Towards a Psychoanalytic Understanding of Fascism and Anti-Semitism: Perceptions From the 1940's

The British historian E.H. Carr claimed that all history is contemporary history. No historian can escape from his own relationship to the present; each inevitably sees the past through the perspective, that is, the anxieties and desires of the present. Historians record and evaluate the past refracted both through the pressures of their current circumstances and through the dynamics of their own personality. The goal is to create a dynamic interaction between his material and himself, an honest and respectful dialogue between the facts of history and interpretations, an open-ended conversation between past and present.[1] The 110-year history of psychoanalysis presents precisely the same problems that Carr mentions. What is selected and omitted, emphasized or emphasized, argued or refuted will all turn on the historian's contemporary concerns and how he consciously and unconsciously conceives of the present; nor can the historian's ideological affiliation, perhaps best conceptualized as theoretical and methodological loyalties, filtered through his personal life, be bracketed out from his approach to the past…

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[Deutsche Fassung]

Freud left a number of pithy remarks on anti-Semitism and German fascism. When he learned of the Nazi book burnings in May 1933, including the destruction of his own texts, he commented: "What progress we are making! In the Middle Ages they would have burnt me; nowadays they are content with burning my books."[2] In June 1938, after the invasion of Austria by the National Socialists, the 82-year-old Freud was required to sign a document to secure an exit visa; he asked to add a sentence to the affidavit: "I can heartily recommend the Gestapo to anyone."[3] Freud speculated that anti-Semitism and castration anxiety were integrally connected in unconscious thought processes: "The castration complex is the deepest unconscious root of anti-Semitism; for even in the nursery little boys hear that a Jew has something cut off from his penis – a piece of his penis, they think – and this gives them a right to despise Jews."[4]

In Freud's brief "A comment on anti-Semitism,"[5] written shortly before his death, he expressed his wish for non-Jews to protest against the "anti-Semitism excesses of today." Disguising his own voice in this piece, Freud distinguished his position from Christian sources and from secular humanists. He proposed to be speaking the "religion of truth," underscoring the history of centuries of injustice towards and persecution of the Jews. He reminded the reader of certain aspects of Jewish superiority, particularly in the scientific, technological, and cultural realms: "They [the Jews] do not need so much alcohol as we do in order to make life tolerable; crimes of brutality, murder, robbery and sexual violence are

great rarities among them; they have always set a high value on intellectual achievement and interests; their family life is more intimate; they take better care of the poor; charity is a sacred duty to them."6 Although I do not have the space to discuss it here, Freud elaborated his controversial views on the dialectic of anti-Semite and Jew in *Moses and Monotheism*.7 From Freud we get a spirited but ironic anti-Nazism. He viewed the Nazis as barbaric, denounced their policies and attitudes as representing a regression to outmoded medieval notions, signifying a revival of the old pogrom mentality. There is no sustained theoretical or clinical analysis of anti-Semitism, only an incomplete and abstract conjecture. Freud never elaborated a systematic understanding of the modern potentials for mass extermination in the German and racial versions of anti-Semitism. He did not apply his own theories about collective pathology, the destructive possibilities of modern mass mobilization, and the leadership principle that he had elucidated in *Group-Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego*.8 In effect Freud, who remained in anti-Semitic and fascist Vienna as long as he could in the middle and late 1930's, did not produce an early or penetrating understanding of the dangers of fascism represented to Western civilization, to democratic forms of government, to humanistic values, even to the future of the psychoanalytic movement.

We must turn to the next generation of psychoanalysts, to a younger group more firmly anchored in twentieth-century realities than Freud, predominantly but not exclusively more politicized and left-wing than Freud, more appreciative of the cultural and socio-economic roots of social movements and of nationalistic currents, to understand the earliest psychoanalytic perceptions of fascism and the atrocities of anti-Semitism.

This chapter will survey psychoanalytic writings from 1940 to 1950, specifically drawing on articles and books written before, during, and immediately after World War II. I will focus on five European analysts whose lives and orientations were decisively changed by their own experience of German fascism. In examining the writings of Otto Fenichel (1897-1946), Ernst Simmel (1883-1947), Erik H. Erikson (1902-1994), Rudolph Loewenstein (1898-1976), and Bruno Bettelheim (1903-1990), my study presupposes they all suffered personal distress, trauma, dislocation and persecutions because they were Jewish psychoanalysts and intellectuals, and that fascist anti-Semitism caused them to rupture their lives in Europe, forcing them to emigrate to the United States. In looking at their earliest assessment of fascist racism and the dynamics of prejudice, I will organize my chapter into five categories: (1) awareness of environmental factors; (2) data upon which they base their interpretations; (3) dynamic formulations about anti-Semitism; (4) their ambivalence about their own Jewishness; and (5) conclusion.

My approach will be comparative and thematic. The key texts to be discussed include two papers by Otto Fenichel; two papers by Ernst Simmel, including one originally published in 1932 *Der Sozialistiche Arzt (The Socialist Physician)* and the other a lengthy essay on "Anti-Semitism and Mass Psychopathology" from Simmel's 1946 edited volume *Anti-Semitism: A Social Disease*; several papers by Erik Homburger Erikson written prior to Childhood and Society (1950), including "Hitler's Imagery and German Youth," (1942) and four recently published pieces of "war memoranda" written between 1940 and 1945, from *A Way of Looking At Things* ((Eric H. Erikson, "On Nazi Mentality," *A Way of Looking At Things: Selected Papers from 1930 to 1980* (New York, 1987), pp. 341-345, ed., Stephen Schlein; Erikson, "Comments on Hitler's Speech of September 30, 1942," (1942), ibid., pp. 351-361;

Erikson, "Comments on anti-Nazi Propaganda," (1945), ibid., pp. 362-365' Erikson, "A Memorandum to the Joint Committee of Post-War Planning," (1945) in ibid., pp. 366-374.)) (1987); Rudolph M. Loewenstein's *Christians and Jews: A Psychoanalytic Study*9 (1951); and finally the powerful classic by Bruno Bettelheim on the concentrations camps, "Individual and Mass Behavior in Extreme Situations," written between 1940 and 1942, originally published in *The Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology* thanks to the intervention of its editor Gordon Allport.

Allport, past President of the American Psychological Association and Harvard Professor of Psychology, played a significant supportive role in this history in the 1940s; though a "non-analytic" psychologist, he wrote the "Preface" to Simmel's volume on anti-Semitism; Erikson reports that he served as a member of the Committee on National Morale, along with luminaries like Gregory Bateson, Kurt Lewin, and Margaret Mead, working to coordinate and interpret information on German fascism. Despite its early rejections by psychiatric and psychoanalytic journals, Bettelheim's essay had the most impact largely because it negated the widespread disbelief in the United States about concentration camps in Nazi Germany, countering the general unwillingness on the part of the American government and population to fathom the reality of Nazi atrocities. His essay was subsequently reprinted in Dwight Macdonald's journal *Politics* in 1944; by the end of the war, General Dwight Eisenhower required that it be read by the United States military government officers stationed in Germany.

To capture the flavor of these earliest psychoanalytic investigations, I will occasionally make reference to Erich Fromm's 1941 classic text, *Escape from Freedom*.10

AWARENESS OF ENVIRONMENTAL FACTORS

None of these psychoanalytic texts are exclusively psychologizing. Each and every one attempts to integrate environmental factors. Each author viewed fascist anti-Semitism as a social pathology, that is, as an individual and social "disease."

Fenichel's 1940 paper emphasized the importance of specific historical conjunctures, above all, the political and economic context of Germany, in addition to psychological factors to explain German fascism. Employing the key concepts of a Marxist sociology, widely current in left-wing European circles during the 1920s and 1930s, Fenichel argued that fascist anti-Semitism was an over-determined historical phenomenon, but its key component was authoritarianism and obfuscation of class conflict. Anti-Semitism deflected the revolutionary tendencies of the masses away from social rebellion; it blunted all efforts at radical reform into hostility toward the Jews. At the same time anti-Semites maintained an uncritical respect for authority, law and order. Anti-Semitism had to be understood as part of an international class struggle released by the world-wide economic crisis of the depression. It was "a weapon in the class warfare dominating the present era."11 Fenichel's second paper on anti-Semitism, written after emigration and his arrival in the United States, deletes the Marxist language of the first one, de-emphasizes social and economic determinants, and gives the psychological and intrapsychic more interpretative weight.12

Ernst Simmel was a medically trained psychoanalyst who co-founded the Berlin Psychoanalytic Institute in 1920. From 1927 to 1931 he directed the Schloss Tegel, a psychological clinic and sanatorium in the outskirts of Berlin, designed to apply psychoanalytic principles to the treatment of severe mental disorders, including perversions, addictions, psychoses, and psychosomatic disorders. Simmel was best known

for his seminal contribution to the psychoanalytic understanding of the war neuroses, or of shell-shock, during World War I.13 He was held in high esteem by Freud and his closest associates and was for a time Freud's physician. After the Nazis came to power, Simmel left Germany and came to Los Angeles, California, in 1934 to start an institutional center for training clinicians in psychoanalysis, which led to the eventual foundation of the Los Angeles Psychoanalytic Institute in 1946.

While in Germany, Simmel was a committed, practicing Socialist and was the President of the Association of Socialist Physicians. He spoke the interwar language of German Social Democracy, including direct references to class struggle, to calls for the socialization of the medical system and the healing arts, and explicit support for health insurance. He minced no words in unmasking the dangers for mental health represented by National Socialism; he opposed the brutal policies of Hitler, pointing out their warlike, anti-social, and atavistic tendencies. Through the device of mass suggestion, Hitler denounced his enemies as if they existed outside the community. Simmel clearly recognized that fascist exclusionist policies might result in murder. "This time it is the Jew, the Marxist, the dissenter in general – he is the target, in reality the phantom for taking off steam from the aggressive cannibalistic drives."14

It is not surprising that Erikson, whose pre-psychoanalytic origins were as an artist and pedagogue, would highlight cultural determinants in his analysis of German national character. The liberal Loewenstein built his argument about anti-Semitism by insisting on a dialectical relationship between Christian and Jews and by demonstrating the historical roots of anti-Jewish sentiment in Christianity; while privileging the psychological component, his analysis also focused on the xenophobic, economic, religious, and cultural foundations of anti-Semitism. Bettelheim structured his argument by highlighting different reactions to the extreme traumatic situation of the concentration camp experience in terms of social class. The Freudo-Marxist Fromm framed his discussion of the "Psychology of Nazism" by insisting that Nazism was primarily an economic and political problem and by connecting the emotional appeal of the Nazi ideology to its socio-economic roots.

DATA
Fenichel built his psychoanalytic theory of fascism around a non-specific summary of anti-Semitic literature; he did not cite his primary sources and he quoted Freud and Theodor Reik from the secondary literature. Simmel's data derived primarily from the history of anti-Semitism, particularly the accusations against and denunciations of Jews; he referred to LeBon and Freud and the literature on group psychology, but conspicuously omitted references to Wilhelm Reich's classic, *The Mass Psychology of Fascism* of 1933.15
Erikson performed a textual analysis of Hitler's *Mein Kampf*, examined several of Hitler's speeches, and also had access to interviews with German prisoners of war. Loewenstein, known subsequently as the master clinician in the triumvirate of ego psychologists with Heinz Hartmann and Ernst Kris, drew on his own clinical work with anti-Semitic patients he had analyzed in France; he also offered a psychoanalytic reading of typical samples of anti-Jewish literature, such as the Russian document, "The Protocols of the Elders of Zion." Fromm's basic data emerged from an evaluation of Hitler's *Mein Kampf* and from Joseph Goebbels' novel, *Michael*.
Bettelheim's paper came directly out of his own personal experiences as a survivor of two concentration camps, Dachau and Buchenwald, during the year 1938-1939; he claimed to

have sampled other prisoner reactions to the camps by having conversations with an estimated 600 prisoners at Dachau and 900 at Buchenwald. His perceptions of the dynamics of adaptation and disintegration were enhanced by dialogue in the camps with two other prisoners, Dr. Alfred Fischer and Ernest Federn, both professionally trained mental health practitioners.[16]

DYNAMIC FORMULATION

Fenichel's analysis of anti-Semitic personalities underscored the defensive process of projection, particularly a splitting mechanism of the ego where hostile impulses were disavowed and externalized. He focused on the hidden meaning of anti-Semitic images of the Jews, picturing the latter as "murderer, filthy, and debauched."[17] Since there was no rational or statistical justification for these accusations, he viewed these vilifications as creations of the anti-Semitic imagination. The Jew is a projection, a displacement substitute for the homicidal, dirty, and voluptuous tendencies concealed in the Jew-haters. The anti-Semite sees in the Jew what he does not wish to be conscious of in himself, especially whatever is unappealing, such as his own aggressiveness. In the unconscious of the rioters, the Jew symbolizes their own repressed instincts, including images of strangeness, wickedness, and ugliness, which they despise in themselves. Because the Jew is resented and blamed, he readily becomes transformed into an object of reprobation. This is a relatively easy mental maneuver because he is a member of a racial minority and because of his alleged emphatic foreignness. For Fenichel, perceptions of the Jew and the unconscious instinctual drive of hostility have foreignness in common.[18]

Simmel proposed that anti-Semitism was a mass psychosis, akin to a paranoid form of schizophrenia; he characterized the illness as one which unleashed the instinctual forces of primitive hatred and destructiveness, with the ultimate goal of massacring Jews. Jew-baiting was equivalent to Jew-biting, which psychodynamically stems from archaic tearing and orally devouring tendencies. Anti-Semites were driven by a loss of reality, a break of the ego, and the conversion of illusory ideas into delusions. Anti-Semitism was fueled by the forces of projection and denial, all resulting from a splitting of the ego, particularly prevalent in the mass mind. The collectivity regarded the Jews as the personification of the devil, the symbol of all civilization's evil, the epitome of degeneration and decadence. The anti-Semitic individual in the group undergoes a severely regressive process, or mass psychosis, marked by a conspicuous loss of judgment and moral values; he re-externalized his super-ego in the image of the leader. "This clinical syndrome: *unrestricted aggressive destructiveness under the spell of a delusion*, in complete denial of reality, is well known to us as a psychosis. Thus anti-Semitism as a mass phenomenon appears to be not a mass neurosis, but a *mass psychosis*"[19] Simmel's phenomenological description sounded remarkably similar to present-day understandings of extreme borderline pathology.

The anti-Semitic group mind, despite reacting to situations with an immature, highly disintegrated ego, served to protect the individual anti-Semite from insanity. Anti-Semites do not know they are sick and they do not seek out forms of therapeutic treatment. The gains in their illness are a form of ego inflation, superiority, and the overcoming of alienation through membership in a supposed true spiritual community, like the *Volk*, the nation, or the Nazi Party. Given the lethal power of its projective mechanisms and its insatiable orality, modern mass anti-Semitism could also displace its notion of Jewishness, foreignness, or devilishness onto any absolute enemy. A leader of the mass anti-Semitic mind could arbitrarily decide who a Jew was, condensing his debased image onto a number

of international or domestic enemies. Projection was similarly a defensive strategy to expel the horrific enemy within. "The anti-Semitic complex in man can be used over and over by the mind engineers (propagandists) of dictator regimes to serve two ends at the same time: first, to manipulate the 'crowd mind' within their country in order to whip up collective national hatred; and second, to disintegrate the collective spirit of the enemy nation."[20]

In analyzing the imagery of Hitler's childhood, Erikson offered a developmental psychoanalytic perspective, influenced by Aichhorn's study *Wayward Youth* (1925). Hitler's personality and world vision flowed from an arrested or, more precisely, a delinquent adolescence. The Fuhrer's character structure remained that of an unrepentant and intransigent adolescent, one "who never gave in" to the adult world. Having failed artistically, academically, and professionally, Hitler learned to exploit his own failures and those of his parents' generation. Erikson viewed Hitler's vision of a Thousand Year Reich as a fantasy of adolescent aggrandizement. As *Fuhrer* he dealt with the older generation of Germans in a stubborn, devious, cynical manner. Hitler's hysterical oratorical tirades resonated with the mass audience because they tapped into deep-seated resentments and criminal solutions. Erikson diagnosed Hitler as a severely disturbed personality, but one endowed with resilience and with a capacity to exploit his symptomatology: "He [Hitler] has hazardous borderline traits. But he knows how to approach the borderline, to appear as if he were transgressing it, and to turn back on his breathless audience."[21]

The Nazi ideology reflected and elaborated the projections of an adolescent delinquent, hence, the arrogance, defiance, scorn, violence, anti-social goals, and desires for dominance. Hitler's imagery resonated with a large sector of German society because of the affinity of Hitler's family experience and upbringing with that of millions of other demoralized Germans. Erikson also attributed part of Hitler's wide popular appeal to the political immaturity of the German people, to German susceptibility to emotional and histrionic appeals, to a national masochism, and to a paranoid suspiciousness toward democratic modes of governing and thinking.[22]

For Erikson, Hitler remained a fixated adolescent delinquent, who never overcame conflicts around authority and around conflicting instinctual drives. Nazi ideology was an ill-digested, irrational blend of social ideas, grandiose ideals, and suggestibility of the German populace, generating a hypnotic effect which was morbid and sinister. Erikson saw German anti-Semites constructing a simplistic dichotomy of black and white, revealing phobic avoidance and the wish to extirpate everything black. The Germans were receptive to imagery of the Jew as a germ or a foreign body that poisoned, infected, or emasculated the nation. With the Jew described as small, black, and hairy, the German Aryan became the positive opposite: tall, erect, light, soldierly, and clean. For Erikson, the German-Jewish antithesis, while it contained an aesthetic and moral dichotomy, essentially reduced into that of the superman and the apeman. He speculated that Hitler's Jewish phobia may have been a personal symptom that was particularly well suited for exploitation though shrewd use of propaganda. Erikson also noted projection at work in Hitlerian anti-Semitism, particularly the externalization of German weakness.[23]

Within the framework of his discussion of the history of Christian ambivalence toward Jews, Loewenstein emphasized Oedipal dynamics to explain the persistence of anti-Semitism. In effect, the ancient conflict between Christians and Jews represented the struggle between a younger and older religion, a religion standing for the sons versus one standing for the law and for the dominance of the fathers.

Psychodynamically, this conflict reflects the child's past conflict with his father and "becomes the unconscious symbol of the Oedipus complex."[24] For the anti-Semite, the Jew becomes a scapegoat for his own repressed sadistic and masochistic ideas. The Jew, like the real father imago of the anti-Semite, is hated, loved, and feared. Loewenstein showed how the unresolved Oedipal passions could work to shatter the accepted limits and boundaries of the super-ego. "The concept of the Jew, therefore, was only a superstructure over primitive conflicts deriving from the Oedipus complex. The Jews, therefore, do not necessarily represent the epitome of all evil to all Christians. They can, however, do so under the pressure of pathological factors, individual or social."[25] Hitler attempted to eradicate the superego by delegitimizing all moral values except those of the master race and the Fuhrer.[26]

Bettelheim, for his part, perceived the existing psychological literature to be conceptually inadequate to grasp the horrific experiences of the concentration camps on its victims. Beginning with when he was being transported to the camps, immediately after receiving a bayonet wound and a heavy blow to the head, Bettelheim approached the border of fragmentation, wondering "all the time whether man can endure so much without committing suicide or going insane."[27] He coined the phrase "extreme situation" to emphasize massive traumatic environments that pushed an individual to an ultimate limit. The camps dehumanized and threatened the personality with disintegration because of the severe and unrelenting traumatic effects of everyday life in such brutal and brutalizing settings. He defined an extreme situation as one marked by the strict monitoring and discipline of the prison guards, characterized by torture, terror, and overwork in mindless and monotonous tasks; prisoners were dressed in improper clothing, suffered from the absence of medical care, and were deliberately mystified by not knowing why they were imprisoned or how long imprisonment might last. This massive anxiety and shattering trauma placed the prisoner in a psychological and existential position of being overpowered, leaving him helpless, passive, and completely subjected to the arbitrary will of the guards. The sadistic Nazi system, Bettelheim insisted, had developed methods to transform previously free citizens into serfs. Concentrations camp life severely injured the self-esteem, the sense of self, and the integrity of the inmates.[28]

Bettelheim detected a number of defensive techniques used by inmates to prevent the total unraveling of their personality, attempts by the individual to preserve some autonomy and to protect against the total disintegration of their minds and value systems. He described a gamut of defenses spanning the spectrum from neurotic to psychotic. He observed detachment on the part of prisoners, a defensive need to inhibit their emotions and to split themselves into subjects and objects. Desperately seeking to preserve their pre-camp images as liberated subjects, many became convinced through derealization that this horrible experience was happening to them as objects, things, not real people. Many prisoners refused to share their thoughts and feelings about the inhuman experience of the camps, expressing banal or distorted emotions instead. Inmates gave vent to their hatred of the S.S. in dreams of revenge against the guards; daydreaming was common.[29]

The most macabre defense of all, however, resulted from regression to a child-like state. Because the camp experience generated a persistent and shattering form of terror, because the inmates were so dependent and so prone to annihilation anxiety, because the group dynamics were so damaging to the inmates' self-esteem and so destructive to their sense of self, they became infantilized, gradually losing their former normative systems and ideals

as self-determining individuals. Exploring a variation of the defense known as "identification with the aggressor," Bettelheim spoke of an identification with the torturers, as evidenced by the prisoners imitating the S.S.'s attitudes and styles of behavior. This included Jewish prisoners who inflicted pain on other Jewish prisoners, who imitated the S.S.'s clothing and leisure time activities, to the extent of adopting the S.S.'s racial and conspiratorial theories about Jews. Identification with the torturers operated defensively as a result of massive regression, with the prisoners assuming a child-like attitude toward the S.S. For their part the prison guards became objects of projection, as if they were figures of an all-powerful father surrogate, receptacles of both intense positive and negative transference from the inmates.[30]

AMBIVALENCE ABOUT THEIR OWN JEWISHNESS

Simmel's volume on anti-Semitism mostly omitted any discussion of Jewish character traits. In his "Introduction," he suggested that "the question whether unconscious trends in the Jewish personality correspond to unconscious trends in the anti-Semitic personality deserves much more consideration."[31] Fenichel stressed the history of scapegoating Jews in Germany, the Jewish position as persecuted minority, their defenselessness in often hostile environments, their cultural and linguistic differences, their foreignness, and above all, the existence of a "psychology of the Jews" stemming from centuries of ghettoization.[32]

I want to signal the middle name in the signature of the author of "Hitler's Imagery and German Youth," Erik Homburger Erikson. Erikson's first seven publications, from 1930 to 1938, were signed Erik Homburger. We now know him as Erik H. Erikson. In the section of his paper called "Jew," he proposed a number of reasons why Jews became the logical and convenient victims of German anti-Semitism, specifying their availability for an infinite number of projections of badness or blackness. In summarizing centuries of wandering and dispersal, Erikson discussed the survival of "two Jewish types": the ghetto Jew, that is, a regressive Jewish personality or, in his words, "the Orthodox, not influential, anachronistic type," unable to adapt to a changing environment or time; and the "successful type," continually adapting to changes, by either skills in trading goods and cleverness or by attaining leading positions in the arts, sciences, and cultural enterprises. "His talents and his compulsion, his vices and his genius, are all based on a sense of the relativity of values."[33] This stereotyping of the Jews into two simplistic typologies has the ring of the pejorative; it suggests a heightened ambivalence of the author about his own Jewish identity. Erikson asserted that Jewish relativism could easily dissolve into "nihilism," that psychological insight could be used to devalue the absolutes of the majority and host countries that Jews could not defeat by might.

My own speculation is that Erikson's ambivalence about his own Jewishness, his shame, guilt, and possible hatred of himself as a Jew are being expressed in these passages, just as is his ultimate rejection of Jewishness. The future theoretician of identity had difficulty in acknowledging and identifying with his own Jewish mother and Jewish stepfather, Homburger. Too cosmopolitan and sophisticated to become a ghetto Jew, he could not accept the uncertainties that resulted from "Jewish relativism" in the area of psychological knowledge and ethical values. Erikson would subsequently opt for an ethics grounded in religion, for example, in his attachment to Luther and to certain ideals of Christianity, and subsequently in his adherence to the non-violent ideology of Gandhi.[34] Perhaps Erikson's need to distance himself from his Jewish cultural roots and origins derived from an

unanalyzed negative transference to Anna Freud, his training analyst, and to her circle of overprotective maternal figures in Vienna. It may express an unanalyzed negative transference toward Freud, whose relativity of values and atheism were quite pronounced in his theoretical and methodological repertoire. Ambivalent passages about Jewish geniuses of modernity, Marx, Freud, and Einstein, can also be found in his *Childhood and Society*.[35] Loewenstein's book cites the previously published articles by Fenichel, Simmel, Bettelheim and Erikson. His concluding chapter to his monograph focuses on "Jewish character traits." He is clearly identified with Freud's atheism, scientific aspirations, and secularism; cultures advance when religion plays a less significant role in the life of a given society; religions influence civilizations in predominantly negative ways. Loewenstein was motivated to write this study because of his exclusion from his beloved France simply because he was Jewish: "… although born in pre-1914 Russian Poland, I had for many years completely identified myself with France only suddenly to find myself morally rejected by my adopted country because I was a Jew."[36] Claiming to be "objective and impartial,"[37] that is to say, scientific, Loewenstein argued that he examined the question of a Jewish character typology neither to vilify nor attack the victims of Nazi anti-Semitism, but to inquire if there was something in the Jewish personality that provokes conflict in the anti-Semite, possibly explaining the "almost universality of the prevalence of hostility toward Jews."[38]

Unable to live up to his aims, Loewenstein's chapter on Jews is denigrating, overly general, and biased against the Jews, almost to the point where the author appears to accept a plethora of anti-Semitic stereotypes of the Jew. He assumes the existence of a universal Jewish personality. Despite some positive comments about the Jewish aptitude for intellectual endeavors and inclination toward spiritual and ethical concerns, he constructs an unflattering portrait of miserly and spendthrift Jews; of overly anxious and overly protective Jewish mothers; of Jewish horror of physical violence; of Jewish Puritanism, asceticism, and sexual inhibition; of a Jewish pathological reaction to anxiety in many situations; of a high incidence among Orthodox Jews of hypochondriasis and disorders of the digestive system; of Jewish obsequiousness and lack of fighting spirit; of a Jewish desire to placate the all-powerful enemy; of the Jewish recourse to irony as a weapon; of Jewish superiority rooted in narcissistic self-inflation; of Jewish tendencies toward profound, ineradicable self-doubts and a chronic sense of inferiority; of the Jews' destructive criticism and of their need to prove themselves more intelligent than others. "And if there is anything peculiar to the Jewish mind, it would seem to be the special ways in which the ego deals with aggressive drives and the defense mechanisms the Jews have elaborated in terms of the peculiar circumstances of their social environment."[39]

Rejecting the Zionist option after the foundation of an independent State of Israel, Loewenstein foresaw the possible dangers of identification with the aggressor on the part of the Israelis, manifesting itself in extreme nationalism and in hostility toward the Arabs. In effect, Loewenstein presents a group picture of an infantilized, immature, and wounded people, deeply damaged by centuries of anti-Semitic persecution. "The Jews, in spite of their conviction that they are God's favorite sons, experience the miseries they endure as a lack of affection and, like children, they suffer more from lack of affection, than from actual injustices."[40]

Bettelheim also expressed mixed feelings about his Jewishness. In the paper "Freedom from Ghetto Thinking,"[41] though ostensibly written as "a Jew to fellow Jews," he articulated the secular Jewish heritage of the Enlightenment and of nineteenth-century liberal

humanism, which was founded on a tradition of compassion for others, a sense of moral responsibility, civic and social service, the protection of democratic freedoms and the human rights of individuals. His ties to his Jewish origins consisted of a sense of solidarity to "all others who were singularly persecuted."42 Bettelheim denounced ghetto thinking as a fatal mistake; it was anachronistic, narrow-minded, nationalistic, and self-righteous; it perpetuated a history of Jewish passivity, of refraining from resistance to injustice or revolt from oppression; it functioned as an insensitivity to the debasement of the oppressor; it was based on the defenses of avoidance, denial, delay, and the desire to ingratiate oneself with one's moral or mortal enemies. Ghetto thinking essentially reflected an inner resignation about life. Because it precluded non-ghetto, that is, secular historical and psychological perspectives, because it was cut-off from twentieth-century realities, such as mass murder and genocide, the ghetto mentality resulted in actions that were innocent, passive, ignorant, and ultimately self-destructive.43

Bettelheim exhorted his post-Holocaust audience to remember that there could be no real peace of mind, no authentic protection, unless they understood how six million Jews died, almost entirely without struggle or resistance. There could be no innocence in the face of mass slaughter. In insisting that Jews need not be helpless nor impotent, Bettelheim emphasized the successful resistance of Jews during the World War II, praising those "Jews who had shaken off an internal ghetto." There was nothing noble in submitting passively to the sword or to the gas chambers only degradation, only the transformation of a human being into a debased thing.44

Bettelheim, like his other psychoanalytic colleagues, appears to be trafficking in his own form of reductionistic thinking, his own caricature of ghettoized Jews, opposing it to an ideal of the emancipated Jew. He was, to be sure, self-conscious about the double bind of the Jewish survivor, exhorting other Jews to keep alive the possibilities of an active, democratic resistance to Nazism (and other totalitarian threats) through the formation of "independent, mature, and self-reliant persons"45 capable of group opposition and self-defense against the system. To the end of his life, however, Bettelheim remained an alienated, homeless, enlightened Jewish intellectual, trying to preserve his autonomy. He could neither join allegiance with the ghetto Jews and their descendants, nor participate with Israeli Jews who, at least, had an ideological and practical commitment to fighting back. Bettelheim remained a non-Jewish Jew who was ambivalent about his Jewish identity, describing himself poignantly as a Jew who found himself midstream, "in between, nowhere truly at home. They, like the author, are inwardly torn."46

CONCLUSION

The psychoanalytic writings on fascism and anti-Semitism in the 1940's reflect the strengths and limitations of the state of the science of that era. Freud's influence and the European enlightenment heritage are transparent. The key theoretical ideas are grounded in instinctual drive theory, Freud's structural model, with particular emphasis on super-ego conflicts, splitting of the ego, and the potentiality for the eradication of the super-ego. Several thinkers viewed German anti-Semitism as yet another derivative of Oedipal dynamics and they used ego psychological concepts to illustrate and prove their theses. I saw no evidence of the influence of the English object-relations school, no mention of the narcissistic dynamics that might be at work, except as a term of reprobation. Erikson integrated some of the psychoanalytic developmental thinking on delinquent adolescence into his papers. Most of the literature stresses the pathologizing aspects of anti-Semitism,

while neglecting the adaptive and skillful uses of propaganda and mass psychology by the fascist leadership. These psychoanalytic thinkers emphasized that the key mechanisms at work in anti-Semitism were splitting, paranoid projections, sadomasochistic forces, and primitive residues of Oedipal dynamics, including identification with the torturers.

These psychoanalytic papers reveal the influence of context, especially of the European politics and culture of the 1930s and World War II. These writings belong to the history of anti-fascism, a history that is still being constructed. Fenichel and Simmel wrote markedly different papers on anti-Semitism when they were still in Europe than those composed once they emigrated to America; the latter indicates a sign of de-politicization and de-radicalization, possibly expressing a wish to play it safe and not be perceived as subversives or threats to their American audience. Marxist socio-economic analysis gave way to psychoanalytic interpretations about prejudice; class analysis was replaced by psychodynamic perspectives on race. From an explicit socialist internationalism in Europe, we see a marked shift away from politics toward peaceful reforms and educational concerns in America. Franklin D. Roosevelt is quoted instead of Marx and the classics of European Marxism.47 All of these thinkers, with the possible exception of Erikson, maintained pessimism about the destructive potential of the individual and the horrendous barbarism inherent in mass psychology. Some of the writings explicitly work toward weakening religious impulses, aiming to humanize Christianity, urging Christians to recognize their history of psychological and cultural suspiciousness, if not hostility toward Jews. Several papers attempt to dilute irrational crowd-mindedness on the part of bigoted groups.

These texts were written to educate and influence academics, statesmen, governing elites, and other clinicians, as well as to have some future impact on mothers and on modes of child-rearing. In Erikson's case, there is solid evidence that he directly influenced the U.S. government in creating counter-Nazi propaganda during World War II and plans for the "Americanization" of post-war Germany after Hitler's defeat. Bettelheim's paper was widely distributed and read by American troops; it influenced the American intellectual left. With Adorno and Frankfurt School thinkers, once fascism as a threat seemed to be eclipsed, their attention turned to deciphering the subliminal aspects of propaganda, to the unmasking of authoritarianism, and towards formulating a critique of the consumer society, a society of political consensus and conventional values.48

The issue of the Jewish identities of these analytic thinkers, particularly their ambivalence about their Jewishness, runs through this literature as a latent subtext. All of our authors originally came from assimilated, secular, cultivated middle or upper middle class Jewish backgrounds. Some achieved assimilation through the process of education, some through psychoanalytic training. Fenichel, Simmel, and Loewenstein were medically trained, Erickson and Bettelheim were lay analysts and university professors. As analysts and psychoanalytic cultural critics they were committed to the precepts of justice and universal good, to the ideas of the Enlightenment and the ideals of the French Revolution, all of which had emancipated the Jews. They all opposed or rejected the ghetto mentality for being parochial, intolerant, psychologically and socially out of touch with modern realities and scientific advancements. Jewish observance and ritual did not play a significant part in their lives in Europe before fascism or once in exile in the United States. Yet being a Jew caused them to be demonized, persecuted, and placed in dangerous, potentially murderous

situations. None opted for a return to the ghetto, or for a move to Israel or an ideological commitment to Zionism. Many found themselves in an insoluble double bind, which became particularly acute for a survivor of the camps such as Bettelheim: they were Jews without a meaningful connection to Jewish communities or traditions, yet they socialized with other Jews in psychoanalytic associations, in the university, and in their clinical practices.

Above all, they needed to come to terms with anti-Semitism and the Holocaust and the potential for the unleashing of a new anti-Semitic campaign in their new country. All remained internally ambivalent about their Jewishness, often externalizing their negativity and hostility to themselves as Jews by drawing a static, caricatured, or essentialist portrait of Eastern European ghetto Jews. Though aware of projective mechanisms in anti-Semites, these psychoanalysts themselves could and did project. Though critical of the authoritarian tendencies in fascism and in anti-Semitic mass movements, most of these Central European Jews could and did behave in America in distinctly authoritarian styles. They brought with them in differing degrees and tonality an arrogance, superiority, elitism, disdain, and refusal to tolerate democratic cooperation and dialogue with their American psychoanalytic colleagues (many of whom they regarded contemptuously as poorly educated, Eastern European ghettoized Jews, without a deeper appreciation of Freudian psychoanalysis or European culture).

As we now know, authoritarianism could be found not just in right-wing, fascist, or anti-Semitic personalities but also in character structures on the left and within the institutions and core of the psychoanalytic movement itself. Many of these thinkers displaced internationalist and cosmopolitan ideas from Socialism into high expectations for the psychoanalytic cause, which they considered an international movement with a liberating potential, not just a therapeutic enterprise. All embodied a distinctly modern Jewish tradition of self-examination, introspection, rationality, and a passion for universal theorizing, with varying acceptance of the relativity of values. None easily escaped the double bind of being perceived as Jews even though they had assimilated, shedding much of the trappings of Jewish belief, traditions, and culture. The issue of transformation of the ambivalence about their Jewishness into the structure and organization both of local psychoanalytic institutes and of national associations in the United States needs further research and elucidation which may provide a clue into the origins and durability of the conservatism, authoritarianism, and elitism that continue to characterize these institutions.[49]
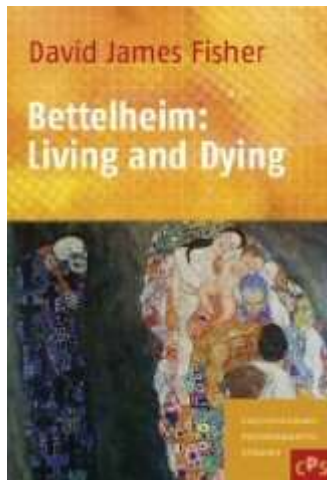
David James Fisher, [Bettelheim: Living and Dying](#)
Amsterdam – New York, NY 2008, page 31-47

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