

EIGHT

From Admission Ticket to Contribution: Remarks on the History of an Apologetic Argument

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What does Europe owe to the Jews?
Many things, good and bad . . .

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Beyond Good and Evil

THE JEWS AND EUROPEAN CULTURE: FROM THE BACK DOOR TO THE FRONT ENTRANCE

NOT long after the idea of culture (*Kultur*)¹ became a key concept, not only as a descriptive term, but also as a term of value, modern Jews began to use it to define the content of their singular heritage, tradition, and identity as Jewish culture. At the same time, they also tried to prove that the intellectual and creative heritage of the Jews, namely, their culture, included all the traits and assets then regarded as an inseparable part of the high culture of a *Kulturnation*.² Such proof could serve both those who wanted to depict Judaism as the bearer of a cultural tradition no less rich than the culture they aspired to join, and those who wanted to create a new autonomous, all-inclusive Jewish cultural system.

¹ For my purposes here, the distinction between the terms 'civilization' and 'culture' is not significant, particularly since in the literature of the period the former term generally referred to the material aspect of the culture, not to its intellectual-spiritual aspect. On the other hand, some believe—erroneously, in my view—that the term 'Jewish civilization' is broader and more all-embracing than the term 'Jewish culture'. In the context of this chapter, the distinction between the overall European culture (Western culture), which is a *Weltkultur*, and the specific national cultures of Europe is far more important.

² See the programmatic article by Immanuel Wolf (the nom de plume of Immanuel Wohlwill, 1799–1847, one of the founders of Verein für Kultur und Wissenschaft der Juden, the Society for the Culture and Science of the Jews), 'Über den Begriff einer Wissenschaft des Judentums', *Zeitschrift für die Wissenschaft des Judentums*, 1 (1822), 1–24.

The former are the subject of this chapter. They believed that, as a result of the diminishing status and role of religion in European culture, it had become a cultural system in which modern Jews could actively participate, as indeed they did. On the basis of this belief, in 1821 Eduard Gans (1797–1839), one of the founders of the Science of Judaism, expressed the optimistic view that the main entrance, not the back door as in the past, was now open to Jews—specifically, German Jews—allowing them full admission into European society and culture.³ The hope Gans expressed came out of the belief that modern German society—in his view, the apex of European culture—was now a liberal, open, and secular society, so that all the legal and religious obstacles to the integration (*Verschmelzung*) and even assimilation (*Aufgehen*) of Jews had now disappeared. The special Jewish–German relationship and the influence of Hegelian philosophy gave rise to a rich vocabulary capable of proposing a range of possible models of cultural participation and activity, while also being among the tools of philosophical reasoning and historical metaphysics that explained the necessity—or feasibility—of these models.⁴

There is, however, quite a large gap between the world of ideas and deliberations on the abstract nature of the *Jüdische Geist*, on the one hand, and the actual cultural reality, on the other. In reality, there was a fundamental distinction between participation and contribution in two separate spheres of culture. The first was the ‘neutral’ area of science, technology, and the learned professions. The other was the area of literary and artistic creation in all of its dimensions. The scientist, the technician, the physician can participate in the culture without coming up against a cultural barrier, or the need for legitimization. Yet such is not the case with the writer, the poet, and the artist. Participation and contribution were problematic in these areas, since both the Romantic and Hegelian concepts held that literary and artistic creative works are a unified whole that expresses the uniqueness and oneness (*Eigenheit* and *Einheit*) of the particular national spirit (*Volksgeist*).⁵

Jews therefore faced a serious problem in attempting to adopt the notion of *Kultur* in its holistic interpretation, which postulated the unity of all manifestations of a cultural system and claimed that they are an expression of a ‘spirit’ or of an ordering principle (or structural unity). The critical question was: If there existed a *besonderer Volksgeist* (a peculiar national spirit), as Hegel

³ In Eduard Gans, ‘Drei Reden im Kulturverien’ (1821); repr. in *Der jüdische Wille*, 1/1–3 (1919); trans. into Heb. in Paul R. Mendes-Flohr (ed.), *Modern Jewish Studies: Historical and Philosophical Perspectives* (Heb.) (Jerusalem, 1979). Gans’s lectures were printed in full only there by Zalman Rubaschoff (Shazar).

⁴ See Jacob Toury, ‘Emancipation and Assimilation: Concepts and Conditions’ (Heb.), *Yalkut Moreshet*, 2 (1964), 167–82.

⁵ See E. H. Gomblich, *In Search of Cultural History* (Oxford, 1969).

reasoned, how could Jews, with a peculiar spirit that had created their singular cultural heritage, take part in a culture—or even civilization—that is the product of a totally different *Geist*?

Several solutions were proposed for this dilemma. One could claim participation and partnership in the secular liberal culture and its values, represented by the ideal of *Bildung*, or try to argue—unsuccessfully—that the Jews are not alien to the Germanic national spirit, and even that the Jewish spirit is in harmony with it. In a lecture delivered on 22 January 1919 entitled ‘The Future of Jewry’, Ismar Freund, a prominent member of the Berlin Jewish community, a scholar and a member of the CV Hauptvortand (Central Verein deutscher Staatsbürger jüdischen Glaubens, the Central Union of Jewish Citizens), defined the harmony between ‘Germanness’ and Judaism as follows: ‘The Deutschtum we love with all our hearts is something holy for us . . . We German Jews are conscious of the fact that we have greatly contributed to what we regard as *Deutschtum* . . .’⁶ According to another claim, the important role filled by Jewish creators in the modernist movements was unquestionably a result of the fact that such nearly metaphysical integration was impossible, and a consequence of the universal, rather than national, nature of modernism.

Most modern Jews looked forward to a modest, measured degree of integration and acculturation. They sought to preserve the distinctive Jewish tradition and yet, at the same time, to adopt aspects of the non-Jewish environment, to assimilate these into their specific Jewish lifestyle, and to participate in the culture of the non-Jewish society. Such cultural activity grew more and more intensive in the second half of the nineteenth century, constituting one of the important manifestations of the Jewish revolution in the modern era.

BETWEEN PARTICIPATION AND CONTRIBUTION

At the beginning of the nineteenth century, modern Jews began knocking on Europe’s door, believing they could see the dawn of a new historical era, and eager to be part of its newly born culture(s). By participating, they meant to be not only passively absorbing consumers of European culture, but active and productive creators in the various fields of the arts, literature, sciences,

⁶ Lecture by Ismar Freund, ‘Über die Zukunft des Judentums gehalten im Logenhaus am 22 Jan. 1919’; quoted in Jehuda Reinharz, ‘The Response of the Zionistische Vereinigung für Deutschland and the Centralverein deutscher Staatsbürger jüdischen Glaubens to Antisemitism during the Weimar Republic’ (Heb.), in Abraham Margalit and Yehoyakim Cohavi (eds), *History of the Holocaust: Germany* (Jerusalem, 1998), 21. I am grateful to Professor Reinharz for his English version.

etc.⁷ During the nineteenth century, this *participation* was often defined as a Jewish 'donation', namely, it defined the Jew as a donor and suggested that the recipient was indebted to the Jew.⁸

† *Participation* (or partnership) and *contribution* are, therefore, two concepts that were employed to describe and evaluate a key aspect of the process of the Jews' integration (*Eingliederung*) into the cultures of their non-Jewish environments. However, these concepts embodied two opposites: on the one hand, the awareness that the participants or donors are a distinct group within the larger society, and, on the other, the subjective belief of the group that it is an inseparable part of the surrounding culture, as well as its desire to be seen as such. These two concepts were part of the far larger stock of new formulations and terms that emerged at the beginning of the period of the Haskalah and the emancipation to denote the new character of the relationship between Jews and their surroundings. With the help of this stock of terms, modern Jews tried to clarify for themselves what were the desirable limits of integration and acculturation, what parts of their tradition they would be required to forgo, what type of Jews the non-Jewish society would be prepared to accept, and how the Jews should introduce themselves when they knocked at the gates of European culture and entered through them. In other words, what kind of calling card could serve as an admission ticket for the modern Jew into European societies and their culture.

Of course, it was not ideology that encouraged integration and assimilation or motivated the revolutionary process of Jewish participation in European culture; nor was it formulas that determined the dimensions and boundaries of this participation in the cultural system. But the new concepts did foster a certain pattern of cultural behaviour, gave it legitimacy and described it, and at the same time tried to set the desirable boundaries of the cultural contact between Jews and the surrounding culture. There was an urgent need to set these boundaries, because religious walls were being undermined, if not torn down, and European culture in the West had become, in many aspects, a 'secular' culture, and, according to some, even a 'new paganism'.

This chapter focuses only on one of the calling cards presented by Jews at the gates to European culture, and, leaving aside the metaphor, it is my

⁷ See Jacob Katz, 'German Culture and the Jews', in Jehuda Reinharz and Walter Schatzberg (eds), *The Jewish Response to German Culture: From the Enlightenment to the Second World War* (Hanover, NH, 1985).

⁸ To the best of my knowledge, the word for contribution (*Beitrag*) appears infrequently in German Jewish literature. The reference is generally to participation (*Anteil, Teilnahme*), regardless of whether the subject is 'passive' participation, i.e. as a consumer of culture, or active participation, as a creator of culture. Use of the term 'contribution' was primarily widespread in literature on German Jewry, to stress that this was an act of 'giving' or granting those things that were lacking in the receiving culture.

intent to suggest some headings for the history of the concept of 'Jewish participation in and contribution to European culture' in the nineteenth century, as well as of the uses made of it in the Jewish public discourse before these were appropriated by Jewish historiography. I should point out that the discussion here is limited to contribution in the field of culture and does not deal with the Jewish contribution to other fields (economics, politics, etc.). It is no coincidence that the term 'contribution' always seems to relate to the broad field of culture (including science), and not, for example, to the role filled by Jews in politics or in the revolutionary movements. The stress on 'contribution' in the various fields of cultural creation stemmed from the fact that in Germany (but not only there) national pride and the collective self-esteem emphasized their 'common achievement in science, literature, philosophy and music'.⁹ The question of what *really* was the contribution made by Jews to European culture in general, and to specific European cultures in particular, is also outside the purview of this chapter, which deals only with the concept, as well as with the question of what was 'Jewish' in the contribution of the Jews.

APOLOGETICS DIRECTED INWARD AND OUTWARD

Many obstacles stood in the way of the integration of the Jews into European culture (or cultures). One of them was the widespread claim—supported by various pseudo-scientific theories—that the Jews lacked the necessary qualities to participate and create in the various fields of culture. This claim was refuted by what I shall call a polemical or an apologetic strategy. It was directed both inwards, towards those opposed to integration and assimilation, and outwards, towards those non-Jews who spoke about the innate cultural inferiority of the Jews.

In the internal Jewish context, there was a desire to prove to the conservative circles of Jewish society that 'capable' Jews had been active throughout Jewish history in all fields of general culture. Externally, this strategy was part of an apologetic argumentative discourse, for the purpose of showing the surrounding society a calling card that introduced the Jews as the possessors of a rich repertoire of cultural assets: a repertoire that endowed them with the ability as well as the right to take an active part in the culture of modern 'Europe'. This cultural calling card was intended to rebut deeply rooted prejudices and to persuade the non-Jewish society that the Jews did not lack those qualities that characterize a modern *Kulturvolk*; in other words, to claim that they were now entering the gates of modern European

⁹ Norbert Elias, *The Germans: Power Struggles and the Development of Habitus in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries*, ed. Michael Schröter, trans. Eric Dunning and Stephen Mennell (New York, 1996), 323.

culture not empty-handed, as cultural beggars, but bringing with them a rich and precious cargo.

In both contexts, there was a need to provide proof from the past. In the former, this proof took the form of discovering, rediscovering, and even inventing forgotten or dormant aspects of Jewish cultural life, mainly its rich cultural productivity throughout the ages. Thus, when the Russian *maskil* Isaac Baer Levinsohn (1788–1860), in his *Te'udab beyisra'el* (A Testimony in Israel, 1828), drew up a long list of rabbis who were engaged in science and philosophy, his aim was to convince traditional Jews that Judaism is not alien to these fields of cultural creativity. In the latter context, which is the subject of this chapter, proof from the past meant contesting the popular dogma of Jews' innate cultural inferiority, which went as far back as the Hellenistic–Roman period. History shows that Jews were always active in almost all those areas of cultural activity considered in the nineteenth century as the vital traits of a *Kultur*; hence, they do not immanently lack any of the mental traits or faculties that are the source of this type of creativity.

This dogma concerning the mental inferiority of the Jews was formulated by a number of writers in the Hellenistic–Roman culture. The notorious Apion claimed that the Jews 'have not produced any geniuses, for example, inventors in arts and crafts';¹⁰ Celsus, the anti-Christian pagan philosopher, claimed in *Alethes Logos* (The True Doctrine) that no Jew contributed to philosophy, science, or any of the many practical inventions (Pliny the Elder counts almost 159 such inventions that contributed to the welfare of humanity);¹¹ the Roman emperor Julian argued in his *Against the Galileans* that the Jews had contributed nothing in the field of culture and science.¹² These claims outlived the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, and were revived at the dawn of the modern era. As one famous example, the French Jansenist *abbé* Henri-Baptiste Grégoire (1750–1831), in his *Essai sur la régénération physique, morale et politique des Juifs* (1789), rejected the idea that the Jews in the Middle Ages were 'princes of the science of medicine', and argued that the Jews had no talent in music, art, or mathematics. However, in his view, this was not an innate flaw and might be corrected by education and by the Jews' self-improvement of their way of life. In the course of the nineteenth century this view became a widespread pseudo-scientific dogma, based on the concepts of 'race' and its 'mental traits', as well as on the morphology of cultures. Again and again, it was stated that the Semitic Jews lacked the capacity for art, science, philosophy, and so on. In an article published in the first issue (1806) of *Sulamith*—a journal that aimed to 'advance culture and

¹⁰ Josephus, *Against Apion*, 2. 135.

¹¹ From the vast literature on this subject, I will only mention Bezalel Bar-Kochava's article 'The Anti-Jewish Treatise of Apollonius Malon' (Heb.), *Tarbiz*, 69/1 (1999), 6–58.

¹² Julian, *Against the Galileans*, 178 A–B, 216 C–224 D.

humanity among the Jewish people'—the author praised the superiority of Greek culture and argued that Jews 'lack the true spirit of humanity; they did not write poetry, did not create art, etc.'¹³ In a feuilleton written (in Russian) by Ze'ev (Vladimir) Jabotinsky (1880–1940) in 1911, entitled 'An Exchange of Compliments', describing a conversation between a Jewish and a Russian passenger travelling in a train, the Russian claims that the Jews have contributed nothing original to world culture; at the very most, they have served as 'travelling salesmen' who disseminated cultural assets created by others.¹⁴ To sum up, at the gates of modern European culture, Jews encountered the claim that in the past they 'had no art—if we except music—no science, no philosophy'.¹⁵

One of the ways Jews contested these widespread claims was, of course, to revive old patterns of response, mainly the claim that in fact Jews were the progenitors of many human achievements, and were not strangers to *humanitas*, or 'adab. Just as Hellenistic Jews responded in *ad maiorem judaeorum gloriam*, so did modern apologetic Jews in Europe, turning to the old legend 'The Theft of Philosophy' (by the non-Jews).¹⁶ Modern Jewish historical writing—of the Haskalah and of Wissenschaft des Judentums—also undertook to expose and depict the broad field of the Jews' participation in the past in creating and spreading 'alien wisdom'.

PRAISES OF THE ACCOMPLISHMENTS OF THE JEWS

This appeal to the past filled an important role in Jewish rhetoric and apologetics in the nineteenth century, but it does not represent the major strategy that was employed. The important calling card was the present situation, and the present told of the great success Jews had experienced in integrating into all areas of European culture, whose doors were open to them. This is what I. B. Levinsohn wrote in his *Sefer ah'yah shiloni ha'ozeh* (1839):

¹³ I. A. L. Richter, 'Worin lag die vorzügliche Kultur der Griechen?', *Sulamith*, 1 (1806), 125–47.

¹⁴ Ze'ev Jabotinsky, 'An Exchange of Compliments' (Heb.), in Jabotinsky, *Nation and Society* (Jerusalem, 1950). The feuilleton was written as part of the debate about the contribution made by Russian Jewry to Russian culture in general and to Russian literature in particular. Also see the article 'Jews and Russian Literature', which he wrote in response to an article of the same title published by Korny Zhukovsky in the newspaper *Svobodnie Misl'i* (Free Thoughts) in 1908. It was printed in Ze'ev Jabotinsky, *On Literature and Art* (Heb.) (Jerusalem, 1948), 61–8.

¹⁵ S. H. Butcher, 'Greece and Israel', in Butcher, *Harvard Lectures on Greek Subjects* (London, 1904), 13–14. And see a brief summary on this subject in Yaacov Shavit, 'Have Jews Imagination? Jews and the Creative Arts', in Shavit, *Athens in Jerusalem: Classical Antiquity and Hellenism in the Making of the Modern Secular Jew* (London, 1999), 220–77.

¹⁶ For a catalogue of the claims about Jewish creativity, see Anatole Leroy-Beaulieu, *Israel among the Nations: A Study of Jews and Antisemitism*, trans. Frances Hellmann (New York, 1895).

Let every wise lover of truth among the Christians state whether Jews, in addition to being exceedingly diligent, do not possess intelligence, and whether some among them are not imbued with fine ideas, and others are capable in every branch of learning and science and in all the arts and crafts. How many marvellous artists are there among them today in the world, how many fine musicians skilled in every instrument, and how many have gained wide fame. There is hardly any field of science, art and the crafts, even among the most prestigious and honoured, in which there are no Jews today . . .¹⁷

Thirty years later, in 1869, the popularizer and historian from Vilna, Kalman Schulman (1819–99), took pride in the speed with which Jews entered into all branches of European culture:

Anyone who sees clearly will gaze with astonishment at the rapid ascent of Jews to the heights in modern times in all areas of wisdom and knowledge, in all arts and crafts. This they achieved in just a short while, whereas other peoples did not succeed in attaining such heights even over a period of many hundreds of years. For no sooner did the kings and counts of the land unloose their bonds and favour them with civil rights and laws, than they opened their treasures and displayed the precious qualities and fine talents that had lain dormant in their souls during the dark years when they were persecuted by their foes, who gave them no rest until they devoured them.

Before many days passed, there arose proudly from their midst great poets, wondrous rhetoricians, lauded authors in all realms, renowned mathematicians and engineers, astronomers, chronologists, men well versed in religion and law, and knowledgeable in all branches of the natural sciences, famous physicians, psalmists, musicians, diplomats, sculptors, visionaries. And there is no wisdom, art or craftsmanship in which the Jews did not engage and become famous in the land for their prowess.¹⁸

Schulman did not laud the contribution made through this intensive and multi-disciplinary activity of Jews to the development of particularistic modern Jewish culture; rather, he took pride in the presence of Jews in Western culture and in their full integration into it.

In 1864 the poet Judah Leib Gordon (1831–86), a radical *maskil* and Russian patriot, wrote:

Now there is no city or state in which young Jewish men do not draw the clear waters of alien springs . . . You can count the specialist physicians employed by the state . . . how many young Jews you will find today who engage in writing and speak the language of their country fluently, or German and French, and all of them born in the last generation, products of the last decade . . .¹⁹

¹⁷ I. B. Levinsohn, *The Book of Abiyah Hashiloni the Visionary* (Heb.) (Leipzig, 1863), 117.

¹⁸ Kalman Schulman, *History of the World* (Heb.), iv (Vilna, 1867), 13–16.

¹⁹ J. L. Gordon, *Letters* (Heb.) (Warsaw, 1893), 90.

Around the same time, in 1858, the Reform leader Abraham Geiger (1810–74) thus tried to dissuade a Jew from converting to Christianity:

Let me tell you—and do not accuse me of arrogance—the Jews are proving an ability to develop that is likely to bring them much favour. For many generations, their human rights have been violated, both the most sublime and the most common, their spiritual development has been hampered and their very existence has been in constant danger. Less than a century has passed since their situation has been considerably eased. And now a totally different generation is quickly springing up! Improving in every sense, enormously energetic in all their aspirations, spiritually alert and making great achievements in all spheres despite the fact that quite a few professions are closed to them. This is not a decadent public; on the contrary, it is brimming with lofty talents . . .²⁰

In the eighth letter of his 'Correspondence of an English Lady on Judaism and Semitism' (1883), Heinrich Graetz (1817–91) wrote in the same spirit: 'And now, dear friend, take a look at what the Jews have achieved in less than one century. They perform well in all branches of science and literature and in some they are the leaders.'²¹

This calling card presented not the Jews' real or imaginary achievements in the past, but their ability in the present to become—and in a short period of time—active in every field of cultural activity. There is no reference yet in this picture to the notion of 'Jewish contribution'. It refers only to the fact that—in the words of the Orthodox weekly *Der Israelit*—'since they left the ghetto, the Jews have been active partners in creative works in all walks of life'.²²

THE NEW CALLING CARD

The words of Geiger and Graetz are no longer apologetic in nature, a change that shows that less than fifty years passed from the time when Jewish apologetics began to present a new calling card that introduced Jews as people capable of being active participants in the surrounding culture. This card stated not only that the Jews are full participants in European culture, but that they are also making a decisive contribution to its creation, and moreover that they have a pre-eminent position in that culture, as the American sociologist Thorstein Veblen put it early in the twentieth century.²³

²⁰ A. Geiger, *Über den Austritt aus dem Judenthume. Ein aufgefundenener Briefwechsel* (Leipzig, 1858). The letter was printed in a Hebrew translation in Abraham Geiger, *Selected Writing on Religious Reform*, ed. M. A. Meyer, trans. G. Eliashberg (Jerusalem, 1979), 65.

²¹ Heinrich Graetz, *The Structure of Jewish History and Other Essays*, ed. and trans. Ismar Schorsch (New York, 1975), 220.

²² J. Wolff, 'Eine Jahrhundert-Betrachtung', *Der Israelit*, 108 (28 Dec. 1899), 3027–9.

²³ Thorstein Veblen, 'The Intellectual Pre-eminence of Jews in Modern Europe', *Political Science Quarterly*, 34 (1919), 33–42; repr. in M. Lerner (ed.), *The Portable Veblen* (New York, 1959).

Towards the end of the nineteenth century, these concepts, 'Jewish contribution' and 'Jewish excellence', became important elements and motifs, which were permanent and useful in the apologetics and self-consciousness of the Jews. They were perceived not only as part of the self-image, or as a means of defending themselves against prejudicial claims of the cultural inferiority of the Jews, but also as a factual description of the situation, namely of the fact that Jews were not only participating in all fields of culture, but also were over-represented in them and were demonstrating special excellence, demonstrating the quality of the 'Jewish genius'.²⁴

What interests me here is not the various explanations given for Jewish 'excellence' in the various spheres of cultural creation. For my purposes, it is important to distinguish between the 'Jewish contribution', on the one hand, and the 'contribution of Jews' as a group or as individuals, on the other. The two terms relate to different things. The former speaks about the contribution of Judaism in the sense of a defined system of ideas and values, in particular the idea of one God and moral rules. The latter assumes that all the Jews who contributed to European culture brought to it a common 'genetic cultural' baggage, which includes a world picture, concepts, values, and faculties. And from this standpoint, we need to define the nature and content of the 'distinctive Jewish cultural traits' that shaped the unique Jewish contribution.

In addition, there were those who related to the Jews as a group and as individuals, whose contribution to the overall culture lacked a shared charac-

²⁴ In March 1912 the young Jewish journalist Moritz Goldstein published an article entitled 'Deutsch-jüdischer Parnass' in volume 25 (1912) of *Der Kunstwart* (The Art Guard), in which he claimed that the Jews were a dominant factor in the spiritual property of Germany, a country that does not recognize their Germanness. See Moritz Goldstein, 'German Jewry's Dilemma: The Story of a Provocative Essay', *Leo Baeck Institute Yearbook*, 2 (1957), 236-54; Steven E. Aschheim, 'The Publication of Moritz Goldstein's "The German-Jewish Parnassus" Sparks a Debate over Assimilation, German Culture and the Jewish Spirit', in Sander L. Gilman and Jack Zipes (eds), *Yale Companion to Jewish Writing and Thought in German Culture 1096-1996* (New Haven, 1997), 299-305, in which he called it 'an explosive article'. See also id., 'The Jews Within: The Myth of "Judaization" in Germany', in Reinharz and Schatzberg (eds), *Jewish Response to German Culture*. Steven Lowenstein wrote derisively about the idea of a 'collective enterprise' of Jews 'giving a gift to the non-Jewish majority' (Steven M. Lowenstein, 'Jewish Participation in German Culture', in Michael A. Meyer (ed.), *German-Jewish History in Modern Times*, iii: *Integration in Dispute 1871-1918* (New York, 1996-8)). Siegmund Kazenelson edited a collection of articles with the aim of providing an objective description of the situation, but it was banned by the Nazi censor in 1934 (Kazenelson (ed.), *Juden im deutschen Kulturbereich*, 2nd edn. (Berlin, 1959)). See Katz, 'German Culture and the Jews', 91-2; Amos Elon carries on this trend of describing at length the creative activity, in many cases also the pioneering activity, of distinguished Jewish figures in various fields of culture, science, and economics in 19th-century Germany and up to 1933 (A. Elon, *The Pity of It All: A History of Jews in Germany 1743-1933* (New York, 2002)).

teristic and was seen to stem from a changing set of sociological and cultural circumstances that motivated and enabled the Jews to excel.²⁵

Nietzsche wrote in 1881 that it was necessary for Jews 'to distinguish themselves in departments of European distinction and to stand in the front rank until they shall have advanced so far as to determine themselves what distinction shall mean'.²⁶ In this he was referring to the future, as well as to the general character traits of the Jews, which were marked by 'intellectual versatility and shrewdness', and not to the current achievements of Jews. Later he asked, 'What does Europe owe to the Jews?', and answered: 'A lot, for good and bad, and most of all for that one thing that is simultaneously of the worst and the best: for the great moral style, for the awfulness and majesty of the absolute demand . . .'.²⁷ Although he was speaking here about the Jews as a people, he was actually referring to ideas and values he regarded as Jewish. Similarly, Graetz, when he wrote that it was 'the prophets and the psalmists who brought a breath of fresh air back into European history after the Roman world ended up as a complete swamp', and that, at the beginning of the sixteenth century, it was the 'Hebraic truth' that saved Europe from neo-paganism,²⁸ he was alluding, not to specific Jews, but to the fundamental ideas and values of Judaism with which they imbued the 'soul of Europe', namely, humanity, monotheism, and religious rationalism.²⁹ After all, Luther did not need the mediation of Jews to arrive at the *Hebraica veritas* of the Old Testament.

By the same token, when Max Nordau declared in 1903, 'We [Jews] contributed our share to the culture of Europe more than to our own culture; this [European] culture belongs to us as much as it belongs to the German,

²⁵ Jacob Katz, 'German Culture and the Jews', in Reinharz and Schatzberg (eds), *The Jewish Response to German Culture*; Shulamit Volkov, 'A Stunning Success: The Example of the Jews in Science', in Volkov, *The Magic Circle: Germans, Jews and AntiSemites* (Heb.) (Tel Aviv, 2002), 209-22. For a survey of Jewish participation in all spheres of creation in Germany, see Heinz Mosche Graupe, *Die Entstehung des Modernen Judentums. Geistgeschichte der deutschen Juden 1650-1942*, ii: *Revidierte und erweiterte Aufgabe* (Hamburg, 1977), 242-57, and Elon, *The Pity of It All*, 259-95. It is important to note that Orthodox Jews in Germany were primarily consumers of German culture but did not participate in creating it. See Mordecai Brener, *Modernity within Tradition: The Social History of Orthodox Jewry in Imperial Germany*, trans. Elizabeth Petuchowski (New York, 1992), 162-73.

²⁶ Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Dawn of Days*, trans. J. M. Kennedy (New York, 1964), 213.

²⁷ Friedrich Nietzsche, 'Beyond Good and Evil: Volker und Vaterlander', quoted in Josef Simon, 'Nietzsche on Judaism and Europe', trans. John Stanley, in Jacob Golomb (ed.), *Nietzsche and Jewish Culture* (London, 1997), 102-3. The entire article is important for our purposes. See also Walter Kaufman's translation of this section in Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, ed. Walter Kaufman (New York, 1989), 185.

²⁸ Heinrich Graetz, 'Correspondence of an English Lady', in Graetz, *The Structure of Jewish History*, 256.

²⁹ Heinrich Graetz, 'The Significance of Judaism for the Present and the Future', in Graetz, *The Structure of Jewish History*, 287.

French and English . . .',³⁰ he too was speaking about the transmission of ideas and values, not about specific contributions by individual Jews. And when Ze'ev Jabotinsky argued that 'from a moral point of view—Europe also belongs to us', he was speaking of a past contribution. The Jews gave birth to Europe, and Europe is in their debt for her social compassion and the idea of progress—for the ideal of a 'golden age' both in the past and in the future; thus, Western culture is a product of the Jewish spirit and genius, and Jerusalem, not Athens, is Europe's alma mater. But modern Europe does not need Jews in order to return to the values of the Bible.³¹

These texts, as well as many others,³² refer, then, to the contribution of Judaism as a set of formative ideas, or about the contribution of the 'Jewish spirit'—transmitted via a book—and not necessarily about the contribution made by many individuals in the various fields of cultural creation. If that is the case, what about contemporary Jews? Can they take pride only in the fact that they imparted ethical monotheism to European culture via the Hebrew Bible? Is this important and precious asset sufficient to provide them with the highly sought-after admission ticket? One could, after all, argue that one needs no Jews for that contribution. The reply comes in the shape of an emphasis on the fact that present-day Jews are making a contribution in the field of modern culture and in detailed descriptions of this contribution. Lists of 'donors' frequently appear in popular historical literature in the form of books that tell the reader about the activity of Jews in various fields.³³

THE PRICE OF 'CONTRIBUTION'

The terms 'contribution', or even 'Jewish contribution', can be regarded as reliable descriptions of the reality, or they can be interpreted as expressions of a sense of superiority. However, the frequent use of these terms to

³⁰ The article, 'Ahad Ha'am über Alteneuland', was printed on 13 March in *Die Welt*.

³¹ Ze'ev Jabotinsky, 'The East' (Heb.); first pub. in Russian in *Razsvet*, 26 Sept. 1926.

³² The Jews, Heinrich Heine wrote, gave Europe the 'principle of modernism' (*das moderne Prinzip*); see Heinrich Heine, 'Shakespeares Mädchen und Frauen', in Heine, *Sämtliche Werke*, x (Munich, 1964), 227.

³³ The case of African American society in the United States shows that the concept of contribution did not, nor does it today, serve only the Jews. For example, Gates writes that, during his trip to Africa, he learned about 'the record of black Africans' genuine contribution to civilization', and that 'so many of Africa's genuine contributions have been denied or appropriated by non-Africans' (Henry Louis Gates, Jr., *Wonders of the African World* (New York, 1999), 29, 107). This claim is a central motif in the 'alarming' but popular African American literature that attempts to 'discover' the contribution of the Blacks in Africa to world culture in general, and the contribution of the African Americans to American culture in particular. See also Yaacov Shavit, *History in Black: African-Americans in Search of an Ancient Past* (London, 2001), 16–35.

describe the cultural activity of contemporary Jews probably attests to an awareness of the fact that the Jews' active and creative participation is not a self-evident part of the creative field of overall culture. Hence the need to emphasize it and to speak of Europe's debt to the Jews—not in the past, but in the present—thus also expressing a sense of cultural superiority. When Heinrich Graetz wrote about the 'wondrous Jewish life', and stated that 'they [the Jews] performed well in all branches of science and literature and in some they are the leaders', he referred, among other things, to the great outpouring of creativity on the part of Jews such as David Ricardo, Karl Marx, and Ferdinand LaSalle—pioneers of social science, likely to solve the riddle of the future. Jews, he added, also have an important role in shaping public opinion, as writers of political essays or feuilletons.³⁴

Not everyone expressed such admiration for the integration of the Jews, or their contribution and its results. Theodor Herzl (1860–1904), for example, had a disparate view. He accepted the above description that Jews are present in many fields of activity, but he wrote that it is necessary to 'keep the Jews from pushing ahead. They should not make such strides.'³⁵ And, according to him, the conviction that Jews had indeed gained the admission ticket was but an illusion. To Baron Hirsch he wrote on 3 June 1895 that 'all the engineers, architects, technologists, chemists, physicians, lawyers who have emerged from the ghetto during the last thirty years, and who thought that they would gain their livelihood and their bit of honor outside the higgling and haggling Jewish trade . . . are beginning to constitute a frightful proletariat of intellectuals'.³⁶ At the same time, Herzl suggested to Baron Hirsch to announce in 'the chief anti-Semitic countries a huge prize for *actions d'éclat*, for deeds of great moral beauty, for courage, self-sacrifice, ethical conduct, great achievements in arts and sciences', and more. This curious suggestion shows that in Herzl's view the majority of the Jews still did not possess the admission ticket to European culture and that only a few of them would gain it.³⁷

Was this gloomy picture an objective observation, or was it a justification of his Zionist vision?

JEW AS INSIDERS AND OUTSIDERS

To summarize this brief history of the concept of Jewish 'contribution', one might argue that this term was used as a mark of pride in the status of Jews as donors to European culture: the target audience for this self-aggrandizement was mainly the Jewish public, although, by the way, it also

³⁴ In the eighteenth letter of 'The Correspondence', Graetz, *The Structure of Jewish History*, 220.

³⁵ Theodor Herzl, *The Complete Diaries*, i, ed. Raphael Patai, trans. Harry Zohn (New York, 1960), 28.

³⁶ Ibid. 28.

³⁷ Ibid. 22.

reached non-Jewish ears. The term was intended to repair the image of the Jews as inferior in the sphere of cultural creativity, and to remove the barriers between them and non-Jewish culture by stressing their active role and their achievements. It was used to prove that Jews had gained full membership in Western civilization and were even an asset to it, as well as that they had shared various cultural assets with non-Jews.³⁸ However, use of the term 'contribution' also emphasized—wittingly or otherwise—the continued existence of these barriers, because it implied that the participation of Jews in European culture was not self-evident. It defined the Jews as both insiders and outsiders, and it reflected both an inferiority complex and a superiority complex. Perhaps the main reason that it continued to be used, even after it became evident that Jewish participation and contribution were a tragic illusion, was a desire to bring the cultural output of the Jews under one roof—even where it had not been created within the framework of Jewish culture. If cultural creativity is evidence of vitality, of accomplishment, and of a creative genius—and if the Jews had disseminated their cultural output in 'alien fields'—it was right to regard the whole of this output as integral to Jewish culture, or Jewish civilization, while also meeting the wider criteria of modern Western culture.

One might regard the rich creative contribution made by Jews to European culture (primarily in Germany) as a vain waste of cultural vitality, and even as a disastrous self-delusion. On this view, the cultural partnership created between the Jews and their environment was not a genuine one since it gave rise to antisemitic claims that the Jews—and 'Jewish values'—had become dominant in European culture, turning it into a Jewish (i.e. alien) culture, or even 'Judaizing' Europe. However, the Jewish contribution might also be perceived as expanding the assets of the universal culture, as well as being intrinsic to the authentic Jewish cultural repertoire, which draws upon the unique 'Jewish spirit'.

³⁸ And, if so, they had met the expectations of Johann Gottfried Herder that 'Jews will live in accordance with European laws and will contribute to the best of the state'; see Alfred D. Low, *Jews in the Eyes of the Germans: From the Enlightenment to Imperial Germany* (Philadelphia, 1979), 61.