression was not first applied to the Jews. It reflected the desire of a modern state to achieve sovereignty, denying the right of any ethnic, religious, or social group to conduct its affairs autonomously. France conducted a genuine struggle against the Huguenots, who, until the repeal of the Edict of Nantes in 1685, not only enjoyed religious freedom but also occupied fortified towns in which they held political and military authority. The advocates of centralized monarchy saw in this situation a violation of the exclusive right of the central authorities to power within the borders of the kingdom. The expression "a state within a state" came to justify this position, saying that no group could be allowed to usurp authority that rightfully belonged to the state alone. In the course of the eighteenth century, power became so concentrated in the hands of the state authorities that the very existence of religious, professional, or social societies was considered a usurpation of the sovereign state. For this reason—at least in part—they disbanded the Jesuit order, made it difficult for the Freemasons to organize, and tried to eliminate the artisans' and traders' guilds. Each of these held a degree of authority over its members and was consequently termed "a state within a state."

The Jewish communities held an even greater degree of authority over their members than the societies did. Nevertheless, the critics of the Jews—Voltaire and others—initially made no use of this expression. The reason for this is abundantly clear. The expression "a state within a state" had a clear meaning at that time. Those who used it claimed that the religious, professional, and fraternal societies that demanded at least a part of their members' allegiance should disband and cease to separate the individual from the all-embracing state. The goal was a commonwealth in which the citizens would relate directly to the institution of the state. A parallel application of this expression to the Jews would have required disbanding of their communities and absorption as citizens. Such a thought was at that time far from the minds of the advocates of the Jews, not to mention their opponents. The Jews did not appear as a state within a state, but as a state barely sustaining itself on the margins of the state. This situation continued until the ideological, political, and social upheaval that affected every sphere of life and, in the last third of the eighteenth century, even brought the accepted opinions regarding the Jews into question. Some thinkers saw them as entitled to human rights, at least, and potential citizenship, the proposal to change their political status and improve their social conditions resulted from this attitude. As soon as the reformers offered their proposal, the perspectives of the opponents changed. Jews were no longer conceived as standing on the margins of society and state, but as moving toward the center. The question that was raised was whether they would disperse among the general populace and take their places as individuals before the all-embracing state, as was expected of other elements of the population. The answer of the opponents of the Jews was negative; they denied the will or the ability of the Jews to free themselves of the bonds that tied them one to another by virtue of religion, tradition, and character. Their conclusion was that granting citizenship to the Jews would be in vain: it would not change their social cohesion or their characteristics. In short, they would not cease to constitute a separate social unit—a state within a state.

As mentioned, Johann Heinrich Schulz was the first, in 1784, to use this slogan in reference to Jewish exclusiveness; others followed suit, either owing to his influence or by their own initiative. 14 Those who first wrote of the Jews as a state within a state gave no indication that they were aware of the deeper significance of their arguments; perhaps they came to use the expression unwittingly, finding it a convenient way to express the opinion that the Jews constituted a separate religious-ethnic group, unable to be absorbed in society or state. 15 It was Fichte who employed the slogan pointedly and with full appreciation of its significance. Jewish affairs are introduced into Fichte's book incidentally; the central theme is a philosophical defense of the French Revolution. Fichte denies the right of...
I. Germany, 1780-1819

The state to regard its citizens as subject to it unconditionally and permanently. On the contrary, he describes to his readers the possibility that an even-grown number of individuals will exclude themselves from the authority of the state and draw up a new civil contract founded on natural law. Immediately, the question arises, Will the existing state tolerate the formation of a new state within its borders? Surely that would be a state in the full sense of the phrase. To defend his philosophical construction, he offers historical precedents: there is nothing new about the phenomenon of a state within a state; the existing state tolerated bodies that should be so classed and no one says a word. Here Fichte lists three groups that should be termed states within the state because of their cohesiveness: military officers, the nobility, the Church (the Protestant to a lesser degree, the Catholic to a greater degree), the guilds. But at the head of all these, Fichte places the Jews: "A mighty state stretches across almost all the countries of Europe, hostile in intent and engaged in constant state with everyone else . . . This is Jewry." Fichte's statements were not simply an expression of hatred. They arose from the position he assumed in relation to a problem that was exercising the contemporary mind: What place could be set aside for the Jews in a state that was aiming at uniting its citizens, when their religion and culture would prevent them from full devotion to the state? With difficulty, Fichte was prepared to vouchsafe Jews "human rights," that is, the right to live in the country as aliens. Jews would only be fit for the right of citizenship if they were capable of changing their nature.

In a less hostile tone and without invoking the formulation of a state within a state, Herder defined the Jews in Europe as an alien Asiatic people. He expressed the hope that the day would come when "the question would no longer be asked in Europe whether one was a Jew or a Christian, because the Jew, too, would live according to European laws and contribute to the good of the state." He discerned the changes that had taken place in interfaith relations and noted that the Christians had ceased to work at converting Jews to Christianity. Nevertheless, the diminution in rivalry between the communities was no reason for the state to alter its attitude toward the Jews. The state was duty-bound to ask how much these members of an alien people, who gave themselves up to special employment, benefited the state in general, and under what conditions and supervision they should be placed. Their exclusive attachment to trade and finance was what had damaged the human nature of the Jews. Herder described the Jewish people as "a parasitic growth on the trunk of other peoples." It was an expression that was repeated often in anti-Semitic writings.

The advocates of the Jews attributed the Jewish deficiencies to their

II. Ideological Counterattack

Social conditions, predicting that if the Jews were allowed to learn and practice every profession, they would adapt their behavior to that of the other citizens. The Jews' opponents scoffed at this prediction. Those who other citizens. The Jews' opponents scoffed at this prediction. Those who...
roughly what he took in. "Jewish commerce does not advance this circulation. The Hebrew always returns less than he receives. He is a swamp that absorbs a great part of the water that passes through it." The Jew took no interest in certain aspects of commerce and monopolized them for his community. Indeed, the Jew never acted alone: "The Jew never traded as a single individual, but as a member of the most extensive trading company in the world. His enterprises have a double purpose, that is, personal profit and direct or indirect advantage to his people" (Max in the original). The Jew did not disdain any business, small or great—"provided it does not involve physical exertion"—and he transformed it into a source of profit by virtue of the cooperation of other Jews upon whom he could rely. "This singular unity of the Jews, their passion to advance the common good of their people, is what equips them to undertake so much for which others have neither talent nor taste. One thinks he sees one Jew working and in effect all of Judaism is in operation." The non-Jewish trader was distracted by his interest in political events, by a genuine or imagined sense of honor, by the tendency to be wasteful and, above all, by the hope of attaining the ultimate success of being included in the ranks of the nobility. The Jew was free from all that. He was notable for "standing apart from the world, and for living a genuinely contemplative life" that prepared him to examine what was happening around him from a purely businesslike point of view. The inevitable result of this was: accumulation of wealth in cash by the Jews or a progressive increase of the commercial capital of the group of the population and its decrease among Christian businessmen."Kortum's remarks reflect the reality of Jewish economic activity, with an added tone of hostility and a negative evaluation based on a spurious theoretical conception. The agility with which Jews traded in every profitable venture, the close cooperation between Jews dispersed throughout the world, and the economic advantages they derived from their detachment from other spheres of life—all are phenomena that could have contributed to a sympathetic examination of the life of the Jewish community. However, Kortum's bias endows these phenomena with chimerical weight and proportion. Kortum has no quarrel with merchants per se, but since he sees the Jews as a foreign body in society, a state within the state, he treats the capital concentrated in their hands as if it had left the state entirely. Here, Kortum applies the central thesis of mercantilism, a theory about the right trade relations between states, to the evaluation of the economic activity of the Jews within the state. In his estimation, even their economic activity, which was "their only point of contact with the Christian citizens," remained outside the realm of the state. The artificiality of the argument is apparent, but its significance and ideological weight do not depend on its internal logic, but on the motive that created it.

5 Philosophy the Heir of Theology

THOSE WHO ARGUED against the enfranchisement of the Jews believed that their arguments were based on characteristics of living Jews, individually or collectively. In fact, as our analysis has shown, their accusations stemmed, in content and form, from the ancient anti-Jewish traditions. The religious factor itself continued to operate: it did not disappear because of the rationalist revolution, but only cast off its old shape and assumed a new one.

It is a well-known fact that rationalist criticism did not always result in the abandonment of all the elements and concepts of religious tradition. Many critics, while rejecting religion in its latest historical guise or rejecting the institutionalized religion of the Church, justified its original form or character as they interpreted its true historical nature at the time of its appearance. Clearly, not all the rationalists declared themselves to be no longer Christians. On the contrary, many adhered to this designation and claimed the right to explain the true intentions of the founder of Christianity or the original significance of his teaching and the purpose of the movement associated with him. We have already encountered this type among the English—Matthew Tindal, for instance, was one of them—and shall encounter it repeatedly among the Jews. Many thinkers in Germany, among them the greatest minds of their time, interpreted Christian tradition so as to discover in it principles identical with their own teachings; but in treating Jewish tradition they forgot these skills of interpretation, and only the full intensity of rationalist criticism was applied.1

For the sake of historical truth one must note that afterward, when the