# The Enlightenment's Apocalypse: Harvard, Antisemitism, and the Future of Science

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*It matters what people read.*

> Magda Teter, *Blood Libel: On the Trail of an Antisemitic Myth* (Harvard University Press, 2020).

*The acceptance or rejection of claims entering the lists of science does not to depend on the personal or social attributes of their protagonist; his race, nationality, religion, class and personal qualities are as such irrelevant. Objectivity precludes particularism…. The Faber process cannot be invalidated by a Nuremberg decree nor can an Anglophobe repeal the law of gravitation.*

> Robert K. Merton, "Note on Science and Democracy," *Journal of Legal and Political Philosophy* 1942 1:1.

*…it is clear to the Task Force that antisemitism and anti-Israel bias have been fomented, practiced, and tolerated not only at Harvard but also within academia more widely.*

> *Final Report of the Presidential Task Force on Combating Antisemitism and Anti-Israeli Bias*, Harvard University

## I. The Crisis of Science

The future of science now depends on whether we can resolve the crisis of antisemitism.[*] One need not agree with the truth of this claim to recognize the

[*] Works reviewed in this article: *Final Report of the Presidential Task Force on Combating Antisemitism and Anti-Israeli Bias*, Harvard University; Frederick C. Beiser, *The Berlin Antisemitism Controversy.* (London: Routledge, 2024); David A. Hollinger, *Science, Jews, and Secular Culture: Studies in Mid-Twentieth-Century American Intellectual History.* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996); Frank E. Manuel, *The Broken Staff: Judaism through Christian Eyes.* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992); Ivan G. Marcus, *How the West Became Antisemitic: Jews and the Formation of Europe, 800–1500.* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2024); Marcel Simon, *Verus Israel: Study of the Relations Between Christians and Jews in the Roman Empire, AD 135-425.* (Paris: Éditions E. de Boccard, 1948); Magda Teter, *Christian Supremacy: Reckoning with the Roots of Antisemitism and Racism.* (Princeton: Princeton

importance of its plausibility and the scope of its significance. Harvard's current loss of over two billion dollars in scientific funding due to antisemitism has implications far beyond its own campus. Science underlies or influences practically every aspect of the contemporary world, not least its economic growth. When the Cambridge mathematical physicist turned historian of science Derek de Solla Price discovered a quantitative law (now called Price's Law) governing the growth rate of science, he created the basis of a new field, scientometrics. Price's Law was the discovery that science grows at an exponential rate, roughly doubling in size every 10-20 years.[1] The field of scientometrics provides significant evidence that economic growth depends increasingly on scientific innovation, with America playing a role so large (87% of the most important science-dependent patents between 2012 and 2016 were American) that if one imagined away American science, one not only imagines away much of the current global science system, but also much of America's economic power.[2] But what does any of this have to do antisemitism?

The next section explains the answer to this question, showing the significance of Harvard's antisemitism crisis to the system of science as a whole, and how the Task Force's Report marks the definitive end of an era inaugurated in 1945 by Harvard's famous "Red Book," *General Education in a Free Society*.[3] Science and democratic values were linked when the Jews were first fully included in the American university, and that link between science and democracy has broken down, leaving intense disagreement about which values should guide the university. The crucial issue is whether science, and the university system, can address fundamental conflicts in values, a problem famously addressed by the sociologist Max Weber in 1917. Even if Harvard's funding were restored, its internal crisis would not go away unless this problem is resolved. The next two sections develop the first by surveying recent and classic works of scholarship that are of essential relevance for understanding the current antisemitism crisis, placing

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University Press, 2023); *The Cambridge Companion to Antisemitism,* Ed. Steven Katz. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022).

[1] Derek J. de Solla Price, *Little Science, Big Science—And Beyond* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), 5. See also his first published statement of his discovery, *Science since Babylon* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1975), which is a charming introduction to Price's work as a whole.

[2] Ali Ghazi and Zhara Ghaseminik, "The Increasing Dominance of Science in the Economy: Which nations are successful?" *Scientometrics (2019) 120:1411–1426*

[3] *General Education in a Free Society: Report of the Harvard Committee* (Harvard University Press, 1945), introduction by James Bryant Conant.

the connection of science, Judaism, and Christianity into an integrated context.[4] The concluding section explores the question of whether the university system, as it is currently constituted, can implement the values-based reforms Harvard calls for in itself and the broader academic system, without explicitly articulating and enacting a clear commitment to a new vision of science and truth.

## II. The Scientific Ethos and Antisemitism

Science and antisemitism are intertwined in three important ways, one of which is obvious (Harvard's current crisis), the second of which is clear but not widely appreciated (the Jewish contribution to science in America), and the third of which is subtle and complex (the deep historical context of antisemitism). At the heart of these connections are debates, going back to the Enlightenment, about scientific values, and whether science can resolve conflicts in values. The current crisis of science is not new, but is the last of three waves of assaults on scientific authority. The first wave began as an esoteric crisis in German academia over a hundred years ago,[5] then came to American academia in a second wave, after World War II, reaching its peak in the so-called "Science Wars" of the 1980s and 1990s,[6] and is now crashing into popular consciousness and politics in its third wave as the Harvard crisis.

Understood in the larger context of the history of science and of antisemitism, the *Final Report of the Harvard Task Force on Combating Antisemitism and Anti-Israeli Bias* (hereafter abbreviated as the Report or the Report on Antisemitism) makes it clear that there is a deep internal crisis in academia about what constitutes a properly scientific or academic approach to reality.

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[4] I selected these books on the criteria that they could be used to structure an integrated scholarly approach to antisemitism that is cross-disciplinary by design and effective in providing historical information nowhere consistently or coherently taught in university curricula.

[5] The *Wissenschaftskrise* inaugurated by Max Weber's famous 1917 lecture, Science as Vocation (*Wissenschaft als Beruf*). See Richard Pohle, *Max Weber und die Krise der Wissenschaft: Eine Debatte im Weimar* (Vandenhoeck & Rupecht, 2009), and Max Weber, "Science as a Vocation," 129-156, in *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*, ed. HH. Gerth and C. Wright Mills (New York: Oxford University Press, 1946).

[6] See Erika Lorraine Milam, "Who Speaks for Science? A Conversation with Erika L. Milam, Part One," interviewed by Samuel Loncar, *Marginalia Review of Books*, November 8, 2024. https://www.marginaliareviewofbooks.com/post/who-speaks-for-science-a-conversation-with-erika-lorraine-milam

The public controversy that instigated Harvard's plight is well-known: 33 Harvard student groups circulated a letter on October 8, 2023 holding Israel "entirely responsible" for the October 7, 2023 Hamas attacks.[7] This was the beginning of what the Report on Antisemitism calls the "American campus front" in the Israel-Hamas conflict. The Report is a historic document, not only for its careful and lucid history of an immensely controversial and difficult subject, but for its attempt to bring rational and historical clarity to an issue whose roots and effects extend far beyond Harvard.

The Report specifically identifies three claims promoted by anti-Israel activists that contradict responsible scholarship and its norms, yet form the basis of the new, more extreme anti-Zionism that is widespread at Harvard and throughout the broader culture of higher education.[8] Why unscholarly ideas that focus hatred towards Israel and the Jews now govern the thinking of many students and some faculty at America's most elite university is partially answered by the Report, which focuses on how these ideas have become prominent at Harvard, particularly since the 2010s, and does an excellent job of explaining the failures of academic governance that have contributed to their rise.

Recommending a thorough review of Harvard's academic programs, standards, and supervision, with a tightening of control by Harvard's tenured faculty, the Report on Antisemitism provides a detailed social history of Harvard's campus and culture since the 1980s, set in a survey of Jewish life at Harvard since the early twentieth century. A key finding concerns the structural weakening of Harvard's academic standards in certain areas where the mechanisms of academic self-governance seem to have broken down. Derek Penslar, for example, Co-Chair of the Task Force, is a distinguished historian at Harvard specializing in the history of Zionism.[9] But Penslar's expertise, or that of his similarly qualified colleagues, is not what primarily shapes the views of Harvard students on Zionism; rather, students' attitudes seem for the past few decades to have come increasingly, according to the Report, from activism on campus and academic programs and instructors who are not tenure-track faculty.

The fact that America's most distinguished university is in danger of losing its leadership role in science is reasonably interpreted as symbolic: since Harvard

[7] October 7, 2023 was Simchat Torah, a holiday characterized by joy and dancing with the Torah scrolls around the reading table in synagogues.
[8] *Report on Antisemitism*, 17-18.
[9] See Derek Penslar, "Passion and Palestine, *Aeon*, February 3, 2025, for his nuanced explanation of why, beyond antisemitism, the Israel/Palestine conflict evokes such intense debate and emotion.

is the "head" of the American academic establishment, the logic seems to be: if Harvard can effectively address its antisemitism crisis, then its example can be followed throughout higher education since it is the leader in global research and education. The connection between antisemitism at Harvard and a loss of funding for science might be dismissed by some as local and temporary: *some student activists got out of hand, Harvard has a crisis and lost federal money, but that is all there is to it*. In short, the Harvard crisis is overblown, and one should not bother to read anything deeper into it about antisemitism, science, and universities.

The Jewish contribution to science, however, challenges this attempt to limit the significance of Harvard's current crisis. One has merely to name Albert Einstein to conjure the accurate perception that Jewish intellectuals have played a remarkable role in science. Their expulsion from Nazi Germany crippled the German university, the most intellectually exciting and transformative center of science in the nineteenth-century, and the model of America's modernized university system.

The establishment of American dominance in science since World War II and the success of the Manhattan Project coincided with and is partly due to the increased presence of Jews in American intellectual life. Commenting on the fact that "by the midcentury mark, intellectuals of Jewish origin were no longer systematically excluded" from even the humanities (where they were most resisted), the historian David Hollinger observes:

> Hitler was a major agent of this transformation in two respects. His example—horrifying to many Americans even before the full dimensions of the "Final Solution" became known—rendered anti-Semitism of even the genteel sort more difficult to defend. If this helped American Jews beginning careers in the late 1940s and early 1950s, a second of Hitler's acts made a more dramatic and immediate impact: he pushed from Central Europe to a relatively welcoming America a distinctive cohort of Jewish scholars, scientists, and artists that attracted extensive notice within the American academic and literary worlds. This cohort included not only Albert Einstein and a substantial percentage of the physicists who built the atomic bomb, but a galaxy of distinguished humanists and social scientists.[10]

[10] David Hollinger, *Science, Jews, and Secular Culture: Studies in Mid-Twentieth-Century American Intellectual History* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996), 27-28.

Hollinger's broader argument is that the secularization of American public culture in the post-WWII era is connected to a movement of intellectuals, many Jewish, to promote a more inclusive culture, centered on science as the unifying ideal of a democratic society. The extent of antisemitism in America and the world in this era is often forgotten or ignored, but it is crucial to realize *antisemitism is the historical norm, not the exception*, in Western institutions and history, and it has been a sign of great ethical and intellectual progress that it was, for a time, overcome.

Failure to acknowledge the deep roots of antisemitism creates distortions of the historical record and the contemporary situation, for it makes it appear strange that an institution like Harvard or other elite universities could create an uncomfortable or hostile environment for Jewish students or faculty. This relates to a key premise, often implicit, that underwrites many discussions of antisemitism and makes the problem difficult to understand, resolve, or even productively discuss. The premise is that antisemitism, or hatred of the Jews, can be understood outside of history, especially the history of Christianity as a cultural tradition and its role in shaping the modern world.[11] In other words, such a thing as purely "secular" antisemitism is assumed to exist, and, thus, solutions to antisemitism are assumed to exist that make no reference to the intellectual, moral, and legal frameworks within which hatred of the Jews evolved and was institutionalized. In fact, as Hollinger and the Harvard Report show, Jewish integration into American intellectual life is a great achievement of the post-WWII era, and thus less than a century-old. It is now imperiled.

In the 1930s in America there was significant support for fascism and the Nazis, including among religious leaders, most infamously the Catholic priest, Father Coughlin, whose pro-Nazi radio show reached 30 million Americans (at a time when the US population was around 120 million), promoting *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, and whose magazine, *Social Justice*, further spread his antisemitic views.[12] The 1930s was the peak of an intense rise of antisemitism in America, whose arc coincided almost exactly with the growth of modern German antisemitism, beginning in the 1870s. In some cases, it was directly influenced by

[11] Throughout this essay, the sense of "Christianity" is precisely that of a cultural tradition, not a "religion." Being shaped or influenced by Christianity in this sense has nothing to do with personal religious affiliation, nor are individual professing Christians in any way in view. Most practicing Christians today would vehemently reject antisemitism, just as most Americans vehemently reject slavery. I regard the category of "religion" to be the creation of the modern Western world, but this complex issue extends beyond the scope of this article.

[12] See Jonathan D. Sarna, "Antisemitism in America, 1654-2020," in *The Cambridge Companion to Antisemitism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022), 402

Nazi propaganda.[13] The contemporary "rise" of White religious nationalism is the surfacing to broader consciousness of a tradition that is hardly restricted to some Christian evangelicals, but is as much in keeping with the prejudice of the old WASP establishment and pre-Vatican II Catholicism. [14]

T.S. Eliot (a Harvard 1909 alumnus), perhaps the most influential artist and intellectual among the American literary elite at the time, in his Page-Barbour lectures at the University of Virginia in 1933, said:

> The population should be homogenous; where two or more cultures exist in the same place they are likely either to be fiercely self-conscious or both to become adulterate. What is still more important is unity of religious background; and reasons of race and religion combine to make any large number of free-thinking Jews undesirable.[15]

Hence, Hollinger's important framing:

> We need to remind ourselves that in those years [the 1930s and '40s] the notion of a 'Christian' culture still carried vivid connotations of anti-Semitic barriers to the employment of Jews in higher education, especially in the humanities and social sciences. Not a single Jew held a tenured appointment in any department of Yale College until 1946.[16]

The rise of Jews in the American academy and scientific establishment coincide with a new vision of science as linked to a particular "ethos," a morality, that the sociologist of science Robert Merton, in the formative paper quoted as an epigraph to this essay, "Note on Science and Democracy," argued was most at home in democratic societies. We are today seeing a kind of echo of the context of Merton's

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[13] Ibid., 398. Cf. Sander A. Diamond, *The Nazi Movement in the United States: 1924-1941* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1974).

[14] Evangelical churches are much more likely to be Zionists than either liberal Protestants or Catholics, due to the importance of dispensationalism among many evangelicals, which is a theology that rejects Christian supersessionism, discussed below. With no exceptions that I am aware of, all theological traditions of Christianity that were historically supersessionist are strong supporters of anti-Zionism today. Rev. Timothy O'Leary, an Episcopal priest and the co-founder of the Center for Jewish Christian Understanding at Marginalia, noted in a forthcoming conversation with me that the Episcopal Church recently entertained, though a majority rejected, a proposal to eliminate the word "Israel" from its religious services. And it supports the BDS movement, along with 9 other Christian denominations.

[15] T.S. Eliot, *After Strange Gods: A Primer of Modern Heresy* (London, 1934), 20.

[16] Hollinger, *idem*, 159.

essay, which was the anti-fascist, specifically anti-Nazi, culture of intellectuals concerned by the anti-liberalism in American society and abroad.[17]

The first of the four values of the scientific ethos Merton describes is "Universalism," and it is in this context that he says:

> The acceptance or rejection of claims entering the lists of science does not depend on the personal or social attributes of their protagonist; his race, nationality, religion, class and personal qualities are as such irrelevant. Objectivity precludes particularism….The Faber process cannot be invalidated by a Nuremberg decree nor can an Anglophobe repeal the law of gravitation.

Any ostensibly scientific system hostile to any group based on prejudice is to that extent, on Merton's view, contrary to the scientific ethos, and when the hostility extends to some of its most distinguished and important contributors, it is on a path to self-destruction. This self-destructive logic is deeply connected to the logic of antisemitism itself, and Merton and others making similar arguments at the time had in mind the contemporary racial science of the Nazis and their expulsion of Jews from positions in German universities.[18]

Merton was in the tradition of the great historical sociologist Max Weber, who analyzed modern societies as highly complex systems with distinct spheres of value, such as the state, economy, family, aesthetics, and science itself. As the division of labor increased specialization, each sphere of values tended to become autonomous, having its own rules, and competing with other value spheres.

Weber rejected the idea that we have rational grounds for choosing between one sphere of values or another. Thus, although the realm of science (*Wissenschaft)* is normed by the value of truth, Weber famously denied that we have a rational basis for choosing the value sphere of science over any other value sphere in his 1917 lecture, *Science as Vocation*. Nor do we have any rational way to answer the question, "What is the meaning, or ultimate value, of science, and why defend or support it?" Weber denied science could tell us how to live, precisely out of the intellectual concern to distinguish political or religious activism from scholarship or rational inquiry. Citing the example of "Turn the other cheek" from the Sermon

[17] See Hollinger, *passim*, but especially, 80-96.
[18] It is thus jarring in this context to read, in the Harvard Report on Antisemitism, that "Faculty in some parts of Harvard also expressed fear that their colleagues would not vote to appoint a Zionist or an Israeli to a faculty position in their department." *Harvard Report*, 18.

on the Mount, Weber notes that it is up to the individual to decide whether this command is a good value (from the religious perspective) or bad value (from the perspective of "manly" courage to resist evil): "According to our ultimate standpoint, one is of the devil and the other God, and the individual has to decide which [value] for him is God and which is the devil."[19] In defending the internal integrity of science and its values, Weber argued powerfully against conflating ethical and political activism with scholarship, but at the price of losing any good argument for why science should exist in the first place.

At the foundation of the Weimar Republic (1919-1933), then, and for one of its most distinguished intellectual leaders, Reason itself appeared an arbitrary choice, a matter of personal preference. This bleak and relativistic vision, indebted to Nietzsche, undercut the intellectual program that had launched the German research university in the early nineteenth-century: a philosophical vision of Reason as an essential aspect of reality, which the activity of science (*Wissenschaft*)—understood as *all disciplines of the university and their unity*—grasped as a realization of human freedom. This was rooted in the ancient philosophical ideal that being ignorant was incompatible with being free, that knowledge and human liberation bore some inner affinity, and it was widely shared by the German Idealists who, building on Immanuel Kant, laid the foundations of the modern research university on a metaphysics that was a secularized, but recognizable, form of Christianity.

The broadly Christian context of Western scientific values is crucial to understand, because there is an important distinction between science as a research enterprise and science as a successfully consolidated set of values and institutions.[20] Many cultures have had science, but none of them became *scientific cultures* except the modern West. The historian of science Stephen Gaukroger introduces this distinction to stress what is special about Western science and modern culture:

> Successful consolidation, of a kind that aims to promote the cognitive claims of science and build a legitimate scientific culture, is the characteristic feature of Western science in the wake of the Scientific

[19] "Science as a Vocation," 148. See Frederick Beiser, *The German Historicist Tradition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 557-567.

[20] Stephen Gaukroger, *Civilization and the Culture of Science: Science and the Shaping of Modernity, 1795-1935* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), 423. The best overview of the relationship between science and religion, and Christianity's role in shaping modern science, is Peter Harrison, *The Territories of Science and Religion* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015)

> Revolution. [The origin of the culture of Western science] was not in scientific developments as such but in a particular set of political and religious problems, and it was thought of and defended in the context of a Christian understanding of the world until the middle of the eighteenth century. By the nineteenth century, science was becoming dissociated from Christianity, but taking its cue from Christianity, it began to be presented as an autonomous enterprise representing universal values, by contrast with those of Christianity, now increasingly considered problematic and parochial.[21]

By the time of Weber's lecture in 1917, science as an Enlightenment project advancing universal values—essentially a form of secularized Christian culture—was no longer credible, and thus the religious and philosophical foundations of scientific culture and its values were considered a matter of mere history, fated to obsolescence.

In spite of his own unquestionable commitment to truth and science, then, Weber could give the Weimar generation of Germany no philosophical basis to combat the streams of nihilism and relativism that had been challenging the authority of science since Arthur Schopenhauer and Friedrich Nietzsche, whose philosophies became popular in a broadly pessimistic and anti-rationalist movement in the later 19th century known as *Lebensphilosophie* (philosophy of life).[22] The main philosophical enemy of *Lebensphilosophie* was a rationalistic movement of German academic philosophy, Neo-Kantianism, that sought to study and understand science in a rigorous way, paying particular attention to its logical and historical foundations.

Among the most prominent Neo-Kantians were Jewish intellectuals like Hermann Cohen and Ernst Cassirer, who represented the high point of Germany's integration of its Jewish citizens into the academy, and who contributed significantly to the defense of liberal, universalistic values in Germany academia and culture. Max Weber was himself connected to the Neo-Kantian movement, and his belief that there could be no ultimate rational foundation for science reflected the difficulties of providing a cogent defense of science even among philosophers who supported and exemplified its virtues.

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[21] Ibid., 424.

[22] See Frederick Beiser, *Weltschmerz: Pessimism in German Philosophy, 1860-1900* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), *The German Historicist Tradition*, and *Neokantianism* for an overview of this context.

About a decade after Weber's profound yet deeply dispiriting lecture, Ernst Cassirer and Martin Heidegger had a famous debate in 1929 in Davos, Switzerland, which seemed to many to mark the twilight of Cassirer's Enlightenment vision and values and the ascendancy of Heidegger's darker vision of Western philosophy, which saw Reason as a smokescreen for an obliviating neglect of the primal question of philosophy and a template for the domination of the earth by technological power at the expense of authentic existence.[23] Heidegger famously found the great carrier of authentic existence in his own time to be the Nazi Party. Along with Carl Schmitt, the brilliant legal scholar who helped dismantle the Weimar Republic with his deep critique of its constitutional flaws, Heidegger became one of the most influential intellectuals of the 20th century, whereas few people today have heard of Cassirer, never mind read him. Schmitt, like Heidegger, was an active supporter of the Nazis, and he is as influential today as ever, taught at the top law schools in the country and engaged by many on the right and left.

We can see the first wave of the attack on scientific authority ending symbolically in the 1929 Davos debate, with the 1930s seeing the liberal, universalistic ethos of German-Jewish intellectuals going into exile and establishing a new outpost in America and its universities. In this context, Robert Merton's search in the 1940s for the social conditions that give rise to science and foster its growth can be seen as an attempt to circumvent the irrational abyss into which German science and society had plummeted by providing a social scientific link between the values of democracy and the values of science. Merton was trying to create a new value framework for scientific culture, one that is not directly dependent on a religion (so as not to exclude other religions or groups), nor hostile it, but could permit a rational, if oblique, critique of where science in Germany had gone. Democracy, in Merton's context, played the role of a new universal framework for scientific culture.

As Hollinger shows, Merton distanced himself from the political and moral context and purport of the 1942 form of this essay, when, in the 1970s, it had become foundational to the sociology of science as a newly professionalized field. The sociology and history of science combined,[24] by the 1980s, to produce a

[23] See Peter Eli Gordon, *Continental Divide: Heidegger, Cassirer, Davos* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010), for a powerful cultural and intellectual history of the event, and Michael Friedman, *A Parting of the Ways: Carnap, Cassirer, and Heidegger* (Open Court, 2011) for a lucid account of the core philosophical issues at stake and their relevance to contemporary philosophy.

[24] Milam, "Who Speaks for Science?"

number of accounts of science that, to critics, seemed to undermine scientific truth and a straightforward sense of scientific progress, leading to a historically unconscious yet recognizable repetition of the crisis of science that began in Germany.

The peak of the Science Wars of this era was the 1996 Sokal Affair, in which the physicist Alan Sokal, concerned by the use (or abuse) of these studies of science in postmodern trends, wrote a nonsense article full of the jargon of postmodern theory, which he successfully published in one of the leading postmodern journals, causing a public controversy when he revealed the hoax.[25]

As evidenced by the Sokal Affair and the academic reaction, which was understandably divisive and not notably enlightening, the problem of scientific authority and the social values necessary to sustain science did not go away simply because the original German context was forgotten or never understood in the American academy. Instead, it had emigrated. The crisis of science itself went into exile in America, but kept its German passport.

By the 1990s in academia, then, there was no easy confidence about what, exactly, the "scientific ethos" was, or whether it was a fit model for the broader values of society, and there was definite discomfort among the now professionalized scholars of science about the broader uses of their field.[26] This signaled a subtle but major shift away from the earlier ideals of Harvard, and thus American higher education as whole, as they had been powerfully articulated in Harvard's report, *General Education in a Free Society*, published in 1945. This was a probing assessment of the development of education in America, focused on the challenges of increased specialization and the role of the university in the broader context of American secondary education and culture. It essentially codified Harvard's commitment to the idea that democratic and humanistic values were also the values of science itself.

*General Education in a Free Society* recognized science as playing a crucial role in advancing the ideals of human dignity and freedom, particularly through medical and technological advances, but also in its spiritual dimension: "Science has done more than provide the material basis of the good life; it has directly fostered the spiritual values of humanism. To explain, science is both the outcome

[25] Sokal's account of the affair can be found in Alan Sokal and Jean Bricmont, *Fashionable Nonsense: Postmodern Intellectuals Abuse of Science* (New York: Picador, 1999).
[26] It was in exactly this context in 1996 that David Hollinger's book, *Science, Jews, and the Secular Culture* was published, whose contents function as a metacommentary on the science and multiculturalism debates of that era.

and the source of the habit of forming objective, disinterested judgments based upon exact evidence. Such a habit is of particular value in the formation of citizens in a free society."[27] This is a good example of how the text as a whole, and thus Harvard in 1945, dealt with the ethical dimension of education and its connection to democratic values. It carefully but directly tied the scientific ethos to the moral foundations of civil society and Harvard's own educational culture and mission.

If one reads Harvard's *General Education in a Free Society* as its constitution for the post-Holocaust era, one can read the second wave of the crisis of scientific authority in the Science Wars, in which scholarship from Harvard played a key role, as signs of a constitutional crisis in the American university, a loss of confidence that science was significantly tied to democratic values, or that it could function as a spiritual guide to the culture.

This erosion of scientific authority in American academia was not because of the Science Wars. Rather, as we have seen, these debates reflected an outstanding problem—the rational foundation of science and its values—that had been solved neither in Germany a century earlier, nor in American academia in the post-WWII era. The lack of a solution was not because of scholarly flaws, but because of siloed specialization, in which the problem could never be clearly articulated or resolved on the university's own terms.

The program of deepening and broadening the understanding of science undertaken by James Conant Bryant (President of Harvard from 1933-1953) was a great success, creating professional bodies among historians, social scientists, and philosophers focused on rigorous scholarly study of science in all its aspects. Over time, direct ethical and social considerations, such as those that were present in Merton's "Note on Democracy and Science," were abandoned as a matter of professional humility: historians could say it was not their expertise or job to discuss philosophical matters of truth; philosophers could say it was not their job to read the historians; social scientists could say they could only study values, not prescribe them; and working scientists could say none of any of this concerned them or what they did in their labs. [28] In short, it was precisely the university's failure to integrate the post-WWII developments in science and its study that led the academy to slowly drift away from a shared vision, which was one of the

[27] *General Education in a Free Society*, 50.
[28] See Lorraine Daston, "Does Science Need History? A Conversation with Lorraine Daston." Interviewed by Samuel Loncar, *Marginalia Review of Books* (November 2022): 12. https://www.marginaliareviewofbooks.com/post/does-science-need-history-a-conversation-with-lorraine-daston-part-one

prescient concerns of *General Education in a Free Society*: that an increase in "specialism" has a natural fragmenting logic, and this required general education to form the skills of determining which experts to trust and how to responsibly integrate their insights.

Unfortunately, neither Harvard nor any university has managed to do this, and the result was that bodies of specialists would go on accumulating more and more refined insights, while completely ignoring other relevant areas of scholarship, because professional academia provides no real space for such integration, and often punishes the interdisciplinary character of such work, in spite of notionally recognizing its necessity. (The Meanings of Science Project at *Marginalia* was designed to address this persistent gap in academia, and the same logic led to our new Center for Jewish Christian Understanding, focused on gathering the scholarship we have already published and synthesizing it for scholars and the public through new projects). Thus, when there were radical developments or uses of certain works of scholarship (as happened with Thomas Kuhn's *Structure of Scientific Revolution*) in directions their authors may not have endorsed, there was no mechanism consistent with academic freedom and professional disciplinary boundary-keeping to stop this from ultimately undermining core aspects of the scientific ethos articulated by Harvard in its 1945 vision of education.

As Erika Milam, a Professor in the History of Science at Princeton University and member of our Meanings of Science Project, observed in an interview:

> [F]or the academic scholars who study science and scientific cultures, there's a different set of questions about the limits of scientific expertise, of scientists' capacity to provide satisfying answers to questions that contain inherent assumptions about group or individual identity…this, of course, explodes in the 1980's and 1990's as the Science Wars. Academics trained in different fields debated the social construction of science: What is scientific truth, and how should social scientists best address these questions in relation to natural scientists? That became a huge difficulty as well.[29]

In certain areas of study, intellectually related to the Science Wars, some academic programs became (as critics deem them) "politicized," seeming to use academic knowledge to advance particular visions of social justice, rather than

[29] Milam, "Who Speaks for Science?"

pursue the formation of "objective, disinterested judgments based upon exact evidence," an ideal that is contested in the academy today.[30] Merton's core idea of universalism is related to *General Education in a Free Society*'s conviction that science must involve a habit of deep respect for truth and evidence, even if they contradict our personal beliefs. This ideal seems to imply a relevance for the scientific ethos beyond just universities or professional scientists.

But by the time of the Science Wars and ever since, the attitude towards truth as a meaningful concept to which one could appeal to adjudicate fundamental disputes came to evoke, in many sectors of the academy, a response similar to that of Max Weber's: skeptical, if not mocking. Discussing the idea that science can tell us anything about meaning, Weber said, "And today? Who—aside from certain big children who are indeed found in the natural sciences—still believes that the findings of astronomy, biology, physics, or chemistry could teach us anything about the meaning of the world?"[31] Thus the fate of truth as an ideal reminds one of Francis Bacon, who opens his essay on Truth: "What is truth? said jesting Pilate, and would not stay for an answer."

But if we sincerely want an answer, no matter how complex, and are willing to stay, we need to ask: Can the university system yield the truth, or path to it, that can help resolve its own crisis? Is there a scientific or scholarly approach to explaining antisemitism and anti-Zionism? The answer to that is straightforward: Yes. If we consider some important recent and classic work in the area, the situation at Harvard begins to become clearer.

## III. On the Origins of Modern Antisemitism

In 1992, Frank Manuel, a distinguished intellectual historian, published an invaluable introduction to how Western society began to engage Jewish texts and culture in *The Broken Staff: Judaism Through Christian Eyes*.[32] This surveys the

[30] The historian David Wooton, whose *The Invention of Science: A New History of the Scientific Revolution* (New York: Harper, 2015) is aimed at the relativism he finds prevalent in the history of science, agrees with the claim that the "driving force behind relativism and postmodernism . . . is a political commitment to multiculturalism." Ibid., 554.

[31] Weber, *idem*, and for the historical context of this passage, see Steven Shapin, "Weber's *Science as a Vocation*: A moment in the history of 'is' and 'ought,' *Journal of Classical Sociology* (2019), 1-18, especially, 7-12.

[32] Frank E. Manuel, *The Broken Staff: Judaism Through Christian Eyes* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992). This book is cited less than one might expect, and seems to be rarely

rise of Christian-Hebraism, the term scholars use for the movement, beginning in the Middle Ages and Renaissance, of Christian academics who sought to understand the Bible better through its original language, Hebrew, and thus the custodians of the text in its Hebrew form, the rabbis. By the 17th century, there was a significant body of literature dealing with the Bible and its connection to rabbinic Judaism and its texts. Latin translations of the Mishnah, the Talmud, parts of the Zohar, and the texts of many famous Jewish thinkers, like Maimonides's *Guide of the Perplexed*, became available and were regularly studied by learned Europeans such as John Milton and Isaac Newton, exercising a profound influence on modern intellectual history and politics.[33]

This era was the high-point of Christian culture's intensive engagement with Judaism, because the ideal of a learned Christian scholar was someone who knew Greek, Latin, and Hebrew. While this knowledge was almost always sought out or justified for religious purposes, like converting the Jews or simply knowing the Bible as well as possible, Manuel shows that it often had a scholarly logic of its own, and is thus the precursor to the contemporary academic study of Judaism and Christianity as a single historical complex. Extensive knowledge of Judaism by Christian Hebraists could serve both antisemitic and philosemitic impulses, even in the same scholar. Manuel charts a key change, whose legacy we still observe today, in the Enlightenment and its shift away from such detailed learning, rooted in a firm belief in the Bible's authority, towards philosophical histories of the West in which both Judaism and Christianity often functioned as evolutionary stages of human development.

The Enlightenment—in many ways an application of Protestant critiques of Catholicism against Christianity as a whole—divided into two streams, an overtly atheistic one associated with Baron d'Holbach and his disciples, and the deistic stream associated with Voltaire. Both streams converged in intense attacks on Jews and Judaism, which doubled as a way of delegitimating Christianity at the same time. Voltaire's attacks were particularly lurid, and given the significant influence of his work, they helped shift the outlook cultivated in the 17th century Christian Hebraists of the Jews, which, while still affected by prejudice, had come to see Israel in the Bible as a crucial model for contemporary European political debates (all political debates in the 17th century were inseparable from religion, and thus the

taught, which is unfortunate, as there is nothing like it in the literature, and it should be on any syllabus introducing this subject.

[33] See Eric Nelson, *The Hebrew Republic: Jewish Sources and the Transformation of European Political Thought* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011).

Bible was a crucial text of political philosophy in the era of Locke and Milton). Manuel takes the story from the Enlightenment and its critical reception in Germany, to the later twentieth-century, focusing on the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls and other major developments in the post-Holocaust era.

*The Broken Staff* is thus a deeply relevant intellectual history of the past 500 hundred years, which helps us appreciate the fact that Christianity is the context in which modern ideas about Jews and Judaism have evolved. Much of the history of Christianity's treatment of the Jews is something most professing Christians today would repudiate, and some religious bodies (like the Catholic Church) have made official changes since the Holocaust to their view of Judaism. But the actual status of Jews throughout most of Christian history is not widely appreciated. In general, Jews were subordinated members of society, *servi*, who depended upon the grace and grants of local powers and were not equal under the law.

The historian Magda Teter's recent book, *Christian Supremacy: Reckoning with the Roots of Antisemitism and Racism*, provides a powerful survey of the legal and social evolution of ideas of Christian superiority to Jews, and its connection to racism and white supremacy. The power of Teter's book is its chronological scope, going from the New Testament up-to-the present, and its extensive documentation of the way ancient theological views of the Jews evolved into the legal and institutional frameworks in which they were second-class citizens, showing how these frameworks shaped the development of racism. Teter also deals with the various Christian responses to the antisemitic or anti-Judaic legacy of Christianity in the post-Holocaust era. These responses are especially relevant today, and they place the central role of Harvard Divinity School (noted specifically in the Harvard Report) in Harvard's antisemitism crisis in a new light.

One might expect elite divinity schools to be the ideal place to gain a scholarly understanding of the Jewish Christian matrix of our history, including the history of antisemitism. But to my knowledge (I am an alumnus of Yale Divinity School and taught there), none of them require such education. Teter provides valuable context for why this might be the case:

> In both Europe and the US, the period since the end of World War II was pivotal in forcing reckoning with issues of antisemitism and racism and the questions of collective belonging: Who belonged to the social and political "we"? Both in the United States and in many European countries these issues remain unresolved because on both sides of the Atlantic, large portions of society are resistant to facing the unvarnished history, preferring

> a memory of an imagined past, or focusing on redemptive moments of progress, while explaining away the issues that do not fit with the neat memory.[34]

The conclusion one arrives at from Teter's book is that *there is no secular history either of antisemitism or modern racism*. The antisemitic and anti-Black racial ideas that become mainstream "science" in the 19th century are secularized ideas that originally were expressed first as theological, then as scientific, truths.[35]

The view that there is no simply secular history of antisemitism is directly supported by Ivan Marcus's *How the West Became Antisemitic: Jews and the Formation of Europe, 800-1500*, which makes two important contributions that complement and support Teter's. The first is an emphasis on the Jews as a significant part of Europe and its development, not merely as a passive or oppressed group, but as an agent active in the formation of medieval Christian and European culture: "The Jews were a fourth medieval civilization embedded in three other civilizations: Islam, Byzantium, and Latin Christian Europe. This is the story of the Jews and the formation of Christian Europe, the West."[36] A key aspect of Marcus' argument is that *the idea* of the Jews, just as much as their actual presence, played a critical role in the formation of medieval Europe, and that antisemitism is essential to understand European history.[37]

Recognizing Jews, including Christian ideas of them, as a core part of European history might seem obvious, but it is not. The idea that Jews are not an integral part of Western or European history is a leitmotif of antisemitic history. The leading figure of the Berlin antisemitism controversy (1879-1881), which we will consider below, was the distinguished professor of history at the University of Berlin, Heinrich von Treitschke. Treitschke was typical of his time in regarding the Jews as a foreign race inimical to European identity, rather than a crucial part of European history and culture, and this is a key part of the deeper historiographical context of Marcus' argument.[38]

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[34] Teter, *Christian Supremacy: Reckoning with the Roots of Antisemitism and Racism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 233.

[35] The post-Holocaust historian Leon Poliakov seems to be the first to recognize and document the theological matrix in which antisemitism and modern racism developed. See Jonathan Judaken, *Critical Theories of Antisemitism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2024), 158-188.

[36] Marcus, *How the West Became Antisemitic: Jews and the Formation of Europe, 800-1500* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2024), 3. The recognition of the *idea* of the Jews as crucial to the construction of Christian identity is well-known in the literature on Christian-Jewish relations, but not often developed in the context of European history itself.

[37] Ibid., 18-19.

[38] See Teter, *Christian Supremacy*, 181-189.

Beyond clearly showing how Jews actively shaped European culture and history, Marcus suggests a three-fold structure of medieval antisemitism that persists in modern antisemitism: first, a rivalry in which Jews and Christians both thought they were chosen, and thus superior to the other; second, after the First Crusade, Marcus sees this hierarchy of what Teter would call Christian supremacy developing the idea of the Jews as the "inner enemies of Christians"; and, third, the idea "that Jewish identity is a permanent condition, regardless of conversion or other factors, especially in adult Jewish men." Marcus argues that these "three interlocking structural factors contributed to Christian antisemitic assumptions about Jews more than any stereotypes, and they persisted into modern times" when they were "translated into modern and racial terms."[39] Thus, the Christian church becomes the modern *Volk*.[40]

Marcus ends with a clear statement of how important this background is today:

> Awareness of the deep structure of antisemitism, derived from medieval Christian Europe, does not mean that it is coterminous with the West, but it does mean that not recognizing it will prevent any measure taken against it from succeeding. Put positively, if the West is to overcome color racism or antisemitism, it has to be aware of the history of each.[41]

To be aware of the history of antisemitism means recognizing that *a crucial way antisemitism has always been expressed is precisely through history itself*, through the construction of history in a way that erases the Jews or holds them guilty in the present for alleged past wrongs. The claim that the Jewish people have no historical connection to the land of Israel, for example, is a flagrant rejection of historical fact, yet it is a key aspect of the anti-Zionism on Harvard's campus that the Report identifies, and is directly linked in the Report to the attempt to de-stigmatize antisemitism itself.

Historical debates about Judaism's place in history are integral to the birth of the modern, ostensibly secular, antisemitic movement, and connected to the tensions between liberalism and nationalism we see today. The Professor of History

[39]Marcus, *How the West Became Antisemitic*, 197.
[40] On the significance of church history for modern historiography, see Robert B. Holden and Samuel J. Loncar, "The Historical Critique of Heresiology in the Seventeenth Century and the Origins of John Milton's Arianism," 287-311, in *Antitrinitarianism and Unitarianism in the Early Modern World*, ed. Kazimierz Bem and Bruce Gordon (Switzerland: Palgrave MacMillan, 2024).
[41] Marcus, *How the West Became Antisemitic*, 199.

at the University of Berlin, Heinrich von Treitschke, was a longtime member of the Liberal party in nineteenth century Germany who became increasingly illiberal as his nationalism intensified. When he read an 11-volume history of Judaism by a Heinrich Graetz, a German historian and orthodox Jew, he was incensed by what he saw as its attacks on Germans and Christianity, and he published a historic antisemitic essay in 1879, leading to a firestorm of controversy.[42]

In *The Berlin Antisemitism Controversy*, the historian of philosophy Frederick Beiser provides a detailed philosophical history of Treitschke's essay, its context, and its immediate effects. Its context was the critical decade of the 1870s, which saw the completion of Jewish emancipation on April 22, 1871. As soon as Jews became fully equal members of the new German empire, the antisemitism that, in some of its forms, can be traced directly to Hitler and National Socialism was born. Beiser sees two major issues driving the rise of antisemitism after emancipation, the first identified by Jacob Katz as the failure of the German expectation that the emancipated Jews would assimilate, and the second identified by Beiser himself as a missing explanation: the fear of Jewish domination, often expressed as the claim that the present world is already controlled by a small foreign group inside society: the Jews. Both the demand for Jewish disappearance through assimilation and the idea of Jewish control over society are common aspects of contemporary antisemitism. Treitschke gave the antisemites something their pernicious ideas lacked: the intellectual respectability of a famous professor.[43]

Considered in light of Teter's and Marcus' work, the theological background to the Berlin antisemitism controversy is clear, and Beiser notes areas where it directly shaped the debate, paying particular attention to the idea of the Christian state and its influence on the idea that national unity entailed religious homogeneity. The antisemites' expectations (assimilation or no citizenship) and fears (Jewish power) were not novel; rather, they are patent translations of older ideas: that the Jews' very identity is a problem; that in order to address this problem, the Jews must cease to be Jews through conversion, or assimilation; and that even this may never be enough, because Jewish identity may in fact be inextirpable.[44] Likewise, the old idea of the Jew as the inner enemy in society, a tiny group that somehow threatens the whole, patently continues the medieval development of this

[42] Heinrich von Treitschke, "Unsere Aussichten," (Berlin: Preußische Jahrbücher, 1897) 559-576.
[43] Beiser, *idem*, 55, 296.
[44] See Beiser's discussion of one of the major publicists of the antisemitic cause in Germany, Ernst Henrici (1854-1915), for whom even a baptized Jew "still remains a Jew," and he thus excludes them from Christianity on racial grounds: Beiser, *Berlin Antisemitism Controversy*, 193.

idea traced in Marcus' *How the West Became Antisemitic*. The modern rite of anti-Israel purity tests, in which one must denounce Israel in unambiguous terms in order to be morally acceptable, is a recrudescence of these ideas. If these demands were rooted in a universalistic vision of justice, Israel would not be singled out as the exclusive focus of moral ire, nor would its denunciation play such an important role in social approval.

What becomes clear from Beiser's book—read in the context of Marcus', Teter's, and Manuel's—is that the short-lived window of Jewish equality in Germany (1871-1933), was from its foundations connected to internal divisions within its university system and the stability of its scientific values. Treitschke's stature as Professor of History at Berlin (on a strained but valid analogy, the Harvard of Germany at the time)[45] added scientific authority to German antisemitism. It is perhaps no accident that he was himself an advocate of the idea that there are no universal values, and that the ends can justify the means. Beiser sees Treitschke's *Realpolitik* and historicism, "his belief that moral and political principles get their meaning and validity only within their particular historical context," as directly contributing to an a-moral political philosophy:

> We want to ascribe universality and necessity to our moral principles, as if they were true for all times and places; but it is precisely this belief that is undermined by historicism…All the more reason, then, for laying these principles aside [on Treitschke's position] if political necessity demands it.[46]

As Manuel shows in *The Broken Staff*, it was within the realm of Christian scholarship that the modern historical understanding of Judaism developed, and that scholarship showed clearly that Christianity is profoundly indebted to its Jewish origins, which means modern culture, as it is indebted to Christianity as a cultural tradition, likewise is ultimately connected to Judaism. The denial of the debt of Christianity and thus Western culture to Judaism is a denial of history and sound scholarship. Yet Treitschke himself claimed that Christianity owed nothing to Judaism, but was heroic for having overcome it, echoing the Marcionist ethos of

[45] The University of Berlin was the first modern research university, and has always played a leading role in the German university system, but the analogy is strained, as those familiar with Germany know, because Germany lacks a system of private, elite universities, such as the American Ivy League universities.
[46] Ibid., 302-303.

German scholarship at the time, which taught a thoroughly de-Judaized idea of Christianity and sought to deny any meaning to Christianity's historical connection to Judaism, where this was conceded.[47] At its extreme, this concept of Christianity's immunity to history would later lead to the Nazi's pseudo-scholarly idea of the Aryan Jesus.[48]

Marcionism reflects an extreme yet popular way of coping with an undesired history—deny it against all the facts to the contrary—that converge in its effects with the dominant approach adopted by Christianity to make sense of its relationship with the Jews, known as supersessionism. Here the facts of history, like the fact that Jesus was Jewish, were not denied; they were overcome.

## IV. How the Jews Became History: The Logic of Supersessionism

The major work on this topic is Marcel Simon's *Verus Israel: A Study of the Relations between Christians and Jews in the Roman Empire AD 135-425*. Simon's book is a classic, first published 60 years ago. While some of its conclusions have been challenged or refined, it has not been surpassed by recent scholarship but confirmed in its core argument. It an immensely erudite and conceptually profound study of the origins of the idea that the Christian church became the true, universal, spiritual Israel, leaving no place for "carnal" or "fleshly" Israel. This is supersessionism, a concept that is essential to understand not only Christian-Jewish relations and antisemitism, but also the modern worldview we associate with secular modernity.

R. Kendall Soulen, a theologian who specializes in this subject, says:

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[47] Treitschke's use of "Judenthum" and his construction of it as a foreign religion of the "Israelites" or "Jews" is worth noting, because it is exactly during this time in Germany that Daniel Boyarin, in *Judaism: The Genealogy of a Modern Notion* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2019), argues "Judaism" as a religion came into being. His concluding evidence, ibid., 145-148, of H.Y. Flensberg's argument about "yahadut" as a calque of the German *Judenthum* takes on new significance in light of Beiser's book. On the Marcionist background and its consequences, see Samuel Loncar, "Christianity's Shadow Founder: Marcion, Anti-Judaism, and the Birth of Protestant Liberalism," *Marginalia Review of Books,* November 19, 2021. https://www.marginaliareviewofbooks.com/post/christianity-s-shadow-founder-marcion-anti-judaism-and-the-birth-of-liberal-protestantism, and Alon Confino, *A World Without Jews: The Nazi Imagination from Persecution to Genocide* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014).

[48] Susannah Heschel, "Jesus the Aryan: The Protestant Reformation's Troubling Legacy." *Marginalia Review of Books*, October 13, 2017, and Heschel, *The Aryan Jesus: Christian Theologians and the Bible in Nazi Germany* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010).

> For most of the past two millennia, the church's posture towards the Jewish people has come to expression in the teaching known as supersessionism, also known as the theology of displacement. According to this teaching, God chose the Jewish people after the fall of Adam in order to prepare the world for the coming of Jesus Christ, the Savior. After Christ came, however, the special role of the Jewish people came to an end and its place was taken by the church, the new Israel. The church, unlike the Jewish people, is a spiritual community in which the carnal distinction between Jew and Gentile is overcome. Accordingly, the church holds that the preservation of Jewish identity within the new Israel is a matter of theological indifference at best, and a mortal sin at worst.[49]

Supersessionism, to expand on Soulen's description, describes a basic idea in Christian theology: the replacement of Israel by the Church, which means the replacement of the Jews by Christians in God's interaction with history, the transferal of the promises to the Jewish people to the church in a spiritualized form, and the consequent nullification of the original, special relationship of election with the people of Israel and its transferal to Christians, who are now *Verus Israel* (True Israel). In short, the Church supersedes the "carnal" or fleshly Israel and all of the distinctive features of God's relationship to the Jewish people transfer to the church, now the 'true' 'spiritual' Israel.[50] All the basic binaries of Christian anti-Judaic

[49] Soulen, *The God of Israel and Christian Theology* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1996), 1-2. On the origins of Christian anti-Judaism in the context of its wider history, see David Nirenberg, *Anti-Judaism: The Western Tradition* (New York: Norton, 2013), 48-134. Paula Fredriksen is one of the leading scholars on this subject, and summarizes her work in Fredriksen, "The Birth of Christianity and the Origins of Christian Anti-Judaism," in *Jesus, Judaism, and Christian Anti-Judaism* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002), but for a more extended treatment, see Paula Fredriksen, *Augustine and the Jews: A Christian Defense of Jews and Judaism* (New York: Doubleday, 2008), 3-104.

[50] On this and the broader issue of Jewish-Christian relations, see Marcel Simon, *Verus Israel* and the subsequent scholarship that has revised and challenged some of Simon's argument and conclusions, including Robert Louis Wilken, *Judaism and the Early Christian Mind: A Study in Cyril of Alexandria and Theology* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1971), *idem*, *John Chrysostom and the Jews: Rhetoric and Reality in the Late 4th Century* (University of California Press, 1983), John Gager, *The Origins of Anti-Semitism: Attitudes Towards Jews in Pagan and Christian Antiquity*, rev. ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), Guy G. Stroumsa, "From Anti-Judaism to Anti-Semitism in Early Christianity," in Ora Limor and *idem*, *Contra Judaeos: Ancient and Medieval Polemics Between Christians and Jews* (Berlin: Mohr Siebeck, 1996), Albert Baumgarten, "Marcel Simon's *Verus Israel* as a Contribution to Jewish History," *Harvard Theological Review* 92 (1999), 465-478, Daniel Boyarin, *Border Lines: The Partition of Judaeo-Christianity* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006), Peter Schäfer, *Judeophobia: Attitudes Towards the Jews in the Ancient World* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997),

thought, law vs. gospel, particular vs. universal, material vs. spiritual, are historicized into supersessionism. The supposedly Jewish aspects—law, particularity, materiality—are plotted as past preconditions for a new, higher form, which is spiritual, universal, and liberating.[51] Spiritual Israel, or the universal church, encodes the most fundamental utopian ideal of the West, that of a peaceful global order of nations. The idea of a transethnic global order of justice and peace that integrates all nations into itself is foundational to Western political thought, reflected in Article 1 of the United Nations' charter. Israel's uncertain place in this order reflects the fact that the very idea of Israel is both essential to the formation of the Christian international order and deeply contested. Paula Fredriksen opens her new book, *Ancient Christianities: The First Five Hundred Years*, with a chapter that should be required reading on the topic, entitled, "The Idea of Israel." The development of the idea of Israel in Christianity made it a model for political theory and ideas of world history.

Supersessionism thus fights its enemy not with swords, destined to become ploughshares, but with time itself. The very nature of history is against the Jews, because they have not adapted to the new time inaugurated by Christianity. Supersessionism renders one reality in the present, Christianity, legitimate by delegitimizing another, the Jews, into the past, creating a distinctive aspect of antisemitism, the problem of existential legitimacy. Crucially, by relegating Judaism to a superseded past, the continued existence of Judaism and the Jews becomes a serious problem in early Christianity, and its very existence *de facto* is rendered *de jure* illegitimate. As Baumgarten says:

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*idem*, *The Jewish Jesus: How Judaism and Christianity Shaped Each Other* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012).

[51] One relevant criticism of both Marcus' and Teter's books concerns their material on the New Testament, especially Paul's writing, which tends to equate the later Christian use of these texts with their own meaning in their original context. This is understandable, given their concerns, but The New Testament writings were Jewish writings, and should be treated as such to avoid replicating the later misuses of these texts. I explain the source of the antisemitic use of these texts briefly in "Why Antisemitism is Our Problem," which is the prejudicial repurposing of critiques originally internal to the Jewish community to Jews as a group, after the Messianic movement affiliated with Jesus became Gentile-dominant.
https://www.marginaliareviewofbooks.com/post/antisemitism-is-our-problem
On this, see Paula Fredriksen, *Ancient Christianities: The First Five Hundred Years* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2024); Matthew Novenson, *Paul and Judaism: At the End of History.* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2024); and Timothy O'Leary, "Reading the Signs of Jewish Time: The Eschatological Elusiveness of the Apostle Paul." *Marginalia Review of Books*, May 4, 2024. https://www.marginaliareviewofbooks.com/post/reading-the-signs-of-jewish-time-the-eschatological-elusiveness-of-the-apostle-paul

> The living example of Judaism (the mere fact that Jews refused to disappear from the scene of world history), even after the triumph of Christianity over virtually all the other religions of the ancient Mediterranean world, served as a constant challenge to Christians to justify their claim to be the true heirs to the promise of the Hebrew Bible.[52]

The Jews thus become a "stubborn and backward" people, resisting God and history by refusing to renounce their historically particular identity and claim to election and embrace Christianity's universal message.

Supersessionism is thus a very powerful philosophy of history, encoding the worldview in which fleshly Israel, the Jewish people, are in principle guilty for continuing to exist and must assimilate to the new righteous order, whether by conversion to Christianity, the nationalist state, or now anti-Zionism, in order to be redeemed. This is why Israel is the only instance of a modern state where it is socially acceptable to question the legitimacy of its existence and, now, literally advocate for its destruction.

The international order's focus on Israel, evident in the prominence of anti-Zionism in Harvard's crisis, exists inside this supersessionist philosophy of history, in which Israel and the Jews play, as always, a crucial role as the evil that must be expelled, the inner demon that must be exorcised for the true, spiritual community to be pure.[53] Supersessionism as the default philosophy of history in the West thus helps answer basic questions: Why is the world so singularly focused on Israel, such that the United Nations Human Rights Council has an agenda item (no. 7) to regularly discuss the crimes of the state of Israel? Is it normal that front page headlines from Paris to New York to London to Berlin report so frequently on Israel, and often in a negative light? How is it that antisemitic propaganda as vile and stupid as the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion* have spread around the globe and are regarded by many as knowledge?

Based on the number of resolutions passed by the United Nations Human Rights Council against Israel relative to other nations, an alien social scientist, unhappily limited to quantitative methods and with no grasp of history, would have to conclude that Israel must be the most wicked state in the world. From a genuinely scientific or scholarly perspective, it is precisely social facts like these that must be explained, and in order to explain them, one must have recourse to the

[52] Baumgarten, *op. cit.*, 476.
[53] See Poliakov's profound insight on this point in Judaken, *Critical Theories of Antisemitism*, 186-187.

broader historical framework within which the modern West evolved. Just as scholarship has shown that the international regime of human rights represents a kind of secularization of the Christian project, so it should be unsurprising that there is no deep understanding of either antisemitism or anti-Zionism that does not include the historical relationship of Christianity and Judaism as the crucial framework within which we still think and feel.[54] Understanding that we all inherit debts to Christianity, just as it is indebted to Judaism, has nothing to do with personal religiosity, but with the human willingness to acknowledge the forces of history that shape us.

If one naively questions, "Why is there so much focus on Israel?" the response of many, unaware of the supersessionist context, will be one of moral indignation, incredulity, or hostility—as if it is obvious that it is because Israel *deserves* all the hostile attention it receives, not because, say, it has anything to do with the fact that it is the only Jewish state, or that for almost two millennia Jews were regarded as the worst people on earth for killing God (the charge of *deicide*, linked to the anti-Judaic construal of the death of Jesus), accused of ritually killing Christian children, subjected to regular outburst of vicious violence and expulsion, and barely enjoyed civil rights in Europe for a century before Hitler sought to destroy all of them. The idea that, in this historical context, Israel just so happens to be singled out for global attention and criticism by a remarkable congruence of ethical alignment and enlightenment in the international order is, of course, logically possible, but it is so historically implausible it approaches the status of a miracle.

Overt Christian supersessionism itself was, ironically, secularized by the Enlightenment, and in fact secularization theory itself, in the classical forms that sees the secular as replacing the outdated religious order, is a form of supersessionism. One finds this explicitly, for example, in the great sociologist Emile Durkheim:

> We have seen that the essential ideas of scientific logic are of religious origin. It is true that in order to utilize them, science gives them a new elaboration [. . .] But these perfectionings of method are not enough to differentiate it from religion. In this regard, both pursue the same end; scientific thought is only a more perfect form of religious thought. Thus it seems natural that the second should progressively retire before the first, as

[54] See Samuel Moyn, *The Last Utopia: Human Rights in History* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2012) and *Christian Human Rights* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press).

> this becomes better fitted to perform the task. And there is no doubt that this regression has taken place in the course of history. Having left religion, science tends to substitute itself for this latter in all that which concerns the cognitive and intellectual functions."[55]

And what happens when science seems unable to take on the religious function it has inherited from the Enlightenment, perhaps precisely because it has realized this role is not appropriate to itself? It, too, becomes at risk of being superseded by forces only too happy to disregard rational inquiry or weaponize it against the self-restraint of more careful scholars.

We are thus back to Max Weber, standing before a packed audience in Munich in 1917: "'Scientific' pleading is meaningless in principle because the various value spheres of the world stand in irreconcilable conflict with each other." Knowing some among his audience would be dissatisfied, he says:

> Those of our youth are in error who react to all this by saying, 'Yes, but we happen to come to lectures in order to experience something more than mere analyses and statements of fact.' The error is that they seek in the professor something different from what stands before them. They crave a leader and not a teacher. But we are placed upon the platform solely as teachers.

Weber remains widely respected by many scholars today not only for his remarkable erudition but for his prescient awareness that the craving for a "leader" and a "teacher" are not the same thing, and that conflating them would have ruinous consequences for science and teaching, as of course they did in Germany. The one thing science offers, for Weber, is clarity: "Science today is a 'vocation' organized in special disciplines in the service of self-clarification and knowledge of interrelated facts. It is not the gift of grace of seers and prophets dispensing sacred values and revelations…"[56]

Clarity is no small thing. Knowing the basic outlines of the history of antisemitism, recognizing that the achievements of American science and the American university after the Holocaust are directly indebted to the inclusion of

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[55] Emile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*, trans. Joseph Sward Swain (New York: The Free Press, 1965), 477. This is part of Durkheim's positivism, his extension of August Comte's supersessionist narrative of history that culminates in Positive Philosophy, a new universal religion of science. That science came for many intellectuals to function as a religion is an undeniable fact, well established in the literature.

[56] Weber, *idem*.

Jews, and recognizing that the status of Jews at Harvard is literally relapsing to its pre-WWII conditions does not solve Harvard's problems, but it does help to clarify their context and thus meaning. Such knowledge also explains why it is reasonable to see in Harvard's crisis the embodiment of a deep struggle for the soul of science, which from Weber's time to our own, has only been deferred, not resolved.

## V. The Enlightenment on Trial: Science, Antisemitism, and the Future of the University

Frederick Beiser's first book, published by Harvard in 1987, was *The Fate of Reason,* which traced the revolution of Immanuel Kant's philosophy and its immediate reception and context. As the title indicates, at stake in Kant's revolution was the question of whether the Enlightenment's belief in reason was actually sustainable. Kant offered the most profound defense of the Enlightenment's core value, the autonomy of reason, and thus its right to critique everything, including religion and tradition, in the name of reason. The critical philosophy of Kant was the most serious application of the Enlightenment ideal to reason itself. According to Kant, reason and its godlike powers were dangerous if their inherent limitations were not recognized: they were only strictly applicable to the material world studied by natural science.

Unlike modern physics, which introduced the first clear concept of *progress* in science, Kant saw philosophy, specifically metaphysics, the aspect of philosophy dealing with fundamental reality, to be backward, stuck in a chaos of conflicting opinions that had not improved in two thousand years. While metaphysics discussed the world, the soul, and God (the traditional divisions of metaphysics in Kant's context: cosmology, psychology, and theology), there was no agreement on these topics, unlike Newtonian mechanics, which Kant regarded as the paradigm of certain knowledge. Metaphysics in Kant's time at the end of the 18$^{th}$ century corresponds roughly with the realm of values, specifically ultimate values, in the time of Max Weber in the early 20$^{th}$-century.

Why had metaphysics failed? Because, Kant said, it had not found the "sure path to science." Kant believed he found that path, and thus in creating the first truly scientific metaphysics and ethics, he had also created the last, for he argued that to be truly scientific a system must be internally coherent and complete. This

introduces the eschatological ethos of science,[57] in which science's very self-concept is linked to the idea that it will be finally complete, reaching an "end of history" that is the final perfection of science and humanity. One finds this end times ethos not only in Kant, but in all the German Idealists, famously Hegel, and in Martin Heidegger (who inverts its value), contemporary physics, and especially the world of AI, where industry leaders speak of "solving physics" and bringing all science to an apocalyptic end through Artificial Superintelligence (ASI).[58] This may be a real possibility, and congruent with the implications of Price's Law, which practically cannot continue forever, or science would absorb the entire human population, as Price himself recognized. So what can be done?

Kant regarded his own answers to the core human questions (e.g. are we free? Do we have moral obligations? Is there a God?), as the scientific solution to these questions. Needless to say, neither his contemporaries nor even his defenders have agreed Kant wholly succeeded, nor have any of those after him who claimed to have created a scientific system to address humans' ultimate questions. We have seen that the movement to revive Kant's approach, Neo-Kantianism, did not succeed where he had failed, but one might say left the same ambiguous legacy: tremendous, lasting insights in many areas, and no solution to the basic problem of values, of ultimate meaning, of the rational foundation of science.

The result, by Weber's time, was a long-running war over whether metaphysics (in the sense of the realm that can determine ultimate values), could be truly scientific, which many in Weber's generation considered to be definitively answered: no, it could not, because metaphysics and philosophy as a whole had outgrown itself by producing the modern specialized sciences, or individual disciplines of the university (*Einzelwissenschaften*),[59] and none of these disciplines, as we have seen, can tell a person how they ought to live or why.

The debate over whether humanity's ultimate values could be scientifically determined was necessarily also a debate about whether the university, as the

[57] This concept and term, and much of the material in this review essay, is drawn from the book I am completing for Columbia University Press, *Philosophy as Religion and Science from Plato to Posthumanism*, particularly chapters 5-7.
[58] See the opening quote by Sam Altman in Karen Hao, *Empire of AI: Dreams and Nightmares in Sam Altman's OpenAI* (New York: Penguin, 2025).
[59] This narrative in its most powerful form is the great contribution of Wilhelm Dilthey in the second-volume of his *Einleitung in die Geisteswissenschaften*. It is used frequently without citation by Martin Heidegger, most famously and influentially in his profound lecture, "Das Ende der Philosophie und die Ausgabe des Denkens." Though it was widely known and adapted in the Weimar era, it never made it to American shores, as the second-volume of Dilthey's book remains untranslated and its importance unrecognized.

corporate embodiment of science, could effectively ground its own values, or whether these depended on broader cultural commitments, such as religion, that were taken for granted. This debate about the nature and limits of reason and science, running throughout 19th century German philosophy, was the original Science War: the war of the Enlightenment against itself, from which the three waves of scientific crisis I have charted emanate, each moving closer and closer to broader public consciousness, even as each wave has been less and less aware of its historical context and philosophical stakes.

The Harvard antisemitism crisis is consequently an apocalypse in the literal sense: an *unveiling*, because it is the direct and public manifestation of the same crisis, in a more general form, facing Max Weber in 1917, and to which his answers remain as profound, as relevant, and as unsatisfying now as they were then.

Science as an enterprise has become detached from the original culture of science whose consolidation, as we have seen, marked the uniqueness of the scientific revolution. Just as neither Marcus, nor Teter, nor any of the scholarship I have surveyed is "anti-Christian," any more than a history of slavery in America is "anti-American," so too the scholarship that has helped us see science as a deeply human enterprise, implicated in the same difficulties of every human community, is not in itself "anti-scientific." But there is no doubt it has been used in this way, and that confronting that problem is very difficult. The great danger is undermining the internal autonomy of the university system, a concern the Report on Antisemitism manifests clearly in the note placed at the beginning, which stresses that any solution must come from *within* Harvard itself.

Jürgen Renn ends his important book, *The Evolution of Knowledge: Rethinking Science for the Anthropocene* on an explicitly eschatological note, drawing on the history of religion. Science must somehow preserve its autonomy, acknowledge its many flawed uses and abuses, and yet still "reorient the knowledge economy towards global responsibility," a process in which "civic engagement and courage will also be imperative."[60] The student activists on Harvard's campus might say that is exactly what they were doing. What is the response?

Since the post-Weberian scientific ethos that governed Harvard after World War II cannot be directly recovered, perhaps a new form of it could be developed and ratified that articulates a rationally compelling statement of the scientific ethos, creating a framework within which our most intense debates can be worked through with civility and respect for truth and evidence, however inconvenient to the politics

[60] Renn, *The Evolution of Knowledge: Rethinking Science for the Anthropocene* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2020), 415.

and passions of the moment. In many ways, this is what the Harvard Report on Antisemitism is seeking to do. It embodies the unique value of the university: the capacity of experts corporately organized to advance the truth, especially when the truth is painful. As the Report recognizes, solutions will be difficult, but it should now be clear that any person who values science, scholarship, and academic integrity—of any political or academic persuasion—should be invested in the success of Harvard implementing its own suggested reforms.

The university system, and the system of science as a whole, has terrible problems that need to be confronted, but the solution is not the abolition of the university or of science, but its renewal. The Report concludes with a charge:

> We urge Harvard's leadership, including the president, provost, deans, faculties, and offices of equity, diversity, inclusion, and belonging to become champions in the fight against antisemitism and anti-Israeli bias—first at Harvard, and then as a model for institutions of higher learning everywhere.[61]

If Harvard fails, Max Weber and the fate of the German university remain our context and probable future. If Harvard succeeds in this admirable charge, it will not only solve the outstanding crisis of science and values it has inherited. It will inaugurate a new stage of the Enlightenment project, one in which the history of the Enlightenment's failures are not denied, but are acknowledged, and in that very process, overcome.*

[61] *Report on Antisemitism*, 191.

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