From Realistic Conflict to Relative Deprivation: Rethinking the

Psychology of Modern Antisemitism

Does conflict between Jews and Gentiles generate antisemitism? Most historians tend to avoid the question. For some, it is a nonstarter, dismissing as they do any connection between Jewish behavior and gentile malevolence. For others, the issue is more complicated. Although their work indicates some form of relationship between the two, it usually remains obscure, concealed behind statistics or implied rather than clearly articulated. Recently, prominent German scholars of antisemitism have addressed the problem in some detail. Highly critical of what has been variously called “objective Jewish question,” “realistic conflict theory” or “kernel-of-truth approach,” they deny the idea that antisemitism stems from competition, rivalry, or struggle between Jews and Gentiles. Instead, their work emphasizes the fantastic and projective nature of antisemitism, relying heavily on Freudian concepts or Freudian-inspired Critical Theory.

The research by these German historians, political scientists, and sociologists is a welcome reminder that evading the matter or blurring the extent to which it informs work on the subject should not be the way forward. In this vein, the essay sets out to examine recent criticisms of “realistic conflict theory”. At the same time, it serves as an intervention in the debate, seeking to demonstrate that the arguments for and against realistic conflict depend on specific psychological notions. Indeed, most scholars of antisemitism rely implicitly on psychology in their accounts of the phenomenon. The article also suggests that historians of antisemitism reconsider the value of non-Freudian psychological theories. While psychoanalysis has allowed us to appreciate the role of “regression” or “projection” among (especially fanatical) Jew-baiters, other psychological approaches offer equally helpful explanations of antisemtic conduct. Indeed, one such approach is especially promising when assessing the debate. “Relative deprivation theory,” it will be argued, can contribute to the field by bridging the epistemological gap between “realistic conflict” and “psychological fantasy,” demonstrating how “objective” change occasions conflicting feelings of entitlement and equally conflicting perceptions of social justice.

The piece is divided into four parts. The first returns to two of the most influential accounts of antisemitism as “realistic conflict.” Both Hannah Arendt and Eva Reichmann set the scene for subsequent discussion insofar as their depiction of realistic conflict has guided scholars ever since. Their work also depends implicitly and explicitly on psychological ideas. The second section turns to two contemporary examples of realistic conflict theory in the literature, an introductory survey that is circulated widely and a comprehensive inquiry that takes the theory to extremes. The third section details several sophisticated repudiations of realistic conflict theory. As will be shown, these objections are often indebted to psychological concepts that require scrutiny before they can be countenanced. The final section will argue that relative deprivation theory can augment other (psychological) explanations of antisemitism. Depending on the nature of the hostility involved, it provides a method by which to trace the psychological impact of social change on societies with anti-Jewish traditions. Relative deprivation is not meant to replace intellectual, religious, and political accounts of antisemitism. Rather, it points to the ways in which some of these traditions culminated in anti-Jewish action. The historiography on German antisemitism, arguably the most exhaustive scholarship devoted to the question, will serve as the background to our discussion.

**Realistic Conflict Theory I: Arendt and Reichmann**

Scholars of antisemitism who subscribe to realistic conflict theory rarely mention psychology at all. Usually, they try to uncover the rational motives (they would only seldom use the term) that engender antisemitic behavior, which social psychologists have associated with intergroup conflict. According to this reading of ethnic prejudice, clashes between groups arise because of incompatible goals or because of competition for scarce resources. Intergroup attitudes, far from originating in psychological defects or irrational passions, merely reflect group interests: where “these are mutually incompatible, where what one group gains is at the expense of another, the social psychological response is likely to be negative.”[[1]](#footnote-1) In regard to antisemitism, Jewish “economic and professional success at extraordinarily high levels (e.g., Spanish Jews under medieval Islamic rule, Polish Jews in the sixteenth century, the Jews of Europe after emancipation in the nineteenth century, and modern American Jews)” has been invoked to explain anti-Jewish hostility.[[2]](#footnote-2) Florette Cohen Abady, for example, contends that the disproportionate prosperity and professional achievements of Jews in the United States “can be a cause of suspicion and envy,” citing classic social psychological studies that posit a correlation between economic well-being, resentment, and inter-group aggression.[[3]](#footnote-3)

In order to revisit key components of realistic conflict theory as applied to antisemitism studies, there is no better place to start than with Arendt and Reichmann.[[4]](#footnote-4) Although Arendt figures prominently in discussions of the topic,[[5]](#footnote-5) the literature ignores the psychological dimensions of her interpretation of events. This interpretation includes two *apparently* contradictory claims. The first rejects scapegoat theories for upholding “the perfect innocence of the victim, an innocence which insinuates not only that no evil was done but that nothing at all was done which might possibly have a connection with the issue at stake.” [[6]](#footnote-6) Arendt contends that Jews, like any other group, exercised agency and intervened in the world, even though their integration was curtailed by prejudice and even though government policy restricted their access to power.[[7]](#footnote-7) As such, Jewish actions and Jewish functions within society were bound to influence gentile responses. Arendt establishes a link between Jews and the state before 1914. “Their special protection from the state,” she writes, “(whether in the old form of open privileges, or a special emancipation edict which no other group needed and which frequently had to be reinforced against the hostility of society) and their special services prevented their submersion in the class system as well as their own establishment as a class.”[[8]](#footnote-8) Enmity toward Jews in the three centuries leading up to the First World War amounted to a reaction against the state: whenever groups came into conflict with the state they resorted to antisemitism, as the Jewish minority exemplified the state like no other group.[[9]](#footnote-9) Arendt’s flawed history aside,[[10]](#footnote-10) her main point is simple enough: Jewish embodiment of the state entailed *some form of accountability*.

Arendt’s second reading of Jew-hatred maintains that murderous, totalitarian antisemitism emerged in the early twentieth century, when Jews “lost their public functions and their influence, and were left with nothing but their wealth.”[[11]](#footnote-11) In order to support this somewhat surprising statement, Arendt mentions, among other factors, Jewish demographic decline in Germany and the near-absence of Jews (*judenrein*, in her language) from the country’s leading banks in the early 1930s. The partial truth of this reference notwithstanding,[[12]](#footnote-12) her version of antisemitism in the interwar period contains a striking paradox: according to the German-Jewish philosopher, the depletion of Jewish power caused the radicalization of Jew-hatred. As long as the Jews had wielded real power (in the shape of economic clout within the upper echelons of the state), the public merely disliked the minority. Once this power vanished, however, dislike morphed into contempt. Most people, Arendt believed, had a “rational instinct that power has a certain function and is of some general use. Even exploitation and oppression still make society work and establish some kind of order.” Yet wealth that does “not exploit lacks even the relationship which exists between exploiter and exploited; aloofness without policy does not imply even the maximum concern of the oppressor for the oppressed.”[[13]](#footnote-13) Arendt does not elaborate on the fact that the ostensible preoccupation with wealth, even at a time when its utility for the state supposedly no longer mattered, also constituted active intervention inasmuch as it stirred a kind of “rational instinct” that could not stomach the display of affluence devoid of purpose.

Both explanations of antisemitism – the Jews as the embodiment of the state in earlier centuries and the Jews epitomizing pure wealth in the early twentieth century – leave a fundamental question unanswered: *how does associating the Jews with either generate antisemitism*? For all her criticism of scapegoat theory, Arendt offers a historically informed scapegoat theory herself – though based on a diametrically opposed logic. Where adherents of scapegoat theory commence with a social psychological premise that still requires “the usual historical research,”[[14]](#footnote-14) the philosopher commences with a historical plot whose serious nature only scapegoat theory can render intelligible. Although she avoids psychological terminology such as projection or displacement, Arendt’s train of thought resembles that of research into the “authoritarian personality.”[[15]](#footnote-15) For Theodor W. Adorno and his team, authoritarian aggression relates to hostility “that was originally aroused by and directed toward ingroup authorities” but can only be displaced onto outgroups. Unlike scapegoat theory proper, Adorno does not simply suggest that frustration, dissatisfaction, or guilt is alleviated and one’s positive self-image re-established by blaming individuals or groups for whatever grievance might exist. Rather, “the authoritarian *must*, out of an inner necessity, turn his aggression against outgroups” because he or she is “psychologically unable to attack ingroup authorities.”[[16]](#footnote-16) We can apply this hypothesis to both parts of Arendt’s analysis: despite representing the state, the Jews never actually incarnated the state, which non-Jewish elites in the bureaucracy, military, and aristocracy continued to embody. And these in-group elites could not be attacked. When the relationship between the Jews and the state was replaced with the relationship between the Jews and naked wealth, the Jews stood for financial capital, the bases of which could also not be challenged. In the words of Moishe Postone, modern antisemitism mutated into a “biologization of capitalism.”[[17]](#footnote-17)

Arendt’s discussion anticipates the realistic conflict theory encountered in later writings by notable historians of antisemitism. The same is true for Eva Reichmann’s *Hostages of Civilization*, which appeared one year before *The Origins of Totalitarianism* and is perhaps best known for differentiating between an “objective” (and therefore real) Jewish question and a “subjective” (and therefore illusory) Jewish question.[[18]](#footnote-18) For the sociologist Reichmann, group tensions characterized the hostility against Jews in much of the nineteenth century. Jewish emancipation (or the prospect thereof) in the early 1800s, although often short-lived in German-speaking lands and only fully granted in the wake of German unification in 1871, led to resentment for at least two reasons: first, Jews entered professions that had hitherto been off-limits; and second, conservatives associated Jews with progressivism and liberalism, both of which had been the mainstays of emancipation politics and both of which came to be seen as jeopardizing the national(ist) agenda.[[19]](#footnote-19) Whatever other reasons may have contributed to antisemitism during this period, Reichmann remarks, the integration of a culturally alien group reinforced anti-Jewish sentiments; whoever denied this nexus, she holds, would frustrate the very task of coming to grips with the causes of antisemitism. In fact, Reichmann compares this denial to apologetics, whereby the Jews were supposed to be absolved from any part in the genesis of anti-Jewish animosity.[[20]](#footnote-20) This “objective” Jewish question persisted after German unification, but with much less urgency than in previous decades. Formerly “a state within the state,” Jewish otherness was now confined to areas such as politics and journalism, where the Jewish propensity to espouse liberal views continued unabated.[[21]](#footnote-21) The “subjective” Jewish question, by contrast, gained ground at a time when Jewish visibility had all but vanished, the majority of acculturated Jews having turned into “highly respectable citizens” whose success was generally recognized.[[22]](#footnote-22)

To decipher the surprising appearance of a “subjective” Jewish question at a time of otherwise harmonious relations, Reichmann refers to psychoanalysis, arguing that Jewish acculturation did not eliminate lingering feelings of strangeness, mistrust, and non-assimilability. It was these feelings that Hitler exploited – and he did so thanks to human aggressiveness. This inborn drive waited to be “discharged” at any time. For men with an abnormal level of aggressiveness, the existence of a discrete group, however much assimilated to mainstream culture, called into question one’s own “way of life” and compelled particularly aggressive members of the in-group to act out their drive with abandon.[[23]](#footnote-23) What distinguished the old, “objective” Judeophobia of an earlier age from the new, “subjective” Jew-hatred under Hitler was not a different rationale or a novel content. Rather, Hitler’s modern “mass antisemitism” allowed men and women to get the better of inhibitions that their ancestors had acquired during the centuries-long civilization process. Subjective antisemitism, in short, could be likened to the satisfaction of primary drives. In the Third Reich, these drives took on a life of their own, defining a wholly illogical movement and leading to the worst sort of antisemitism imaginable.[[24]](#footnote-24)

Like Arendt, Reichmann differentiates between objective and subjective forms of hostility, where one is based on real conflict (involving Jews as agents) and the other lacks rational foundations (involving Jews as ciphers). On closer inspection, however, even subjective antisemitism cannot do without a certain concrete substratum: in Arendt’s case it is the “Jewish” penchant for money; in Reichmann’s a deep-seated suspicion deriving from earlier “traumatic” contact between “Germans” and “Jews.” Neither Arendt’s nor Reichmann’s categorizations are plausible, presupposing that political and economic factors trump psychological ones; that aggression based on real conflict is objective while aggression based on fantasy is subjective; that “irrationality” was irrelevant in an earlier phase (irrespective of disturbances, ritual murder accusations, and pogroms) and only emerged with full force in the early twentieth century; and that the psyche, in light of its kinship with the irrational, is something to be spurned. Both thinkers repudiate scapegoat theory and apologetics respectively in an effort to address the substantive reasons for the rise of modern antisemitism. Yet both also fall back on the psychological dimension of antisemitism by claiming that the most recent iterations of Jew-hatred (totalitarian, mass, or emotional antisemitism) could do without real conflict. Whereas Arendt’s dependence on psychological theory goes unmentioned in her narrative of events, Reichmann’s account does not clarify why an “objective” Jewish question elicits much less emotional energy than a “subjective” Jewish question that rests on “lingering feelings” as opposed to real conflicts of interest.

**Realistic Conflict Theory II: Beller and Lindemann**

Despite occasional references to psychology or psychological concepts in the historical literature on anti-Jewish hostility, many of the most high-profile works on antisemitism in general and German antisemitism in particular *assume* psychological processes to be at work in real conflict between Gentiles and Jews. [[25]](#footnote-25) Again, let me briefly outline two cases that not only typify realistic conflict theory among historians, but openly advocate this approach as a means to explain antisemitism in modern times. The first is Steven Beller’s history of antisemitism, a standard work published in OUP’s highly successful and widely disseminated *Very Short Introductions* series. The second is Albert Lindemann’s controversial *Esau’s Tears,* perhaps the best-known work on antisemitism to support realistic conflict theory. In their distinctive ways, both books are reminiscent of Arendt and Reichmann’s attempt to pit “psychological” against “matter-of-fact” reasons for anti-Jewish hostility.

Beller censures historians for misconstruing the causes of Jew-hatred by focusing on “irrational, delusional thinking” that made people believe Jews were a force of evil. He discriminates between psychology as a general component of antisemitism and history as a contextual component without which the phenomenon could not be grasped.[[26]](#footnote-26) He also complains that the historiography has not only “virtually excluded the Jewish aspect from consideration,” but also, in portraying antisemitism as a disease, absolved Jew-baiters from responsibility. Removing the Jews from the equation meant denying them “any *positive* responsibility in Western history, thus ironically perpetuating one of the original sources of antisemitic prejudice, the idea that Jews were ‘outside of history.’” Favoring psychological accounts over social historical ones meant neglecting “the instrumental rationality often implicated in antisemitism.”[[27]](#footnote-27)

Beller’s “realist” approach is evident throughout his sweeping introduction to the subject. Three arguments stand out: because psychology could not be “contextualized,” specialists and laypeople alike needed to consider the “hard facts” of social life. Including the Jews in the picture was therefore crucial both in terms of the overall argument – antisemitism as the (side) effect of Jewish social and cultural existence – and in terms of Jewish historiography – Jews as the subjects rather than the objects of their own history. Privileging the rationality of antisemitism, finally, ensured that rabble rousers, thieves, and murderers be taken seriously rather than reduced to irrational non-entities.

Like many scholars in the field, Lindemann is keen to distance himself from a “substantialism” that hypothesizes an “eternal” antisemitism or an antisemitism that is unfailingly the same, no matter what its cause and no matter what its complexion.[[28]](#footnote-28) Yet contrary to Beller, Lindemann is much less circumspect in delineating his version of an “objective” Jewish question. He seeks, first, to discredit a type of Jewish “exceptionalism” that “implies the Jews, unlike other human beings, cannot provoke legitimate irritation or that anyone expressing irritation about Jews, or criticism of them as a group, inexorably enters the moral realm of the Nazis.” Most groups, Lindemann insists, have encountered hatred for “fantastic and ‘real’ reasons,” but thanks to a misguided historiographical praxis the delirious and projective expressions of antisemitism have received unequal attention.[[29]](#footnote-29) Second, he wishes to discredit the notion of the Jews’ helplessness and passivity and lack of responsibility for their behavior, proposing instead that “their actions and decisions in some substantial sense (have) been their own.”[[30]](#footnote-30) Where Beller is concerned with Jewish historiography (avoiding the lachrymose conception of Jewish history, with its exaggerated emphasis on Jewish passivity and victimhood, and thus bringing into relief Jewish agency),[[31]](#footnote-31) Lindemann is much more concerned with Jewish responsibility (and thus avoiding the belief in Jewish innocence). Where Beller accentuates the “rise of the Jews” from an ostracized group to a thriving and highly acculturated community, Lindemann goes so far as to speak of Jews as “culture destroyers,” “restlessly innovative and often destructively dissatisfied” with a past that had failed them.[[32]](#footnote-32)

The similarities and dissimilarities between Beller and Lindemann are instructive. Both champion the idea that a close reading of antisemitism reveals the relationship between *who* the Jews were or *how* they behaved and Gentile hostility toward the minority. Beller is much more tentative in this respect, admitting that the relationship cannot be observed all the time and that other factors, among them irrational fantasies, played a part too. Neither differentiates strongly between the “who” and the “how,” offering narratives in which Jewish “proclivities” (social mobility, urbanization, intellectualism) figure alongside Jewish “activities” (in the free professions, in the business world, in the realm of politics). This coexistence of “who” and “how” not only implies realistic conflict theory, it also points to a psychological approach found in the work of all exponents of realistic conflict theory: social inference.

Social inference is about the way in which we “sample and combine information to form impressions and make judgments.” Two possible modes are available. Either we rely “automatically on general schemas or stereotypes in a top-down deductive fashion”; or we can choose deliberately to “rely on specific instances in a bottom-up inductive fashion.”[[33]](#footnote-33) Applied to the concrete case of the Jews, it appears that scholars working in the tradition of realistic conflict theory *must* assume that “specific instances” of Jewish behavior incite antisemitism. Several occurrences of this behavior, then, suffice to conclude *reasonably* that the respective “Jewish” conduct is inappropriate and the corresponding antisemitic response justified.

At least two problems arise in this connection. First, scholars usually do not elucidate why certain aspects of Jewish existence or behavior figure as the necessary cause of realistic conflict, whereas other factors are ignored. Beller, for example, mentions Jewish poverty in late nineteenth-century Vienna, but argues that “a coterie of extremely wealthy Jewish banking, commercial, and industrial ‘dynasties’” provoked strong antisemitism in the city.[[34]](#footnote-34) Second, most scholars concede that antisemitic tropes belong to a (Western, Christian, European, German) cultural “arsenal,” “repository,” or “memory trail,”[[35]](#footnote-35) the content of which can be accessed at any time. If this is indeed the case (and there is no reason to doubt the long tradition of prejudice and persecution owing primarily to Greek and Christian Judeophobia), how is it possible to distinguish between the automatic, deductive associations that ascribe predilections or attributes to Jews and the “rational,” inductive logic that observes patterns of behavior and resolves to treat the Jews accordingly? Is it at all conceivable to make such a distinction? As is true for the concurrence of the “who” and the “how,” the concurrence of antisemitism based on “biased” prior expectations and antisemitism based on “dispassionate” perceptions is nowhere clarified. David Nirenberg has rightly argued that accounts of violence “that dwell exclusively in the history of stereotypes, that overemphasize similarities in vocabularies of hatred” fail to explain “the ability of such accusations to provoke violence.”[[36]](#footnote-36) Conversely, accounts that focus exclusively on conflict or competition fail to explain the move from tension to social inference to violence.

**The Critique of Realistic Conflict Theory**

If prominent proponents of realistic conflict theory spurn psychology, its critics usually assume psychological phenomena to be at work in instances of anti-Jewish behavior. Rarely, however, do they spell out how a psychological perspective could underpin efforts to question realistic conflict theory or to make sense of hostility that neither involves conflict nor arises from irrational frenzy. For the sake of brevity, only the most incisive criticisms will be discussed: one based on *constructivism*, one based on *empiricism*, and one based on *Critical Theory*. As mentioned above, the focus will be on German scholarship, which has produced the most important recent work on the topic.

For two prominent sociologists of antisemitism, *constructivism* is the only adequate response to realistic conflict theory. Contrary to the latter, constructivist theories reject as “irrelevant” the question as to “who the Jews really are” in trying to understand antisemitic stereotypes. Instead, they concentrate on both the psychological conflicts located in the antisemites themselves and on the “the social processes by which the semantics of antisemitism are formed” within certain groups.[[37]](#footnote-37) Although some of the language appears to suggest that antisemitism is created exclusively in the minds of Jew-baiters, sociologically inspired constructivists are forced to determine how and why antisemites develop their “self-image and enemy stereotype.” [[38]](#footnote-38)

The difficulty here is to ensure that all references to Gentile-Jewish interaction are avoided. One way to accomplish this feat is to invoke the “symbolic cultural order” (comprised of language, tradition, and customs) that exists outside the individual.[[39]](#footnote-39) This order is then attributed to the wider social conditions in a given society.[[40]](#footnote-40) The transformations associated with modernity are usually seen as providing the background to a symbolic cultural order that begets a “Jewish question.” This question, constructivists caution, crops up independently of Jewish existence. All the statistics known about the minority become germane only *after* a Jewish question has been posed; otherwise, such statistics would remain irrelevant. Similarly, every prejudice against the Jews requires the semantic construction of “us versus the Jews.” The logic behind this constructivist critique of the kernel-of-truth theory runs something like this: first we have the contrariety, then the question, and finally the Jewish culprit.[[41]](#footnote-41)

Although constructivists refer to modernity’s impact on the “Jewish question,” the semantics (or “contrariety”) that elicit antisemitism cannot be attributed to modernity itself: they existed before the onset of the modern period and consequently require certain pretexts for antisemitism to materialize, be it “modernity,” the Counter Reformation, or the Black Death. Apart from the problem of infinite regress – at what point in the past was real conflict implicated in producing a specific semantic order? – , constructivists face the same questions as social and political historians of antisemitism: why and how does the language of “us versus them” lead to antisemitic behavior? Like other interpretations of Jew-hatred, the constructivists’ “symbolic cultural order” demands psychological explanations of one type (social inference)[[42]](#footnote-42) or another (frustration-aggression analysis) to make anti-Jewish hostility comprehensible.

Leading historians of German antisemitism have found fault with realistic conflict theory’s lack of *empirical* nuance. Olaf Blaschke raises several points in relation to the “rise of the Jews.” Why, he wonders, did antisemitism increase as Jewish acculturation increased? Would it not be consistent with realistic conflict theory to expect less strife, discord, and prejudice once the observable differences between Jews and non-Jews disappeared?[[43]](#footnote-43) Blaschke also casts doubt on a central tenet of realistic conflict theory, namely that economic competition, political antagonism, and a different philosophy of life could induce group tensions between Jews and Gentiles. For such a connection to be viable – indeed, for scholars to be able to speak of “Gentiles” and “Jews” in the first place –, researchers would have to ascertain the relative unity of either group, a difficult if not hopeless task in the case of post-emancipation Jews, for whom their German and Jewish “identities” were equally constitutive.[[44]](#footnote-44)

Finally, Blaschke also brings up the incongruence between realistic conflict theory and the evidence on the ground. For example, successful antisemitic movements emerged in both Berlin and Vienna in the 1890s, which had populations with a high proportion of Jews (about five percent). Frankfurt am Main, by contrast, which had the highest proportion of Jews of all German cities (some 11 percent in 1871 and over six percent in 1910), never became an antisemitic stronghold. Why was Judeophobia “more pronounced in regions, cities or villages where there were very few or no Jews?”, he asks.[[45]](#footnote-45) In a similar vein, Christhard Hoffman doubts whether realistic conflict theory can untangle the complexities of the subject matter. If the “reality” of the Jews as a group was so decisive, he notes, “why was the ‘rise of the Jews’ already criticized at the beginning of the nineteenth century, during the debates over Jewish emancipation, when the term did not yet correspond to anyspecific social reality? And whydid antisemitism actually increase in Weimar Germany while Jews were declining in numbers, influence, and economic power?”[[46]](#footnote-46)

These commentaries on realistic conflict theory’s inability to come to terms with empirical reality stop short of engaging with the psychological premises underlying the theory. As much as it important to identify the factual contradictions typifying narratives of realistic conflict, it is equally important that we explain this kind of antisemitism *in the absence of realistic conflict*. Why did hostility toward the Jews spread as acculturation deepened? Here psychological theories such as social identity and the narcissism of minor differences come to mind, both of which stress that collective particularity is preserved through difference, and that difference is often established, reinforced, and defended against what is closest?[[47]](#footnote-47) Why do so many people mistake individual Jewish actions for collective Jewish conduct? Here social inference, discussed above, might allow us to come to grips with such generalizations. Why did anti-Jewish sentiments mark many of the debates surrounding Jewish emancipation well before any concrete conflict between Jews and non-Jews could unfold? Here relative deprivation theory (to which we will turn shortly) could serve as an explanation for much anti-Jewish behavior at a time when equal rights for the minority were under serious discussion.

*Critical Theory* (and, by extension, Freudian psychoanalysis) informs a final critique of the “kernel-of-truth approach.”[[48]](#footnote-48) Individual antisemitic behavior, Lars Fischer writes, occasionally coincides “with individual aspects of Jewish reality.” Even so, this correspondence can be either coincidental or causal in nature. Realistic conflict theory ignores this difference, relying on a dialectic which first “tries to identify the extent to which some of the antisemites’ claims and contentions coincide with some aspects of some Jews’ reality” and then “tries to identify how the actual behaviour of some Jews makes ‘the Jews’ a foil for the projection of additional, entirely unfounded, anti-Jewish notions.” The sequence is crucial. “What sets the ball in motion” for those who blame the minority is Jewish agency, not antisemitic projections.[[49]](#footnote-49)

Fischer denies that Jewish agency per se causes Judeophobia. Antisemites, after all, do not care about the truth-value of their claims. Even if an element of truth can be detected in anti-Jewish discourse – a disproportionate number of Jews in certain sectors of the economy, for example –, realistic conflict theory fails to elaborate on the distortions of the truth. Furthermore, it fails to deal with the distortions that have no basis in reality whatever, such as ritual murder or well poisoning accusations.[[50]](#footnote-50) All of these reservations amount to a more general critique of the psychological naïveté inherent in realistic conflict interpretations of antisemitism. Fischer also alludes to an issue first broached by constructivists: facts become relevant only when someone accords meaning to them. If antisemites collect “evidence” to substantiate the validity of their assertions, they are doing so for a reason. Recording data or evaluating statistics “begs the question why one should bother” to be involved in any of these exercises in the first place. They make sense, after all, only if “one already suspects an iniquity.” The data, in short, do not demonstrate the existence of a “Jewish question,” “they presuppose it.”[[51]](#footnote-51) From the point of view of Critical Theory, antisemites disregard the fact that antisemitism follows from projection rather than actual Jewish characteristics.

Unlike many other critics of realistic conflict theory, Fischer is sensitive to the psychological dimensions implicit in research on Judeophobia.[[52]](#footnote-52) Adding “projection” to the list of explanations does indeed provide valuable insight into the phenomenon, particularly in extreme cases of antisemitic ideology. Still, as much as antisemitism is about fantasies, fabrications, and falsehoods, it remains incumbent upon scholars to understand why certain individuals, groups, and nations resorted to projections; how it was possible for entire peoples to be captivated by projections; and why particular projections emerged, disappeared, and recurred when they did. Social psychological theories may prove helpful in tracing these developments in greater detail.

**Relative Deprivation**

As noted in the introduction, relative deprivation theory might be one way of bridging the epistemological gap between “realistic conflict” and “psychological fantasy” that we have encountered above. In the words of the best-known exponent of relative deprivation, it “postulates a subjective state that shapes emotions, cognitions, and behavior. It links the individual with the interpersonal and intergroup levels of analysis. It melds easily with other social psychological processes to provide more integrative theory – a prime disciplinary need.”[[53]](#footnote-53) What makes relative deprivation so attractive to researchers is its emphasis on psychological comparison rather than correspondence to the truth: “social judgments are not shaped by absolute standards but also by the standards set by social comparisons,” writes Thomas Pettigrew.[[54]](#footnote-54) Multiple studies on relative deprivation have shown that objectively disadvantaged persons often compare themselves to others in a similar or worse situation, while the objectively advantaged compare themselves to those who are even better off. The theory rests on perceptions of justice, usually distributive justice. The perceived status of other individuals or groups “generates expectations for how well we think” we should be doing.”[[55]](#footnote-55) When a stable expectation is suddenly disappointed, relative deprivation can ensue; the same can happen when an expectation is suddenly heightened.[[56]](#footnote-56)

Many of these studies refer to the distinction, first advanced by Walter Runciman, between egotistic (individual) and fraternal (group) relative deprivation.[[57]](#footnote-57) Individuals, that is, may be perfectly happy with their personal situation, but still feel that their group as a whole is being disadvantaged – or the other way around.[[58]](#footnote-58) Runciman also highlights the non-judgmental quality of relative deprivation theory, which retained the “merit of being value-neutral as between a feeling of envy and a perception of injustice.” For in determining “the empirical relation between inequality and grievance, it is important to use the term which in no way begs the distinction between ‘legitimate’ and ‘illegitimate’ grievances.”[[59]](#footnote-59) In addition, it is the “contextual and flexible nature of social comparisons” that demonstrates how perceptions of injustice are not the property of individuals or groups but “rather the property of particular relationships.”[[60]](#footnote-60)

The literature on relative deprivation has often featured so-called upward relative deprivation.[[61]](#footnote-61) Individuals and groups compare themselves to those who are better off, but they only do so if they feel entitled to equal treatment. What is more, they can only feel entitled if they are comparing themselves to a reference group. The medieval peasant, for instance, did not examine his lot in contrast to princes and kings, and the fast-food employee usually does not compare herself to the CEO of a Fortune 500 company. That said, the number of reference groups may expand and concomitant feelings of “injustice” may spread as universalistic norms and rapid social change transform the world.[[62]](#footnote-62)

Somewhat less attention has been paid to downward relative deprivation, possibly because relative deprivation has been associated with resentment and resentment has been linked to covetousness. Even so, Runciman’s sociological approach sparked growing interest among social psychologists in this type of relative deprivation, notably in connection with prejudice and race relations. In a landmark study of 1972, Reeve Vanneman and Thomas Pettigrew identified white Americans’ reactions to African American advances as a form of relative deprivation. In particular, white affluent workers felt relatively deprived in reference to both white white-collar workers and (potentially) upwardly mobile blacks. In the latter case, whites responded negatively to African-American mayoralty candidates as well as to government programmes intended to assist the black population.[[63]](#footnote-63) The actual prosperity of white workers did not determine their contrary emotions: they were, after all, *affluent* workers and undoubtedly *privileged* in relation to the urban black population. Their grudge was prompted by the expectation that the status quo (regarding race relations in the United States) would be threatened and their relative standing in society questioned.

What might make relative deprivation appealing to historians of antisemitism? Most importantly, it enables us to move beyond the dichotomy of “objective” versus “subjective” antisemitism or “kernel of truth” versus “projection,” reframing the issue from one about conflicts over resources or theological truths to one about perceptions of social and cultural capital. Accordingly, we can acknowledge the psychological mechanisms at work without at the same time ignoring the realities on the ground. In the case of Germany (which scholars of the debate have focused on disproportionately), we can trace developments that transformed the country from a feudal order into a market-driven economy. [[64]](#footnote-64) The realities included the fact that a much-maligned minority was permitted to enter mainstream society and that members of this minority succeeded in many walks of life; the fact that this success was especially impressive in law, journalism, and medicine; and the fact that a high number of Jews, for all sorts of reasons, joined leftist parties. Since the Jewish minority has always figured as a negative reference group for Christians (this is what constructivists call the semantics of antisemitism, the contrariety without which the Jews could not serve as a source of interest or anxiety or contempt), relative deprivation is one means of probing perceptions of justice within Gentile society. As status differences between Jews and non-Jews diminished, some non-Jews perceived this relative loss of stature as intolerable.

There are other advantages too: we need not, again and again, point out (correctly) that antisemitism flourishes in places with negligible Jewish “influence,” and that it is weak or relatively unimportant in places with large or vibrant Jewish communities. As relative deprivation is not about real deprivation but about social comparisons, “antisemitism without Jews” should not be as surprising as it is sometimes made out to be.[[65]](#footnote-65) We can also refrain from psychologizing about “the lack of self-confidence” among antisemites, as if feelings of relative deprivation were confined to weak-willed, fainthearted, and predatory people.[[66]](#footnote-66) When expectations deriving from a sense of entitlement – the Jews as ghettoized pariahs in Christian society, middle-class Christians as the exemplars of true faith – are disappointed, resentment can arise and fester.

The literature on German antisemitism contains ample evidence of the existence of relative deprivation. Indeed, the social and political historians who refer to the transformation of German Jewry in modern times (and whom the critics of realistic conflict theory have rebuked) allude to relative deprivation in their studies. For example, many Gentiles were “tempted” to interpret Jewish emancipation not as bestowing equal rights to an oppressed group but as the oppressed group assuming power over the majority (*Machtergreifung*).[[67]](#footnote-67) Many conservative Germans, among them members of the clergy, officer corps, and higher civil service, rejected Jewish emancipation as a reversal of the established order and, more specifically, as the end to corporate society.[[68]](#footnote-68) And many non-Jewish Europeans gained the “impression” of inordinate Jewish success: “a once despised and legally set-apart group seemed to be prospering more than others.”[[69]](#footnote-69) Even one of the vocal critics of realistic conflict theory conjures up relative deprivation as he attempts to refute the notion that antisemitism could be based on “objective” grounds. Olaf Blascke writes that Georg Heim, leader of the Bavarian Center Party, “complained that ‘we Catholics are becoming increasingly worse off. The judges always seem to be Jewish and their numbers are increasingly alarmingly. Jewry always counts on the destruction of everything.’ ‘If this trend continues, then all judges could be Jews in six years’ time, and then we Catholics can pack our bags, adieu, Catholicism!’ Heim has outrageously dramatized the real figures, especially since there should have actually been more Jewish judges when we take the number of Jewish law students into account.”[[70]](#footnote-70)

The social psychological dynamic that is relative deprivation is also apparent in other work. The 1819 Hep-Hep riots in Würzburg, for example, occurred in a city with no tradition of violence and with no experience of severe economic dislocation following the lifting of the continental blockade. The main targets of the violence, whether in Würzburg or elsewhere, were not Jewish “competitors”, but rather the most “conspicuous local symbols of Jewish *aspirations* for emancipation.”[[71]](#footnote-71) Well-known academics at the time, including the philosopher Jakob Friedrich Fries, the historian Friedrich Rühs, and the theologian Ludolf Holst, warned that the public would engage in mass violence should the Jews be granted (more) rights.[[72]](#footnote-72) In Hamburg, artisans and merchants organized in local guilds anticipated competition from Jewish craftsmen and agitated against calls for greater equality.[[73]](#footnote-73) Sensing widespread resistance to such equality, politicians in Danzig rejected the emancipation project as a threat to the established order.[[74]](#footnote-74) Opposition to Jewish emancipation in southwest Germany in the early 1930s and Bavaria in 1848 owed much to fears that Jews would gain power and prestige (in the shape of equal voting rights, political offices, bourgeois manners, and economic prosperity). Yet these fears neither rested on existing rivalries between Jews and Gentiles nor on any financial difficulties the critics of emancipation experienced.[[75]](#footnote-75) In the late nineteenth century, “antisemitism did not necessarily or even predominantly” emanate from the declining strata, as the rabid Jew-baiting by middle-class members of the Pan-German League, the Navy League and the more extreme student fraternities illustrates.[[76]](#footnote-76) In contradistinction to the more tradition-bound opponents of a secular liberal society, the second generation of the National Liberal bourgeoisie vented its anger not because of any threat to the status quo, but rather out of frustration that heightened expectations of national grandeur, including visions of unity, homogeneity, and similitude, were being sabotaged by Jewish particularity.[[77]](#footnote-77)

**Conclusion**

Psychological reasoning informs the work of all scholarship in the field of antitisemitism studies. Sometimes the reasoning is implicit, as is in the case of realistic conflict approaches, from Arendt’s rejection of scapegoat theory to historical accounts based on social inference. Sometimes the reasoning is explicit, as in recent criticisms of kernel-of-truth interpretations, such as Adorno-inspired arguments that projection transmutes difference into estrangement first and malevolence second. Although realistic conflict theory’s conclusions – that Jews in high offices aroused indignation, that the mere prospect of Jewish success exasperated many Gentiles, that modernization “wrought a zero sum process that enhanced Jewish upward mobility at the cost of downward mobility for non-Jews”[[78]](#footnote-78) – necessarily involves psychological premises, most social and political historians fail to elaborate what kind of mental mechanisms were implicated in the processes they describe. Indeed, social inference, the main mechanism that underwrites most of their arguments, is nowhere discussed. Since it is crucial to understand the relative significance of automatic, deductive associations (antisemitism based on age-old stereotypes) that ascribe predilections or attributes to Jews before behavior is even encountered and the relative significance of “rational,” inductive operations that observe patterns of behavior as they arise, this oversight is regrettable. Since realistic conflict theory relies so heavily on social inference, it is impossible to address “real conflict” without invoking psychological processes at the same time.

Alongside other social psychological theories, including social identity and cognitive dissonance, relative deprivation may prove useful in studying antisemitism for a number of reasons.[[79]](#footnote-79) First, because it concedes that historical change on the ground is a key component of Judeophobia, it allows us to take these developments seriously, not least by examining developments in sufficient detail on the basis of documentary evidence. Second, because it does not rely on a correspondence theory of truth, it allows us to take psychological processes equally seriously, including feelings of entitlement, social comparisons, perceptions of social justice, or heightened expectations. In this respect, the theory dovetails with the “power-threat” model employed by Jeffrey Kopstein and Jason Wittenberg, who have argued that majorities react violently to the prospect that minorities could challenge the status quo.[[80]](#footnote-80) And third, because relative deprivation affects large numbers of people and is not principally about aberrant behavior, it allows us to employ certain terms sparingly. As much as delusional, projective, or chimerical thinking affects individuals and groups alike, often less extreme psychological mechanisms are at work among those who seek to exclude and sometimes banish the Jews from society.

1. Rupert Brown, *Prejudice. Its Social Psychology* (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 144. See also Gary Bornstein, “Intergroup Conflict: Individual, Group, and Collective Interests”, in: *Personality and Social Psychology Review* 7 (2003): 129-145; Rupert Brown, *Group Processes. Dynamics within and between Groups* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996), 192-220; Lee Ross and Richard E. Nisbett, *The Person and the Situation. Perspectives of Social Psychology* (London: Pinter & Martin, 2011), 38-40; Michael A. Hogg and Graham M. Vaughan, *Social Psychology* (Harlow: Pearson, 2008), 398-404. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Florette Cohen Abady, “The Psychology of Modern Antisemitism: Theory, Research, and Methodology”, in: Armin Lange, Kerstin Mayerhofer, Dina Porat, and Lawrence H. Schiffman (eds.) *An End to Antisemitism!* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter 2019), 271-296, here 280. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Ibid. One study is Carl Iver Hovland and Robert R. Sears, “Minor Studies in Aggression: VI. Correlation of Lynchings with Economic Indices,” Journal of Psychology 9 (1940): 301–10, which established a connection between the price of cotton and the number of lynchings of blacks in the South from 1882 to 1930. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. For earlier discussions of both thinkers, albeit without a focus on the psychological background to their accounts, see Albert Lichtblau, *Antisemitismus als soziale Spannung in Berlin und Wien 1867-1914* (Berlin: Metropol, 1994), pp. 9-10, and Herbert A. Strauss and Norbert Kampe, “Einleitung,” in: idem. (eds.), *Antisemitismus. Von der Judenfeindschaft zum Holocaust* (Frankfurt am Main and New York: Campus, 1988), 9-28, here 17-18. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. For a more recent summary of Arendt’s problematic assumptions regarding the Jews, see Peter Staudenmaier, “Hannah Arendt’s analysis of antisemitism in *The Origins of Totalitarianism*: A critical appraisal,” in: *Patterns of Prejudice* 46 (2012): 154-179. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (New York: Harvest, 1979), 5. For more general critiques of scapegoat theory, see Wolfgang Frindte, *Inszenierter Antisemitismus. Eine Streitschrift* (Wiesbaden: VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften, 2006), 160; Gavin I. Langmuir, *Toward a Definition of Antisemitisem* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1990), 325; Claudia Globish, *Radikaler Antisemitismus. Inklusions- und Exklusionssemantiken von links und rechts in Deutschland* (Wiesbaden: Springer VS, 2013), 53-54; and William I. Brustein, *Roots of Hate. Anti-Semitism in Europe before the Holocaust* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 39. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Julia Schulze Wessel and Lars Rensmann, “The Paralysis of Judgment. Arendt and Adorno on Antisemitism and the Modern Condition,” in: Lars Rensmann and Samir Gandesha (eds)., *Arendt and Adorno. Political and Philosophical Investigations* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2012), 197-225, here 206. See also Julia Schulze Wessel, *Ideologie und Sachlichkeit. Hannah Arendts politische Theorie des Antisemitimus* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2006), 59. Richard J. Bernstein holds that Arendt’s emphasis on Jewish agency was also an implicit rejection of the alleged Jewish pre-occupation with the economic sphere: little or no significant political experience and “a failure to accept their share of responsibility” left “European Jewry so unprepared and defenseless” in the face of political antisemitism. Richard J. Bernstein, *Hannah Arendt and the Jewish Question* (Cambridge: Polity, 1996), 56. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Arendt, *Origins*, 13. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Ibid., 25. See also p. 39. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Her assertion that court Jews first and Jewish bankers second determined the development of the nation-state cannot be sustained, for example, nor can her later claim that antisemitism was above all tied to imperialism rather than nationalism. See Jonathan Judaken, “Blindness and Insight. The Conceptual Jew in Adorno and Arendt’s Post-Holocaust Reflections on the Antisemitic Question”, in: Rensmann and Gandesha, *Arendt and Adorno*, 173-196, here 179-185. On the nexus between antisemitism and nationalism, see Klaus Holz, *Nationaler Antisemitismus. Wissenssoziologie einer Weltanschauung* (Hamburg: Hamburger Edition, 2001). For further critiques of Arendt’s account, see Seyla Behhabib, *The Reluctant Modernism of Hannah Arendt* (London: Sage, 1996), 68, as well as David Biale,  *Power and Powerlessness in Jewish History: The Jewish Tradition and the Myth of Passivity* (New York: Schocken Books, 1986); Eli Lederhendler, *The Road to Modern Jewish Politics: Political Tradition and Political Reconstruction in the Jewish Community of Tsarist Russia* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press 1989); Pierre Vidal-Naquet, *The Jews: History, Memory, and the Present*, ed. and trans. from the French by David Ames Curtis (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996); and David Vital, A People Apart: The Jews in Europe 1789 1939 (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1999). [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Arendt, *Origins*, 5. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Arendt was right about Jewish demographic decline in Germany, where the absolute number of Jews as well as their proportion of the population decreased in the first decades of the twentieth century, as the censuses of 1925 (564,379 or 0,9%) and 1933 (499,682 or 0,8%) illustrate well. See Esra Bennathan, “Die demographische und wirtschaftliche Struktur der Juden,” in: Werner Mosse (ed.), *Entscheidungsjahr 1932. Zur Judenfrage in der Endphase der Weimarer Republik* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1965), 87-131, 87-88. But she was wrong about Jewish bankers: for example, in January 1933 Oscar Wassermann was chairman of the executive board of the Deutsche Bank, Siegmund Bodenheimer member of the executive board of the Dresdner Bank, Max Steinthal member of the supervisory board of the Deutsche Bank. For Jewish bankers in the Kaiserreich, see Morten Reitmeyer, “Zwischen Abgrenzung und Ausgrenzung: Jüdische Großbankiers und der Antisemitismus im deutschen Kaiserreich,” in: Andreas Gotzmann, Rainer Liedtke and Till van Rahden (eds.), *Juden, Bürger, Deutsche* Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2001, 147-170. On the continued importance of private Jewish banks in the Weimar Republic, especially regarding the finance of industry, see Keith Ulrich, “Industriefinanzierung in Deutschland. Die Bedeutung jüdischer Privatbankhäuser in der Weimarer Republik,” in: Wolfgang Benz, Arnold Paucker, and Peter Pulzer (eds.), *Jüdisches Leben in der Weimarer Republik/ Jews in the Weimar Republic* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1996), 65-86. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Arendt, *Origins*, 5. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. Adorno is indebted to frustration-aggression theory. See Elisabeth Young-Bruehl, *The Anatomy of Prejudices* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard, 1996), 55; Gavin I. Langmuir, *Toward a Definition of Antisemitisem* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, University of California Press, 1990), 322. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. T. W. Adorno, Else Frenkel-Brunswik, Daniel J. Levenson, R. Nevitt Sanford, “The Measurement of Implicit Antidemocratic Trends,” in: idem., *The Authoritarian Personality* (New York: Norton Library, 1969), 222-279, here 233. For Frankfurt School interpretations of antisemitism, see Werner Bergmann, in: “Starker Auftritt – schwach im Abgang. Antisemitismusforschung in den Sozialwissenschaften,” in: Werner Bergmann and Mona Körte (eds.), *Antisemitismusforschung in den Wissenschaften* (Berlin: Metropol, 2004), 219-239; Peter E. Gordon, “The Authoritarian Personality Revisited. Reading Adorno in the Age of Trump,” in: Wendy Brown, Peter E. Gordon, and Max Pensky, *Authoritarianism. Three Inquiries in Critical Theory* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2018), 45-84; Markus Brunner, “Vom Ressentiment zum Massenwahn. Eine Einführung in die Sozialpsychologie des Antisemitismus und die Grenzen psychoanalytischer Erkenntnis,” in: Charlotte Busch, Martin Gehrlein, and Tom David Uhlig (eds.), *Schiefheilungen. Zeitgenössische Betrachtungen zum Antisemitismus* (Wiesbaden: Springer Fachmedien, 2016), 13-35; Lars Rensmann, *Kritische Theorie über den Antisemitismus. Studien zu Struktur, Erklärungspotential und Aktualität* (Berlin and Hamburg: Argument Verlag, 1998); Eva Maria Ziege, *Antisemitismus und Gesellschaftstheorie. Die Frankfurter Schule im amerikanischen Exil* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2009); Theodor W. Adorno*, Bemerkungen zu ‚The Authoritarian Personality’ und weitere Texte*, edited by Eva Maria Ziege (Berlin: Suhrkamp, 2019). [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. Moishe Postone, “Anti-Semitism and National Socialism. Notes on the German Reaction to ‘Holocaust,’ ” in: *New German Critique* 19 (1980), pp. 97-115, here p. 112. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. Eva G. Reichmann, *Hostages of Civilisation. A Study of the Social Causes of Antisemitism* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1950). The following discussion will rely on the German version of the text: *Die Flucht in den Hass. Die Ursachen der deutschen Judenkatastrophe* (Frankfurt am Main: Europäische Verlagsanstalt, 1956). For a brief discussion of Reichmann’s approach, see Albert Lichtblau, *Antisemitismus als soziale Spannung in Berlin und Wien 1867-1914* (Berlin: Metropol, 1994), 9-10, and Strauss and Kampe, “Einleitung,” 17-18. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. Reichmann, *Flucht*, 17, 21, 147. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. Ibid., 28. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. Ibid., 68. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. Ibid., 197. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. Ibid., 38-9. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. Ibid., 128-129, 229. Reichmann’s argument relies especially on Freud’s *Civilization and its Discontents.* [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. Robert S. Wistrich, *Antisemitism. The Longest Hatred* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1991), xxv, 18, 25, 33; David Nirenberg, *Anti-Judaism. The Western Tradition* (New York and London: W.W. Norton & Company, 2013), 468; Michael Wildt, *Volksgemeinschaft als Selbstermächtigung. Gewalt gegen Juden in der deutschen Provinz 1919-1939* (Hamburg: Hamburger Edition, 2007), 83, 91-2, 167, 373; Götz Aly, *Warum die Deutschen? Warum die Juden? Gleichheit, Neid und Rassenhass* (Frankfurt am Main: S. Fischer, 2011), 20, 65, 215; Alon Confino, *A World Without the Jews. The Nazi Imagination from Persecution to Genocide* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2014), 80; Ulrich Wyrwa, *Gesellschaftliche Konfliktfelder und die Entstehung des Antisemitismus. Das Deutsche Kaiserreich und das Liberale Italien im Vergleich* (Berlin: Metropol, 2015), 15-16, 42; Thomas Kühne, *Belonging and Genocide*. *Hitler’s Community, 1918-1945* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2010), 1, 4; Dirk Walter, *Antisemitische Kriminalität und Gewalt. Judenfeindschaft in der Weimarer Republik* (Berlin: J. H. W. Dietz, 1999), 25, 63, 115, 211; Christoph Nonn, *Eine Stadt sucht einen Mörder. Gerücht, Gewalt und Antisemitismus im Kaiserreich* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Rupprecht, 2002); Helmut Walser Smith, *Die Geschichte des Schlachters. Mord und Antisemitismus in einer deutschen Kleinstadt* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer Taschenbuch, 2002), 59, 108-109; and Kim Wünschman, *Before Auschwitz. Jewish Prisoners in the Prewar Concentration Camps* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2015), 58-59. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. Steven Beller, *Antisemitism. A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 2-3. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. Ibid., 5-6. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. Albert S. Lindemann, *Esau’s Tears. Modern Anti-Semitism and the Rise oft he Jews* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), xiv, xvi. See also Werner Bergmann, *Geschichte des Antisemitismus* (Munich: C. H. Beck, 2016), 7. For a brief history of the distinction between “substantialism” and “functionalism,” see Peter Schäfer, *Judeophobia. Attitudes toward the Jews in the Ancient World* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard 1997), 4-8. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. Ibid., vx. [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. Ibid., 7, 125. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. On the lachrymose conception of Jewish history, see Nils Roemer, *Jewish Scholarship and Culture in Nineteenth Century Germany. Between History and Faith* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2005) and Michael Brenner, *Propheten des Vergangenen. Jüdische Geschichtsschreibung im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert* (Munich: C. H. Beck, 2006). [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. Ibid., 118. For much more nuanced discussions of Jewish “nihilism” and “heresy,” see Jochmann, *Gesellschaftskrise*, 50, and Paul Hanebrink, *A Specter Haunting Europe. The Myth of Judeo-Bolshevism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2018), 28. A particularly clear-cut connection between Jewish emancipation and antisemitism is drawn by the social historian James Retallack: “National unification inaugurated a migration of Jews into and through Saxony. This development supported antisemitic claims that Saxony was being inundated by ‘nationally unreliable’ elements. In 1890 the proportion of Jews among Saxony’s population was only 0.27 percent – four times lower than the Reich average of 1.15 percent. However, the proportion of Jews in Saxony had doubled since 1871, when it stood at 0.13 percent, whereas in the Reich it had declined slightly over the same period.” Retallack does not elaborate further why this still negligible percentage (despite the not so negligible increase of the percentage) produced antisemitism. James Retallack, *Red Saxony. Election Battles and the Spectre of Democracy in Germany, 1860-1918* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 201. The logic can work both ways, of course. According to another prominent social historian of antisemitism, Judeophobia became less virulent when economic progress benefited ever-larger sections of the population. Werner Jochmann, *Gesellschaftskrise und Judenfeindschaft in Deutschland 1870-1945* (Hamburg: Christians Verlag 1988), 84. [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. Hogg and Vaughan, *Social Psychology*, 68. [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. Beller, Antisemitism, 69-71. Lars Fischer has raised this point in idem., “The word ‘Jew’ has several meanings in relation to commerce, but almost all negative’: on the evolution of a projection,” in: *Jewish Historical Studies*, 2020, 51(1), 361-386, here 362. [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. The classic text here is Robert S. Wistrich, *Antisemitism. The Longest Hatred* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1991). For more recent references tot he repository, see Francesca Trivellato, *The Promise of Peril and Credit. What a Forgotten Legend about Jews and Finance Tells Us about the Making of European Commercial Society* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2019), 15; Magda Teter, *Blood Libel. On the Trail of an Antisemitic Myth* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2020), 27, 166, 377; Peter Schäfer, Kurz Geschichte des Antisemitismus (Munich: C. H. Beck, 2020), 40, 42, 190. Teter has referred to “confirmation bias” as a helpful way of explaining the impact of memory trails. On this reading, false or distorted information about the Jews has been accepted because it fit preconceptions of the Jews that had accumulated over centuries. See Teter, *Blood Libel*, 4, 383. [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. David Nirenberg, *Communities of Violence. Persecution of Minorities in the Middle Ages* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), 124. [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
37. Klaus Holz und Jan Weyand, “Von der Judenfrage zur Antisemitenfrage. Frühe Erklärungsmodelle von Antisemitismus”, in: Hans-Joachim Hahn, Olaf Kistenmacher (eds.), *Beschreibungsversuche der Judenfeinschaft. Zur Geschichte der Antisemitismusforschung vor 1944* (Berlin and Munich: De Gryuter Oldenbourg, 2016), 172-188, here 180. See also Jan Weyand, *Historische Wissenssoziologie des modernen Antisemitismus. Genese und Typologie einer Wissensformation am Beispiel des deutschsprachigen Diskurses* (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2016), 15. [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
38. Weyand, *Historische Wissenssoziologie*, 23. [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
39. Ibid., 36. [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
40. Ibid., 37. [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
41. Holz, *Nationaler Antisemitismus*, 65-66, 69. [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
42. This is particularly evident in Weyand, *Historische Wissenssoziologie*, 22. [↑](#footnote-ref-42)
43. Olaf Blaschke, *Offenders or Victims? German Jews and the Causes of Modern Catholic Antisemitism* (Lincoln and London: Nebraska University Press, 2009), 5 [↑](#footnote-ref-43)
44. Ibid., pp. 23-24. Blaschke cites Strauss and Kampe, “Einleitung,” 17-18, in this connection. For similar arguments, see also Holz, *Nationaler Antisemitismus*, 67-68; Weyand, *Historische Wissenssoziologie*, 22. [↑](#footnote-ref-44)
45. Blaschke, *Offenders or Victims?*, 132. Classic instances of “antisemitism without Jews” are Japan and postwar Poland. See David G. Goodman and Masanori Miyazawa, *Jews in the Japanese Mind. The History and Uses of a Cultural Stereotype* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2000); Leo Cooper, In the Shadow of the Polish Eagle. The Poles, the Holocaust and Beyond (Houndmill: Palgrave MacMillan, 2000). [↑](#footnote-ref-45)
46. Christhard Hoffmann review of Lindemann’ *Esau’s Tears*, in: *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 14 (2000): 266-270, here 268. [↑](#footnote-ref-46)
47. A study that traces this aspect of self-categorization theory is Uffa Jensen, *Gebildete Doppelgänger. Bürgerliche Juden und Protestanten im 19. Jahrhundert* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Rupprecht, 2005). On self-categorization theory generally, see Angela T. Maitner, Eliot R. Smith, and Diane M. Mackie, “Intergroup Emotions Theory: Prejudice and Differentiate Reactions toward Outgroups”, in: Chris G. Sibley and Kate Barlow (eds.), *The Cambridge Handbook of the Psychology of Prejudice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017)*,* 111-130, here 118; Devin G. Ray, Diane M. Mackie, Robert J. Rydell, Eliot R. Smith, “Changing Categorization of self can change emotions about groups”, in: *Journal of Experimental* Psychology 44 (2008): 1210-1213, here 1210. A good overview of the literature of the narcissism of minor differences can be found in Aton Blok, “The Narcissism of Minor Differences,” in: *European Journal of Social Theory* 1 (1998): 33-56. See also Trivellato, *Promise and Peril*, 84. [↑](#footnote-ref-47)
48. For a critique of Freudian-based accounts of antisemitism, including Critical Theory, see Anthony D. Kauders, “Speculating About Society, Analyzing the Individual: Where Freudian Accounts of Antisemitism Go Wrong,” in: *Jahrbuch für Antisemitismusforschung*, forthcoming. [↑](#footnote-ref-48)
49. Lars Fischer, *The Socialist Response to Antisemitism in Imperial Germany* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 7. [↑](#footnote-ref-49)
50. Ibid., 6-7. [↑](#footnote-ref-50)
51. Ibid., 8. [↑](#footnote-ref-51)
52. Other prominent scholars sympathetic to Critical Theory for whom projection is an important factor in explaining antisemitism include Samuel Salzborn and Lars Rensmann. Unlike Fischer, however, neither engages critically with realistic conflict theory, aside from Rensmann’s brief summary of Holz’s critique. See Rensmann, *Kritische Theorie*, 91-112; idem., *Demokratie und Judenbild. Antisemitismus in der politischen Kultur der Bundesrepublik* (Wiesbaden: VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften, 2004),100-102; Samuel Salzborn, *Antisemitismus als negative Leitidee der Moderne. Sozialwissenschaftliche Theorien im Vergleich* (Frankfurt am Main: Campus, 2010); Lars Rensmann and Samuel Salzborn, “Modern Antisemitism as Fetishized Anti-Capitalism: Moishe Postone's Theory and its Historical and Contemporary Relevance,” in: *Antisemitism Studies*, 5 (2021): 44-99. [↑](#footnote-ref-52)
53. Thomas F. Pettigrew, “Samuel Stouffer and Relative Deprivation”, in: *Social Psychology Quarterly* 78 (2015): 7-24, here 12. See also Heather J. Smith, Thomas F. Pettigrew, Gina M. Pippin, and Silvana Bialosiewicz, “Relative Deprivation: A Theoretical and Meta-Analytic Review”, in: *Personality and Social Psychology Review* 16 (2012): 203-232, here 203. [↑](#footnote-ref-53)
54. Pettigrew, “Stouffer,” 11-12. [↑](#footnote-ref-54)
55. Brown, *Prejudice*, 168. [↑](#footnote-ref-55)
56. W. G. Runciman, *Relative Deprivation and Social Justice. A Study of attitudes to social inequality in twentieth-century England* (London: Pelican Books, 1972), 25. [↑](#footnote-ref-56)
57. See, for example, Smith, Pettigrew, Pippin, Bialosiewicz, “Relative Deprivation,” 204; Marylee C. Taylor, “Fraternal Deprivation, Collective Threat, and Racial Resentment. Perspectives on White Racism,” in: Iain Walker and Heather J. Smith (eds.), *Relative Deprivation: Specification, Development, and Integration* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 13-43. [↑](#footnote-ref-57)
58. Naomi Elmers, “Social Identity and Relative Deprivation”, in: Walker and Smith, *Relative Deprivation*, 239-264, here 247. [↑](#footnote-ref-58)
59. Runciman, *Relative Deprivation*, 11. [↑](#footnote-ref-59)
60. Smith, Pettigrew, Pippin, Bialosiewicz, “Relative Deprivation,” 220. [↑](#footnote-ref-60)
61. The English soccer player Frank Lampard is a good example of this form of indignation. Rumours have it that in 2008 he felt slighted upon hearing that one of his Chelsea teammates was earning 30,000 pounds per week more than him. “The fact that he was already earning over 100,000 pounds per week himself,” Rupert Brown notes, “was apparently of little consolation to him.” Brown, *Prejudice*, 167. [↑](#footnote-ref-61)
62. Marylee C. Taylor, “Fraternal Deprivation, Collective Threat, and Racial Resentment. Perspectives on White Racism,” in: Walker and Smith, *Relative Deprivation*, 13-43, here 14. [↑](#footnote-ref-62)
63. Reeve D. Vanneman and Thomas F. Pettigrew, “Race and Relative Deprivation in the Urban United States,” in: *Race & Class* 13 (1972), 461-468. See also Taylor, “Fraternal Deprivation,” 17; John Duckitt and Thobi Mphuthing, “Relative Deprivation and Intergroup Attitudes. South Africa before and After the Transition”, in: Walker and Smith, *Relative Deprivation*, 69-90. [↑](#footnote-ref-63)
64. These developments were of course not confined to Germany. For Poland, see Piotr Kendziorek, “Auf der Suche nach der nationalen Identität: Polnische Debatten um die ‘Judenfrage,’” in: Andreas Reinke, Ferenc Laczó, Kateřina Čapková, Michael Frankl (eds.), *Die “Judenfrage” in Ostmitteleuropa. Historische Pfade und politisch-soziale Konstellationen* (Berlin: Metropol, 2015), 249-387. The French case is treated in Daniel Gerson, *Die Kehrseite der Emanzipation in Frankreich. Judenfeindschaft im Elsass 1778 bis 1848* (Essen: Klartext, 2006). [↑](#footnote-ref-64)
65. Blaschke, *Offenders*, 103-4, 109, 132; Hoffmann, Review, 268; Richard S. Levy, *The Downfall of the Anti-Semitic Political Parties in Imperial Germany* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1975, 52-3. [↑](#footnote-ref-65)
66. Aly, *Warum die Deutschen*, 80 [↑](#footnote-ref-66)
67. Reinhard Rürup, *Emanzipation*, 105-6. [↑](#footnote-ref-67)
68. Jochmann, *Gesellschaftskrise*, 31. [↑](#footnote-ref-68)
69. Lindemann, *Esau’s Tears*, 21. [↑](#footnote-ref-69)
70. Blaschke, *Offenders*, 103-4. [↑](#footnote-ref-70)
71. Stefan Rohrbacher, “ ‘The Hep Hep’ Riots of 1819: Anti-Jewish Ideology, Agitation and Violence”, in: C. Hoffmann, W. Bergmann, H. Walser Smith (eds*.*), *Exlusionary Violence. Antisemitic Riots in Modern German History* (Ann Arbour: University of Michigan Press, 2002), 23-42, here 31, emphasis added. See also Retallack, *Red Saxony*, 203. [↑](#footnote-ref-71)
72. Werner Bergmann, *Tumulte – Excesse – Pogrome. Kollektive Gewalt gegen Juden in Europa 1789-1900* (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2020), 151, 189-190 See also Rainer Erb and Werner Bergmann, *Die Nachseite der Emanzipation. Der Widerstand gegen die Integration der Juden in Deutschland 1780-1860* (Berlin: Metropol 1989). [↑](#footnote-ref-72)
73. Bergmann, *Tumulte*, 173-174. [↑](#footnote-ref-73)
74. Michal Szulc, *Emanzipation in Stadt und Staat. Die Judenpolitik in Danzig 1807-1847* (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2016), 185. [↑](#footnote-ref-74)
75. # Stefan Rohrbacher, *Gewalt im Biedermeier. Antijüdische Ausschreitungen in Vormärz und Revolution (1815-1848/9)* (Frankfurt am Main: Campus, 1993), 171; James F. Harris, *The People Speak! Anti-Semitism and Emancipation in Nineteenth-Century Bavaria* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1994), 142, 170, 176, 178. For the importance of status among small tradesmen later in the century, see Lichtblau, *Antisemitismus*, 238. It could be also argued that widespread debates on circumcision and other Jewish rituals in the 1840s were related to fears that emancipation would tip the balance and give rise to Jewish equality or even dominance. See Robin Judd, *Circumcision, Kosher Butchering, and Jewish Political Life in Germany, 1843-1933* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2007), 26, 54.

    [↑](#footnote-ref-75)
76. Pulzer, *Rise*, xx. [↑](#footnote-ref-76)
77. Ibid., xxi. [↑](#footnote-ref-77)
78. Brustein, *Roots*, 35-36. [↑](#footnote-ref-78)
79. For an approach based on cognitive dissonance, see Anthony D. Kauders, “From Particularism to Mass Murder: Nazi Morality, Antisemitism, and Cognitive Dissonance,” in: *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* (forthcoming). [↑](#footnote-ref-79)
80. Jeffrey S. Kopstein and Jason Wittenberg, *Intimate Violence. Anti-Jewish Pogroms on the Eve of the Holocaust* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2018), pp. 3, 4, 6, 13, 14, 15, 68, 124, 125. Unlike relative deprivation, “power threat” theory is more sympathetic to the role that “realistic conflict” plays in the emergence of hostility. See idem., *Intimate Violence,* pp.15, 66. [↑](#footnote-ref-80)