

# Introduction to Emile Durkheim's "Anti-Semitism and Social Crisis"\*

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*Emile Durkheim's "Antisémitisme et crise sociale," written in 1899 during the Dreyfus Affair in France, is introduced. The introduction summarizes the principal contributions that "Antisémitisme et crise sociale" makes to the sociology of anti-Semitism, relates those contributions to Durkheim's broader theoretical assumptions and concerns, situates his analysis of anti-Semitism in its social and historical context, contrasts it to other analyses of anti-Semitism (Marxist and Zionist) that were prominent in Durkheim's time, indicates some of the revisions and additions that a fuller and more complete Durkheimian theory of anti-Semitism would entail, and highlights the significance of Durkheim's ideas for the contemporary study of ethnic and racial antagonism. While noting the limitations of Durkheim's analysis, the introduction concludes that "Antisémitisme et crise sociale" has sadly regained its relevance in the light of a revival of anti-Semitism at the turn of the millennium.*

Emile Durkheim formulated his brief but suggestive analysis entitled "Anti-Semitism and Social Crisis" in the midst of France's infamous Dreyfus Affair, which took place between 1894 and 1906. The key events of the Dreyfus Affair and Durkheim's involvement as a founding and active member of the Dreyfusard Ligue pour la Défense des Droits de l'Homme are well known (Fournier 2007:365–90; Gartner 2001:232, 234–35; Kedward 1965; Lukes 1973:347–49; Strenski 1997; Vital 1999:540–66). Suffice it to say here that the affair was precipitated by the wrongful conviction of Captain Alfred Dreyfus, a French army officer of Jewish background, for allegedly selling military secrets to the Germans. The conviction roiled France for more than a decade before it was eventually reversed, dividing the country into two bitterly opposed blocs. The Dreyfusards, including republican, anticlerical, and eventually socialist groups, lined up to demand a new trial for Dreyfus (most notably in Emile Zola's celebrated 1898 accusation of a military cover-up) while right-wing traditionalist, militarist, and anti-republican elements rallied against Dreyfus and in defense of the French army. The affair was also accompanied by an ugly and disturbing surge of anti-Semitism in French society. Indeed, "the case, status, and future of Dreyfus the man" was impossible to disentangle from "the case, status, and future of French Jewry" (Vital 1999:549). Hostility to the country's Jewish population was expressed

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in both word and deed. Invoking tropes of Jewish conspiracy and disloyalty, French anti-Semites like Edouard Drumont sought to “expose” the putative power of the Jews and their supposed control of the Third Republic. These accusations were accompanied by public demands to bar Jews from political life and the state service, repeal the emancipation that the French state had granted them in 1791, and even expel them from France altogether (Vital 1999:548, 550). In addition, a series of anti-Jewish riots swept through France in early 1898. Some of these riots involved as many as a thousand people, lasted for several consecutive days, and were not quelled until French troops reinforced the local police and gendarmerie. Despite the mobs’ terrifying cries of “death to the Jews,” the riots caused no casualties and involved little shedding of blood, with the important exception of two fatalities in French Algeria; violence was instead mainly directed against Jewish-owned businesses and property (Gartner 2001:234–35; Vital 1999:547–48; Wilson 1982:106–24). This was the context in which Durkheim wrote “Anti-Semitism and Social Crisis.”<sup>1</sup>

The immediate occasion for Durkheim’s analysis of anti-Semitism was an essay published by Ferdinand Brunetière (1898), a French literary historian and critic, a member of the fervently anti-Dreyfusard Académie Française, and a member of the anti-Dreyfusard Ligue de la Patrie Française. Brunetière “defended the [French] army and the social order, threatened by ‘individualism’ and ‘anarchy,’ and poured scorn on ‘various intellectuals’ who had presumed to doubt the justice of Dreyfus’s trial.” More specifically, his article addressed three main questions: (1) “the causes of anti-semitism,” (2) “the place of the army in a democracy,” and (3) “the claims of the ‘intellectuals.’” Concerning the first question, Brunetière argued that “prejudice against . . . Jews was a natural and legitimate reaction to their ‘domination’ in the spheres of politics, law, education and administration, and that the Jews themselves were partly responsible for anti-Semitism” (Lukes 1973:335–36). Durkheim issued three rejoinders to Brunetière between 1898 and 1899, which, in addition to his better-known article “Individualism and the Intellectuals” (Durkheim [1898] 1973), included two replies to surveys of opinion that addressed the other two issues raised by Brunetière: militarism and anti-Semitism (Lukes 1973:338, 344). The last of these replies, “Antisémitisme et crise sociale,” was published in 1899 in Henri Dagan’s *Enquête sur l’antisémitisme* (Dagan 1899:59–63).<sup>2</sup> “Antisémitisme et crise sociale” therefore postdates most of Durkheim’s major works, including *The Division of Labor in Society* (Durkheim [1893] 1984), *The Rules of Sociological Method* (Durkheim [1895] 1982), and *Suicide* (Durkheim [1897] 1951); it roughly coincides with Durkheim’s final draft in 1898–1900 of the manuscripts later published as *Professional Ethics and Civic Morals* (Durkheim 1957), and it coincides with the beginning of Durkheim’s turn to religion in the late 1890s (see Alexander 1988), which eventually culminated with *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* (Durkheim [1912] 1995). “Antisémitisme et crise sociale” was subsequently reprinted in Durkheim’s edited writings (Durkheim 1975a:252–54) and appears with this introduction in what is to my knowledge the first and only English translation of the text in its entirety.

<sup>1</sup>On the reactions of French Jewish intellectuals and French Jewry, more generally, see Hyman (1998:108–11), Vital (1999:550–60), and Wilson (1982:83–85, 692–730). French Jewry was criticized, at the time of the Dreyfus Affair and afterward, for its passivity. However, Wilson (1982:83) found that “the Jewish contribution to the Dreyfusard campaign was crucial,” and “many Jewish intellectuals and notables joined the cause.” Durkheim’s active involvement was therefore not atypical.

<sup>2</sup>On Dagan’s inquiry, the other intellectuals invited to contribute to the inquiry, and the questions posed to them, see Fournier (2007:389). For Durkheim’s discussion of militarism, originally published in 1899, see “L’Etat, la morale et le militarisme” (Durkheim 1975b:160–63).

## DURKHEIM'S DIAGNOSIS OF ANTI-SEMITISM

*The Types and Causes of Anti-Semitism*

Durkheim began his analysis by distinguishing French anti-Semitism from German and Russian anti-Semitism. This distinction was not simply an expression of his patriotism or the wishful thinking of a Jewish *fou de la république* (fanatic of the Third Republic). As Lloyd Gartner (2001:233) explains, there were in fact “fundamental differences between France and Germany in the effect of anti-Semitism.”

Basic French liberties were preserved and governments gave no countenance to the anti-Semitic agitation. [French] Jews moved ahead socially and economically and attained positions which were out of the question in Germany—military commissions despite an unfriendly atmosphere in the officer corps, academic appointments, and political office. They were able to circulate in high society.

In contrast, German anti-Semitism found expression not only in the writings of journalists and intellectuals but also in politics. The Anti-Semitic Petition, which called on the German government to restrict the civil and political rights of German Jews, gathered a quarter of a million signatures in 1880, and avowedly anti-Semitic parties reached their zenith in 1893 when they garnered 264,000 votes and 16 seats in the Reichstag (Gartner 2001:222).<sup>3</sup> German Jews also experienced pervasive social discrimination, including exclusion from professional organizations and discrimination in academic appointments and public employment (Gartner 2001:218–28; Hyman 1998:99; Vital 1999:248–77). Conditions in Russia, where the majority of Europe's Jews resided, were even worse. There Jews were denied formal civil equality until 1917, confined to the Pale of Settlement, and subjected to discriminatory legislation and increasingly murderous waves of violence that the tsarist regime did little to stop (Gartner 2001:238–42; Vital 1999:283–97ff.).<sup>4</sup>

Perhaps with these differences in mind, Durkheim suggested that French anti-Semitism was the product of “passing circumstances” and “violent passions.” In contrast, German and Russian anti-Semitism was “traditional” and “aristocratic” in nature; it sprang from cooler and less transient emotions, namely, “contempt and haughtiness.” Durkheim clearly did not mean to suggest that the anti-Semitism displayed in the Dreyfus Affair was unprecedented in France. On the contrary, he noted historical parallels with events in 1848 and 1870. Rather, his point was that there was cross-national variation in the form that anti-Semitism took. His language suggested an analogy to disease: The “acute” anti-Semitism of France commenced suddenly and rose sharply, but it ran a short course, while the “chronic” anti-Semitism of Germany and Russia recurred more frequently and had a longer duration. Durkheim reasoned that anti-Semitism in France therefore arose from different causes and required a different kind of explanation.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>3</sup>An anti-Semitic parliamentary group also formed in France in 1898, but it was small, disunited, and powerless, and it dissolved by 1906 (Wilson 1982:215–16, 226).

<sup>4</sup>A wave of pogroms occurred in Russia from 1881 to 1884 and again in 1903. Another wave coincided with Russia's 1905 revolution, leaving 3,000 Jews dead (Gartner 2001:247–48; Vital 1999:569–73). Pogroms during the Russian civil war (1918–21) left at least 50,000 and perhaps as many as 150,000 Jews dead (Gartner 2001:283–86; Vital 1999:717). Gartner (2001:234) suggests that French riots during the Dreyfus Affair were “comparable to the well-known Russian pogroms,” but given the much higher death toll and the greater incidence of violence against persons in the Russian pogroms, this claim seems exaggerated.

<sup>5</sup>Although Durkheim characterized Russian anti-Semitism as chronic, he apparently did not think it was ineradicable. Following Russia's February 1917 revolution, which granted civil equality to Russian Jews for

According to Durkheim, the primary cause of France's acute anti-Semitism was "a state of social malaise" in the country.<sup>6</sup> This was a term that Durkheim often used and one that his contemporaries would have readily understood. As Lukes (1973:195–99) points out, Durkheim's references to a "social malaise" were a variation on the theme of social dissolution, which was pervasive in 19th-century French social thought. Generally speaking, it referred to "the social, moral and political isolation of self-interested individuals" in modern societies, "unattached to social ideals," "unamenable to social control," and lacking in social solidarity.<sup>7</sup> While Durkheim's conception of social malaise was rooted in this broader tradition of thought, he interpreted it in a distinctively sociological fashion, tracing it not to the failings of individuals but to their manner of association. As Célestin Bouglé summed up Durkheim's view, "the origin of your malaise . . . is elsewhere than at the bottom of your hearts. To restore equilibrium you must establish new social relations" (quoted in Lukes 1973:300).<sup>8</sup> More specifically, Durkheim understood France's social malaise in terms of a pathological dearth of moral and social regulation, a condition that he termed *anomie*. In contrast to his conservative and anti-Dreyfusard contemporaries, Durkheim did not attribute this condition to the allegedly corrosive influence of Enlightenment rationalism, the French Revolution, secularization, democracy, or the individualism propagated by the nation's intellectuals. Instead, he located the origins of anomie in economic restructuring and contingent historical events. In "the sphere of trade and industry," Durkheim argued, where anomie was "in a chronic state," it was best understood as an abnormal form of the modern social division of labor (Durkheim [1897] 1951:254–58; see also Durkheim [1893] 1984). But anomie could also take an "acute" form; it appeared "in intermittent spurts" whenever society was "disturbed by some painful crisis or by . . . abrupt transitions" and thus rendered "momentarily incapable" of exercising moral regulation over its members (Durkheim [1897] 1951:252, 254).<sup>9</sup>

the first time, Durkheim wrote: "It seems to me that the Russian Revolution does away with the Jewish problem in Russia. From now on, the Jews are certain to be likened to other religious denominations; they will enjoy the same rights; their martyrdom has come to an end . . . . From now on, the Russian Jews will therefore at last have a homeland [*patrie*], which they will love as the French Jews love theirs" (Durkheim [1917] 2000, my translation). Durkheim did not live long enough to see the atrocities perpetrated against Russian Jewry between 1918 and 1921.

<sup>6</sup>Durkheim discounts other presumed causes of French anti-Semitism—religious causes and the alleged failings of the Jews—as merely "secondary circumstances," mainly on the grounds that there is little observable correlation between these causes and outbursts of anti-Semitism. This point was intended to refute Brunetière's claim that Jews themselves bore responsibility for anti-Semitism.

<sup>7</sup>A similar theme can be perceived in American social thought as well, though in this case a break-down of social control has been less feared than the manipulation of atomized masses by elites (Bellah 1985; Kornhauser 1959; Mills 1956; Putnam 2000; Riesman 1950; Tocqueville [1840] 1945:98–99). Durkheim spoke of a "political malaise" in Third Republic France as well as a "social malaise," both of which were said to have "the same origin" in "the lack of secondary organs intercalated between the State and the rest of the society." The political malaise consisted of an "excessive mutability" and "constant flux" on the surface of politics that masked "an habitual stagnation" (Durkheim 1957:98–109; see also Giddens 1971:488–89).

<sup>8</sup>Bouglé, a prominent and influential member of the Durkheim group, published his own critical analysis of anti-Semitism in 1899 (Bouglé 1899). He examined the idea of race upon which the "philosophy of anti-Semitism" rested, questioned its scientific pretensions, stressed its incompatibility with the French conception of nationhood, and emphasized the social over the biological determinants of human behavior.

<sup>9</sup>See Durkheim ([1895] 1982:97–104) for his method of distinguishing the normal from the pathological. Admittedly, there is some ambiguity in Durkheim's work about whether economic and social crises are a consequence of anomie (more specifically, the anomic division of labor), as he suggested in *The Division of Labor* (Durkheim [1893] 1984), or a cause of anomie (more specifically, anomic suicide), as he later suggested in *Suicide* (Durkheim [1897] 1951). "Anti-Semitism and Social Crisis" appears to conform to the latter interpretation.

Durkheim suggests that France's acute anti-Semitism was linked to particular historical crises such as the 1848 revolution or France's military defeat in the Franco-Prussian war, each of which resulted in an acute rise in anomie. His allusions in "Anti-Semitism and Social Crisis" to "moral distress" and "moral disturbance" refer precisely to this momentary weakening of moral regulation. Such crises, Durkheim ([1897] 1951:252–53) suggests elsewhere, unleash the "destructive, violent passions" that he associates here with acute anti-Semitism: "The state of de-regulation or anomy is...heightened by passions being less disciplined, precisely when they need more disciplining." Moreover, he argues, "something like a declassification [*déclassement*] occurs [under anomic conditions] which suddenly casts certain individuals into a lower state than their previous one."<sup>10</sup> This is true for military defeats as well as economic crises. In both instances, individuals are forced to adjust their aspirations and expectations to their changed circumstances. "But society cannot adjust them instantaneously to this new life.... So they are not adjusted to the condition forced on them, and its very prospect is intolerable; hence the suffering which detaches them from a reduced existence even before they have made a trial of it." Acute anti-Semitism, he suggests, is a social mechanism for coping with this suffering. Here Durkheim invokes the widely held scapegoat theory of anti-Semitism, which posits that "Jews constituted a minority group dispersed among many countries and served as convenient targets for the majority's problems" (Brustein and King 2004:37; see also Karady 2004:320–21). "The Jews," he notes, were repeatedly "blamed for [France's] defeats.... When society suffers, it needs someone to blame, someone upon whom to avenge itself for its disappointments; and those persons whom opinion already disfavors are naturally singled out for this role. It is the pariahs who serve as expiatory victims." Since Durkheim views anomie as pathological and anti-Semitism as symptomatic of it, anti-Semitism serves as a kind of social thermometer for him, a useful index of the health of society; it is "one of the numerous indications that reveals the serious moral disturbance from which we suffer." Any sudden upsurge of anti-Semitism could thus be taken as a sign of the illness of society.<sup>11</sup>

### *The Social Function of Anti-Semitism*

Durkheim goes beyond the familiar scapegoat theory of anti-Semitism by incorporating it into his broader sociological analysis of how groups and communities are held together. In Durkheim's view, "anti-Semitism...served a social function: by designating the Jew as adversary, it restored social solidarity, uniting society around hatred of the Jew" (Birnbaum [1995] 2000:70).<sup>12</sup> In Durkheim's own words, people

<sup>10</sup>*Déclassement*, translated by John A. Spaulding and George Simpson as "declassification," also means here that the individuals have been declassified; it is perhaps better rendered in this context as "dislocation." As will be noted later, Friedrich Engels also associated anti-Semitism with *déclassé* groups who were sinking into ruin as a result of capitalist modernization.

<sup>11</sup>For Durkheim, anti-Semitism is in this respect analogous to the suicide rate and socialism. He finds that anomic suicides, like anti-Semitic outbursts, are correlated with "disturbances of the collective order" (Durkheim [1897] 1951:246). Similarly, Durkheim concludes that socialism is "the manner in which certain sections of society, particularly subject to collective sufferings, represent these to themselves. But it at least bears witness to the existence of a social malaise, and although not an adequate expression of it, it can help us to understand it since it derives from it" (quoted in Lukes 1973:325–26). This did not mean that he regarded socialism as pathological. On the contrary, Durkheim advocated a non-Marxist, reformist brand of socialism (Lukes 1973:320–30).

<sup>12</sup>According to Birnbaum ([1995] 2000:Ch. 6), this function was particularly evident during the Dreyfus Affair. He argues that anti-Semitism brought together diverse political factions (royalist, Bonapartist, etc.) into an imagined French-Catholic community whose members, "whatever social and political differences might separate them, were nevertheless united against their common enemy, the Jew" ([1995] 2000:139).

“felt comforted” simply by virtue of knowing “whom to blame for [their] economic troubles and moral distress,” and “it seemed that everything was already better.” Under ordinary conditions, there was no need for such pathological sources of solidarity, but during social crises “anti-Semitism arose as a substitute for the sense of community without which social cohesion [was] impossible” (Birnbaum [1995] 2000:95).

These effects can be better understood by the way of an analogy: anti-Semitism alleviates anomie by fulfilling the role that Durkheim would later ascribe to expiatory rites in *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*. Indeed, this analogy between anti-Semitism and expiatory rites becomes explicit in “Anti-Semitism and Social Crisis” when Durkheim describes Jews as “expiatory victims.” Expiatory rites, Durkheim ([1912] 1995:392, 404, 407, 412) argued, are a response to a social “calamity” or “misfortune”; “the distress in which society finds itself . . . gives rise to ceremonies of this sort.” Under these circumstances, the members of society feel impelled “to find a victim at all costs on whom the collective sorrow and anger can be discharged.” The Jew is an ideal victim insofar as he or she is perceived as a social outsider: The “victim will naturally be sought outside, for an outsider is a subject *minoris resistentiae* [less able to resist]; since he is not protected by the fellow-feeling that attaches to a relative or a neighbor, nothing about him blocks and neutralizes the bad and destructive feelings.” The Jew is also well suited to the role of expiatory victim insofar as he or she personifies the society’s “collective misfortune.” For the anti-Semite, Jews are a manifestation of the impure; they are “evil and impure powers, bringers of disorder, causes of death and sickness, instigators of sacrilege.” Thus, like the biblical scapegoating rite analyzed by Durkheim’s disciples Henri Hubert and Marcel Mauss ([1899] 1964:53–55), anti-Semitism projects impurity upon a victim and then seeks to eradicate that impurity by doing away with the victim. As Hubert and Mauss note in words that take on a chilling new meaning, “the most elementary form of expiation is elimination pure and simple.”<sup>13</sup> In reality, of course, the Jews are not the source of society’s distress; they are only imagined to be so: “It is this experience [of distress] that man is interpreting when he imagines evil beings outside him whose hostility . . . can be disarmed only through human suffering. So these beings are nothing other than collective states objectified; they are society itself seen in one of its aspects” (Durkheim [1912] 1995:416). To be sure, it is not actually existing Jews who are products of the anti-Semite’s imagination, but rather the Jew of anti-Semitic fantasy, envisioned as a malevolent and powerful purveyor of social disorder and distress. Despite this fantastic element, anti-Semitism, like all expiatory rites, has real effects; it unites the group by renewing and intensifying collective sentiments. As a result, “one is reassured, one takes greater courage, and, subjectively, everything happens as if the rite really had set aside the danger that was feared” (Durkheim [1912] 1995:411).<sup>14</sup>

<sup>13</sup>Marcel Mauss, in addition to being Durkheim’s nephew and intellectual protégé, was an active member of the socialist movement. In his view, anti-Semitism was linked to a militaristic form of nationalism, and (like other socialists) he regarded the petty bourgeoisie and “reactionary castes” as its main social carriers (Fournier 2007:382).

<sup>14</sup>See Wilson (1982:543–51) on the longstanding identification of the Jews with the Devil and witchcraft. He rightly emphasizes the role of the Jew as a polluting agent in anti-Semitic ideology: “If the Jews were agents of pollution and corruption, then antisemitism was a cleansing operation” (1982:489). Durkheim’s functional analysis of expiatory rites was already prefigured in *The Division of Labor* (Durkheim [1893] 1984), where he argued that punishment of deviants serves to reinforce a mechanical form of social solidarity based on sameness. However, in Third Republic France, Jews were not deviants. On the contrary, Durkheim points out, they lost their “ethnic character” and assimilated into French society “with extreme

The theme of restoring social solidarity is what links “Anti-Semitism and Social Crisis” to its companion pieces: Durkheim’s remarks on militarism (Durkheim 1975b:160–63) and his essay on “Individualism and the Intellectuals” (Durkheim [1898] 1973). Like anti-Semitism, French militarism was an acute phenomenon (the product of “passing circumstances”) linked to a particular historical crisis and the social suffering it generated (“the memories of 1870, the desire to avenge the defeat”); it stanching demoralization and restored social solidarity (on the basis of a “truly superstitious cult to [France’s] army”), but in a manner that was abnormal (“one cannot consider normal the manner in which war is still extolled, nor the fresh outbreak of militarism which we are currently witnessing”). However, Durkheim noted, “there are other ideas, besides that one, in which all Frenchmen can be united, other ends to pursue jointly” (quotes from Durkheim 1975b:160–63, my translation). He elaborated those ends and ideas in “Individualism and the Intellectuals.” There Durkheim ([1898] 1973:48–51) argued that individualism, properly understood, was “the glorification not of the self but of the individual in general,” and as such provided a moral ideal upon which all the members of society could fix their sights and come together in a shared faith.<sup>15</sup> Indeed, individualism was “the only system of beliefs which [could] ensure the moral unity of the country.” As the social division of labor advances and modern societies become increasingly differentiated, Durkheim explained, “we make our way, little by little, toward a state, nearly achieved as of now, where the members of a single social group will have nothing in common among themselves except their humanity, except the constitutive attributes of the human person (*personne humaine*) in general.” Thus, when the three essays are read together, anti-Semitism and militarism appear as alternatives—albeit pathological, divisive, and ultimately dysfunctional—to this “cult of the individual.” For Durkheim, the Dreyfus Affair juxtaposed these alternatives in stark terms. If the wrongful conviction of Dreyfus comforted and reassured the anti-Semite (for whom “evil came from the Jews”) and the militarist (for whom the army was “inviolable and sacred”), it appeared as the most egregious sacrilege to the individualist: “The human person . . . is considered sacred. . . . And the respect which is given it comes precisely from this source. Whoever makes an attempt on a man’s life, on a man’s liberty, on a man’s honor, inspires in us a feeling of horror analogous in every way to that which the believer experiences when he sees his idol profaned” (Durkheim [1898] 1973:46).

### *Practical Measures to Combat Anti-Semitism*

Given Durkheim’s analysis of the function of acute anti-Semitism in French society, what was to be done? The conclusion to “Anti-Semitism and Social Crisis” makes clear that his theoretical analysis had a practical intent, namely, to discern the most effective means for combating such hatred. This is in keeping with his insistence elsewhere that sociology has an “interest in practical questions,” though one it can only realize if it maintains the autonomy of the scientific field and thus gives its prescriptions a scientific and objective basis (Durkheim [1895] 1982:160–61). This is precisely what Durkheim attempts to do here. “The true means to curb” anti-Semitism, he argues, “would be to put an end” to the “moral disturbance” of which

rapidity.” Nevertheless, despite the rapid assimilation and fervent loyalty of French Jews (Hyman 1998:53–76; Vital 1999:543), anti-Semites continued to regard them as outsiders, and a surge of Jewish immigration from Russia after 1905 renewed anxieties about their ethnic distinctiveness (Hyman 1998:115–35). On the paradoxes of Jewish assimilation, see Bauman (1988).

<sup>15</sup>On moral individualism, see also Cladis (1992), Durkheim (1957:55–64), and Giddens (1971:480–82).

it is “the consequence and the superficial symptom.” In other words, if anti-Semitism is primarily a reaction to and a means of coping with anomie, then anomie is its root cause. Anti-Semitism would therefore “disappear when anomie ceased to exist, when . . . social relations were at last organized in a satisfactory manner” (Birnbaum [1995] 2000:95). Durkheim (1957, [1898] 1973, [1893] 1984) described elsewhere how this was to be accomplished. His chief remedy was the reorganization of economic relations through the revival of occupational groups, linked to but independent of the state. In addition, he sought to “complete, organize and extend individualism,” to promote greater equality of opportunity, “to organize economic life and introduce more justice into contractual relations,” and “to alleviate the functioning of the social machine, that is still so harsh to individuals, to put within their reach all possible means of developing their faculties without hindrance, to strive to make a reality of the famous precept: ‘to each according to his work’” (Lukes 1973:326–27; quotes from Durkheim [1898] 1973:56). By realizing a healthy, organic form of social solidarity appropriate to a complex society with a highly developed division of labor, these measures would obviate the need for dysfunctional substitutes that ultimately divided rather than integrated French society. However, as Durkheim acknowledged in “Anti-Semitism and Social Crisis,” “this work can’t be done in a day”; it was a long-term solution to the problem of anti-Semitism.

Durkheim’s “Anti-Semitism and Social Crisis” therefore also outlined a series of short-term measures that, though directed at the “symptom” (anti-Semitism) rather than the “source” (anomie), were “immediately possible and urgent to begin.” First, he called for repression of “all incitement to hatred of citizens against one another.” To be sure, he was under no illusion that coercion alone could curb such hatred. As Durkheim ([1897] 1951:248, 251–52) noted elsewhere, “physical restraint” cannot effectively limit “passions,” for “hearts cannot be touched” in this way. When moral regulation is imposed by force, “peace and harmony are illusory; the spirit of unrest and discontent are latent . . . . Therefore, when we say that an authority is necessary to impose this [moral] order on individuals, we certainly do not mean that violence is the only means of establishing it. Since this regulation is meant to restrain individual passions, it must come from a power which dominates individuals; but this power must also be obeyed through respect, not fear.” Accordingly, Durkheim argues that the true value of repression lies not in its effects on the inciters to hatred, but on the “public conscience.” Punishment of incitement will not by itself “change people’s minds,” but it may strengthen and reinvigorate public revulsion against such behavior. This suggestion is consistent with Durkheim’s well-known argument that the function of punishment is not so much to deter or rehabilitate the criminal as to strengthen the *conscience collective* of the noncriminal population (Durkheim [1895] 1982, [1893] 1984). The suggestion is also consistent with his conception of freedom as the product rather than the absence of regulation (Durkheim 1957, [1893] 1984).

Second, Durkheim argued that the opponents of anti-Semitism must not merely reprimand it “in theory,” but also discourage it in practice by refusing to reward it. This may be understood as a corollary of the first recommendation.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>16</sup>Durkheim did not elaborate on what he meant by the state rewarding anti-Semitism, but historical instances may provide some indication. Although organized anti-Semitism was absent at the highest levels of the French state, it occasionally appeared at lower levels in such forms as discrimination by municipal authorities in French Algeria (halted by the metropole), scattered instances in which the military refrained from intervening in riots, and police harassment and surveillance of a few prominent Jewish individuals (Wilson 1982:701).

Third, Durkheim urged the government to “take responsibility for enlightening the masses.” This proposal is best understood in terms of his “communication theory of politics” (Bellah 1973:xxxiv; see also Durkheim 1957; Emirbayer 1996:114; Giddens 1971:499–502). Durkheim rejected the view that the democratic state should directly mirror or reflect the moods of the governed; its role, he insisted, is not merely “to express and sum up the unreflective thought of the mass of the people” (Durkheim 1957:92). In a modern society with a highly developed social division of labor, this kind of structural de-differentiation between government and the governed is unsuitable. Instead, Durkheim understood democracy to mean a close two-way communication between state and society, the elevation and refinement of the population’s moods and sentiments by means of deliberative political institutions and the “communicative institutions” of civil society (Alexander 2006:69–105), and the substitution of critical reflection for unthinking custom, habit, and tradition. “The more that deliberation and reflection and a critical spirit play a considerable part in the course of public affairs,” he wrote, “the more democratic the nation” (Durkheim 1957:89). Furthermore, since Durkheim thought that democratic deliberation, free inquiry, and critical reflection presupposed and implied moral individualism, he believed it was imperative for the modern democratic state to foster the “cult of the individual” within civil society (Durkheim 1957:70–73). Given the upsurge of popular anti-Semitism in France in the late 1890s, one can readily understand why Durkheim would see the direct reflection of popular sentiments in government as an undesirable threat to individual liberty and why he would deem it vitally necessary to subject those sentiments to critical (and perhaps sociologically informed) reflection.

Fourth and finally, Durkheim called upon “all reasonable men” to speak out publicly against anti-Semitism and “join forces” to oppose it. Although Durkheim’s political sociology has sometimes been taken to reflect an elitist distrust of mass politics, the language of this recommendation (*se liguer*) evokes and perhaps alludes to the popular leagues (*ligues*) that were then becoming a new feature of French politics. This endorsement of participation in the public sphere and in civil society to combat anti-Semitism underscores the extent to which Durkheim viewed democratic politics in terms of communication between the state and society and not simply as the domination of state over society. While the state had an important role to play in moral regulation (Durkheim 1957), he acknowledged that it was not feasible to regulate a complex society exclusively by means of state action. “The state is too remote from individuals,” Durkheim ([1893] 1984:liv) noted, “its connections with them too superficial and irregular, to be able to penetrate the depths of their consciousness and socialise them from within.” For this reason, he insisted that civil society organizations—Durkheim emphasized professional groups, but he would undoubtedly have included the *Ligue pour la Défense des Droits de l’Homme*—also play a crucial role in moral regulation, which he understood broadly to include informal regulation (civil persuasion) as well as formal regulation by law. As channels of communication and intermediaries between the individual and the state, these secondary associations can contribute vitally to instilling moral individualism.

It is interesting to note that each of the short-term measures that Durkheim recommended to reduce anti-Semitism can be understood as a kind of moral education. This is in keeping with Durkheim’s promotion of “national reintegration through (secular) education” as another remedy for the social malaise of Third Republic France (Lukes 1973:354–60). This emphasis on moral education to curb anti-Semitism is also in keeping with what Durkheim ([1897] 1951:252) said elsewhere regarding individuals who have been dislocated as a result of social crises:

“All the advantages of social influence are lost so far as they are concerned; their moral education has to be recommenced.”

## DURKHEIM'S DIAGNOSIS OF ANTI-SEMITISM IN COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVE

### *Durkheim and the Marxist Diagnosis of Anti-Semitism*

Durkheim's diagnosis of the causes and social functions of anti-Semitism can be further explicated by contrasting it to the principal theoretical alternatives of his time. An important competing explanation, initially articulated by Friedrich Engels and subsequently elaborated by August Bebel and Karl Kautsky, was developed within the German socialist movement (Silberner 1949, 1953; Traverso [1990] 1994:22–27, 59–69, 82–87).<sup>17</sup> In a lengthy letter published in 1890 by the Viennese *Arbeiterzeitung*, Engels laid out “the most unequivocal analysis of anti-Semitism to be found in the socialist literature of that period” (Wistrich 1982:126), “the first authoritative statement on the subject that could be fitted into the general perspective of Marxist doctrine” (Wistrich 1982:127), and the clearest exposition of the “*theoretical* premises that underlay the Marxist class analysis of anti-Semitism” (Wistrich 1982:128). Since this analysis is not well known in contemporary sociology (despite the theoretical influence of Marxism more generally), these remarks are worth quoting at length. According to Engels (quoted in Wistrich 1982:127–28),

Anti-Semitism is the characteristic sign of a backward civilization and is therefore found only in Prussia and Austria or in Russia . . . .

In Prussia, it is the small nobility, the *Junkers* with an income of 10,000 marks who spend 20,000 and therefore fall into the hands of the usurers, who foment anti-Semitism; and in both Prussia and Austria it is the petty-bourgeois sinking into ruin through the competition of large-scale capitalism, the craftsman and small shopkeeper who join the chorus and scream in unison with them. But insofar as *capital* destroys *these* classes of society, which are reactionary through and through, then it is fulfilling its mission and does a good job whether it is Semitic or Aryan, circumcised or baptized; it helps the backward Prussians and Austrians advance until at last they reach the modern standpoint, where all the old social differences are resolved into the one great contradiction between capital and wage-labour. Only where this is not yet the case, . . . where capital, being still too weak to control the whole national production, has the Stock

<sup>17</sup>French socialism also addressed the Jewish question in the 19th century, but largely outside of a Marxist framework (Traverso [1990] 1994:1–2). For this reason I concentrate on German socialism. Suffice it to say the following: a few French socialists were early supporters of Dreyfus, but most of them were initially hostile to the Dreyfusard cause and then shifted to a neutral stance in 1897. Socialist neutrality was exemplified by the 1898 “Manifeste des députés socialistes au prolétariat” (signed, among others, by Durkheim's friend Jean Jaurès), which described the Dreyfus Affair as a conflict between two rival bourgeois factions: clericals and “Jewish capitalists” (Kedward 1965:90–95, 99–102). Thus, French socialists, like their German counterparts, tended to identify Jews with capital, and their analysis seemed to imply that anti-Semitism was a reaction to exploitation or competition. Jaurès swung round to Dreyfusism in 1898. However, it was not until 1899 that a sizable portion of French socialists—now convinced that anti-Dreyfusism posed a threat to the Republic—followed his lead and rallied to the Dreyfusard cause (Wilson 1982:72). On the relation between anti-Semitism and the French left, see Hertzberg (1968), Silberner (1954), Vital (1999:198–205, 543–44), and Wilson (1982:319–78). Wilson (1982:331) noted that it was the Dreyfus Affair itself that separated “orthodox” socialists from anti-Semitic socialists.

Exchange as the main scene of its activity, and where production is still in the hands of peasants, land-owners, handicraftsmen and similar classes surviving from the Middle Ages—only here is capital predominantly Jewish and only here is anti-Semitism to be found . . . .

Anti-Semitism, therefore, is nothing but the reaction of the medieval, decadent strata of society against modern society, which essentially consists of wage-earners and capitalists; under a mask of apparent socialism it therefore only serves reactionary ends; it is a variety of feudal socialism and with that we can have nothing to do.

The analyses of anti-Semitism developed by Durkheim and Engels differed in several key aspects. First, they had different kinds of origins. In contrast to Durkheim, Engels articulated an analysis that emerged from and remained linked to a particular social movement. For Durkheim ([1895] 1982:160–61)—“scientific socialism” notwithstanding—such analyses were unlikely to have the same “scientific value” as his own sociological analysis; they were “practical doctrines” that “tend not directly to express social facts but to reform them,” they arose from “passions” rather than “facts,” and they were tailored to support the solutions that “various interest groups” already advocated. As previously noted, Durkheim believed that sociological analysis could furnish sound practical guidance, but only to the extent that it remained autonomous from politics and imbued with the “special attitude . . . that science alone can give” ([1895] 1982:161). The Marxian endeavor to transcend the dichotomy between theory and practice was simply not part of Durkheim’s sociological method.

Second, while Durkheim and Engels both noted cross-national variation in the appearance of anti-Semitism, Engels interpreted this variation in quantitative rather than qualitative terms. In other words, what Durkheim took to be an acute form of anti-Semitism in France, Engels saw as a relative absence of anti-Semitism. As a result, Engels seriously underestimated the potential for French anti-Semitism. To be fair, Engels published his theoretical analysis of anti-Semitism before the Dreyfus Affair, but it is precisely the inability of his analysis to account for the anti-Semitic hysteria that subsequently erupted in France that underscores its weakness.

Third, Durkheim and Engels provided different causal explanations of anti-Semitism. For Engels, anti-Semitism signified the resistance of the medieval strata of society to the development of the productive forces and the corresponding transformation of the class structure. This is essentially a Marxist version of the modernization thesis, which posits that “the losers (either social groups or nations) in the modernization process tend to harbor the strongest anti-Semitic beliefs” (Brustein and King 2004:37). In this version, anti-Semitism is a reaction against capitalist modernization.<sup>18</sup> In contrast, Durkheim viewed anti-Semitism as the symptom of

<sup>18</sup>The existence of a Jewish proletariat in Russia forced Engels, Bebel, and Kautsky to develop a somewhat different explanation of anti-Semitism in that country, but it did not depart fundamentally from the modernization thesis. In their view, Russian anti-Semitism was the product of tsarist manipulation, the “indigenous primitivism and xenophobia” of the Russian masses, and “the ‘alien’ character of the [Russian] Jews caused by their separation from the surrounding population” (Wistrich 1982:138–39). Middle-class, Western European Jews also embraced a version of the modernization thesis in the late 19th century: “Their favorite explanation [of anti-Semitism] was the ‘time lag’: clericalist, counter-revolutionary, and Christian medievalist elements had persisted into the new age, but they would inevitably die away . . . . [A]nti-Semitism was conceived as the last gasp of those who had either not yet entered the modern age or who had refused to enter it” (Hertzberg 1968:3). For a critique of the modernization thesis, see Hertzberg (1968).

an abnormal or pathological form of modernity itself (namely, anomie). To be sure, Durkheim did not consider anomie to be an inherent or inescapable feature of modernity; he saw it as a transitional phenomenon that would largely disappear once new institutions emerged to regulate the division of labor. Nevertheless, even under the best conditions, acute forms of anomie (and accompanying outbursts of anti-Semitism) could conceivably reappear in modern societies as a result of historically contingent disruptive events that momentarily weakened moral regulation.<sup>19</sup> Moreover, Engels saw anti-Semitism as an economically determined phenomenon, while Durkheim understood its origins in broader terms. Although Durkheim associated anomie with economic crises and considered it chronic in trade and industry, it is clear from his analysis that anomie can spring from noneconomic sources as well, such as military defeats. Furthermore, Engels pointed to specific social carriers of anti-Semitism, namely, those classes that modern capitalism threatened to destroy but that it had not yet eliminated. In contrast, Durkheim saw anti-Semitism, like the anomie to which it was a response, as a more diffuse phenomenon: "The malaise from which we suffer is not located in a particular class; it is general throughout the whole of society. . . . The problem is thus immeasurably greater than that of the conflicting material interests of the classes" (Durkheim, quoted in Lukes 1973:323).<sup>20</sup> Finally, Durkheim endorsed a scapegoat theory of the causes of anti-Semitism, in which Jews were the targets of *displaced* aggression and frustration, while Engels understood anti-Semitism to reflect real conflicts of class interest, insofar as the medieval strata of society were genuinely threatened by "predominantly Jewish" capital.<sup>21</sup>

Fourth, Durkheim and Engels differed in terms of the remedies they proposed to combat anti-Semitism. Perhaps because the socialist movement was more complacent than Durkheim about the dangers of anti-Semitism (Vital 1999; Wistrich 1982), Engels proposed no measures that were (in Durkheim's words) "immediately possible and urgent to begin."<sup>22</sup> Instead, he pointed to capitalist development as the long-term solution. Capitalist development would eventually eradicate anti-Semitism by sweeping its social carriers into the dustbin of history. At the same time, insofar as the Jews themselves were a socioeconomic "caste" (Kautsky's term) inherited from the Middle Ages, capitalist development would destroy their cohesiveness and pave the way for their complete assimilation, which, according to orthodox Marxism, was

<sup>19</sup>Durkheim's attention to historical contingency is both a strength and a weakness of "Anti-Semitism and Social Crisis." On the one hand, given the contingent nature of social crises, his diagnosis invokes what could be seen as ad hoc historical explanations for spatial and temporal variations in the emergence of acute anti-Semitism. On the other hand, because "Anti-Semitism and Social Crisis" was oriented to historical specificities and not merely general laws, it is an interesting and unusual departure for Durkheim, similar in this respect to his study of secondary education in France (Durkheim 1977).

<sup>20</sup>The notion that anti-Semitism was a diffuse phenomenon discouraged Durkheim from investigating its relative intensity among different social groups or classes. However, there is some historical evidence to support Durkheim's position: Wilson (1982:120) concluded that the anti-Semitic riots that took place in France in 1898 "seem to have had important support, active and passive, from members of all classes."

<sup>21</sup>On the relation of group interests to anti-Semitism, see also Elias ([1929] 2001), who distinguished between the "enlightenment view" that anti-Semitism is the result of ignorance or misunderstanding and the "sociological view" that anti-Semitism is rooted in "the conflicting economic, intellectual, and social interests" that arise between Jews and non-Jews by virtue of their social positions ([1929] 2001:219–20). See later on contemporary discussions of the role of interests in ethnic and racial antagonism.

<sup>22</sup>Socialist complacency about anti-Semitism was exemplified by the Second Congress of the Socialist International in 1891. When Abraham Cahan asked for "a formal, verbal condemnation of the persecution of Jews and a declaration of sympathy and support for the victims," "he discovered. . . that the overwhelming majority of those attending the Socialist Congress were unwilling to take up any position that might be read as support for Jews—not, at any rate, unless it was couched in the most ambiguous and. . . most obfuscatory terms ingenuity could devise" (Vital 1999:430–31; see also Wistrich 1982:142–43).

the only “progressive solution” to the Jewish question (Wistrich 1982:146; cf. Traverso [1990] 1994). In short, from the Marxist perspective, anti-Semitism was a product of socioeconomic backwardness, and it was the development of the productive forces, not the building of new regulatory institutions, that would eliminate it. However, if anti-Semitism was rooted in anomie, as Durkheim insisted, then the development of modern capitalism would not by itself eradicate it; only if economic relations were adequately and fairly regulated within modern capitalist societies would anti-Semitism diminish. As a revolutionary socialist, Engels would have denied the possibility of a morally regulated capitalism, and he would have undoubtedly dismissed Durkheim’s proposals to reestablish professional groups and consolidate moral individualism as an instance of what *The Communist Manifesto* called bourgeois socialism: “The Socialistic bourgeois want all the advantages of modern social conditions without the struggles and dangers necessarily resulting therefrom. They desire the existing state of society minus its revolutionary and disintegrating elements” (Tucker 1978:496). Perhaps so, but history seems more favorable to the Durkheimian view that solutions to anti-Semitism must be sought *within* the framework of modern capitalism. After all, anti-Semitism did not disappear in Germany despite the rapid capitalist modernization of that country, nor did it vanish in the socialist regimes of Soviet Russia and Eastern Europe (Wistrich 1982:129).

#### *Durkheim and the Zionist Diagnosis of Anti-Semitism*

Alongside the socialist analysis of anti-Semitism propounded by Engels, the Zionist analysis provided another major theoretical alternative to Durkheim’s own. Even more emphatically than Durkheim, the Zionists rejected the modernization thesis; they insisted that anti-Semitism was a new, secular, and modern phenomenon, not just a reaction against modernization or a “revival of medieval Christian Jew-hatred” (Hertzberg 1968:5–6). There was less agreement within the Zionist movement about which aspects of modernity or which features of modern society gave rise to anti-Semitism. Rather than tracing anti-Semitism to anomie, as Durkheim did, the movement’s theoreticians tended to trace it to the rise of nationalism or the socioeconomic position of Jews in modern societies.

For Zionists who saw Europe moving in a nationalist direction, anti-Semitism was rooted in the growing drive for internal unity within nation-states. The faster and further the other nations of Europe moved in this direction, “the more clearly the Question of the Jews unfailingly came into focus and the firmer the refusal all around . . . to fit them into any of the versions of the new scheme of things . . . . If they were an anomalous category in multinational empires, they were fated to be rendered entirely unacceptable and incomprehensible in nation-states” (Vital 1999:254–55; cf. Avineri 1981:10–12). Anti-Semitic persecution, Moshe Leib Lilienblum concluded in 1883, thus had “a nationalistic basis.” “The over-all trend toward nationalism,” he wrote, was “not a regression” but the wave of the future. If Europe’s modern civilization was a nationalistic civilization, he argued, then anti-Semitism was its “shadow.” The “drive for national self-determination” was “the very soil in which anti-Semitism flourishes.” Thus, “our new and fine contemporary civilization . . . will no more do away with anti-Semitism than the light will destroy the shadows it casts” (Lilienblum, in Hertzberg 1959:173–74). Similarly, in an argument that anticipated later anthropological research on the taboos surrounding cultural anomalies (Douglas 1966), Leo Pinsker suggested that fear and hatred of Jews stemmed from their anomalous existence as a nation without “the effective attributes of national life,” a figurative

“soul without a body...lacking real, corporeal existence” (Avineri 1981:77). Under these conditions, the only way in which Jews could normalize their social existence was to reconstitute themselves as a nation. “If the Jews are hated because they have no homeland, normalization will become possible only if they acquire one. Were this to happen, then the nations of the world would view the Jews as normal human beings and would consequently lose the inordinate fear of them. No concrete, real attribute of the Jews causes Judeophobia; it is the abnormality of the Jews being somewhere between a national existence and a lack of a real foundation for that existence. For the Jews to appear like other people they need a homeland, Pinsker argues: then everybody will relate to them as normal people and Judeophobia will wither away (Avineri 1981:77).<sup>23</sup>

For other Zionists, the origins of anti-Semitism lay not so much in modern nationalism as in modern socioeconomic relations between Jews and non-Jews. This kind of diagnosis can be found in the work of Theodor Herzl. He saw in anti-Semitism a new problem produced by emancipation itself, which therefore could not be remedied by it. Emancipation, he explained in 1896, freed Jews from discriminatory legislation and placed them “into fierce competition with the [non-Jewish] middle classes” (quoted in Avineri 1981:93). Socialist Zionists like Nachman Syrkin and Ber Borochov also stressed the modern socioeconomic roots of anti-Semitism. Syrkin started from the same premises as Engels—he, too, saw anti-Semitism as the social protest of the “declining classes”—but arrived at very different conclusions. In contrast to Engels, Syrkin expected “an *increase* in social anti-Semitism with the development of further crises in the fabric of modern society. From a marginal phenomenon of the social demimonde,” anti-Semitism would become “the political weapon of the social establishment itself in its fight for survival” (Avineri 1981:131, emphasis added). “The classes fighting each other,” Syrkin wrote in 1898, “will unite in their common attack on the Jew. The dominant elements of capitalist society...seek to use the religious and racial struggle as a substitute for the class struggle” (Syrkin, in Hertzberg 1959:340). Borochov, the principal theoretician of Zionist Marxism, also saw anti-Semitism as an economically determined phenomenon. “Anti-Semitism,” he argued in 1906, “flourishes because of the national competition between the Jewish and non-Jewish petit bourgeoisie and between Jewish and non-Jewish proletarianized and unemployed masses” (Borochov, in Hertzberg 1959:361). Such competition was part and parcel of modern capitalism, Borochov pointed out, not a reaction against it. The logic of these analyses pointed to a nationalist solution. Zionist thinkers who stressed the socioeconomic roots of anti-Semitism believed that the creation of a Jewish state would diminish anti-Semitism in various ways: fostering “an inner migration of Christian citizens into the positions relinquished by Jews” (Herzl, in Hertzberg 1959:214), shunting the migration of poor Russian Jews to Palestine rather than Western Europe, empowering Jews by providing them with a “real, material base for their social existence” (Avineri 1981:131), or eliminating the “antagonisms *within* the social classes themselves” that distorted and doomed the revolutionary class struggle (Avineri 1981:150).<sup>24</sup>

<sup>23</sup>About Jews, Douglas (1966:104) remarked: “Belief in their sinister but undefinable advantages in commerce justifies discrimination against them—whereas their real offense is always to have been outside the formal structure of Christendom.” Pinsker’s point was that Jews were no less anomalous after the shift that Anderson (1991) describes from religiously imagined communities and dynastic realms to the imagined community of the nation.

<sup>24</sup>Consistent with Zionist diagnoses, Brustein (2003) and Brustein and King (2004) found that worsening economic conditions and Jewish immigration increased anti-Semitism between 1899 and 1939.

Durkheim's sociological analysis of anti-Semitism differed from the Zionist analysis in at least four key ways. First, like the analysis formulated by Engels and the German socialists, the Zionist analysis arose from a social movement, which would have made its scientific value suspect in Durkheim's eyes. Second, like the orthodox Marxists, the Zionists did not distinguish between types of anti-Semitism. Indeed, insofar as the Zionists took nationalism and economic competition to be ubiquitous features of modern civilization, they had difficulty explaining variations in anti-Semitism.

Third, Durkheim and the Zionists differed about the causes of anti-Semitism. Durkheim traced anti-Semitism to an abnormal or pathological state of affairs (anomie), while the Zionists traced it to features of modern society that Durkheim did not regard as abnormal or pathological, namely, the position of Jews as a minority group or as economic competitors within a non-Jewish society. Durkheim would have been skeptical of the claim that anti-Semitism was a necessary and unavoidable "shadow" of nationalism or an inevitable result of the drive for internal unity within nation-states. To begin with, the claim rested on a purely mechanical notion of social solidarity based on sameness; it did not allow for an organic form of solidarity based on the interdependence of differentiated parts. In any case, even if national solidarity remained predominantly mechanical in form, it would not explain why Jews were perceived as social outsiders during the Dreyfus Affair. In Third Republic France, Durkheim pointed out, the Jews lost their "ethnic character" and assimilated into French society "with extreme rapidity." Furthermore, Durkheim (1957:Ch. 6) did not see nationalism as the defining feature of modern civilization, or at least not the only one. In his view, national patriotism coexisted in tension with "world patriotism," a universalistic orientation that he associated with moral individualism (1957: 72).<sup>25</sup> At the same time, Durkheim would have been equally skeptical of the claim that anti-Semitism was rooted in economic competition between Jews and non-Jews. As previously noted, he did not believe that anti-Semitism was determined in an exclusively economic manner. In any case, Durkheim insisted, it was not so much competition that was socially disruptive as *unregulated* competition. "The role of solidarity," he wrote, "is not to abolish competition but to moderate it" (Durkheim [1893] 1984:302).

Fourth, Durkheim and the Zionists differed about the remedies for anti-Semitism. Both proposed short-term measures for immediate relief as well as long-term strategies to address what they conceived to be the root causes of anti-Semitism. In the short term, the Zionists organized Jewish self-defense against the pogroms in Russia and, after that country's 1905 revolution, committed themselves to further liberalizing the Russian regime (Vital 1999:529–33, 571–74, 616). In the long run, the Zionists conceived of the Jewish question as a national question that required a national answer. While Durkheim's analysis of anti-Semitism might have led him to endorse at least some of the Zionist movement's short-term strategies in Russia, it militated against their long-term solution. "The departure of the Jews," Herzl wrote

<sup>25</sup>A fuller discussion of these issues would need to consider the distinction between civic and ethnic nationalism and to what extent it aligns with Durkheim's distinction between acute and chronic anti-Semitism. National and world patriotism could be reconciled and merged, Durkheim (1957) argued, insofar as individual nation-states became the vehicles for carrying universal moral ideals into effect. In other words, each nation-state would have to direct its energies inward, toward becoming "the most just" and "best organized" society, rather than outward toward "exterior expansion" and conflict with other nation-states (1957:74–75). Liberal, cultural, and socialist Zionists would have been congenial to this conception of nationalism.

in 1896, “will leave no wake of economic disturbance, no crises . . . . The outflow will be gradual, without any disturbance” (Hertzberg 1959:213–14). But for Durkheim, such a mass departure would be as disruptive to French society as the efforts of a “sick person” to “tear himself up with his own hands.” French Jews, now integrated into a highly interdependent French society, could not be torn out of that society without severe damage to the social organism. For this reason, Durkheim would have viewed Zionist proposals for mass emigration to Palestine as no less dysfunctional for French society than anti-Semitic demands to exclude Jews from politics and the state service or to expel them from France.

## CONCLUSION

In this introduction, I have summarized the principal contributions that “Anti-Semitism and Social Crisis” makes to a Durkheimian sociology of anti-Semitism, related those contributions to Durkheim’s broader theoretical assumptions and concerns, situated his analysis of anti-Semitism in its social and historical context, and contrasted it to other analyses of anti-Semitism (Marxist and Zionist) that were prominent in Durkheim’s time. In the concluding pages, I undertake two final tasks. On the one hand, I indicate some of the revisions and additions that a fuller and more complete Durkheimian theory of anti-Semitism would entail. On the other hand, I highlight the significance of Durkheim’s ideas for the sociology of racism and anti-Semitism today. In this manner, I hope to show that what Giddens (1971:513) says about Durkheim’s political sociology applies equally well to his sociology of anti-Semitism: “However marked its limitations,” it “has by no means lost its relevance to modern social theory.”

### *Toward a Durkheimian Theory of Anti-Semitism*

“Anti-Semitism and Social Crisis” provides important elements for a Durkheimian theory of anti-Semitism. By no means, however, does it provide a complete or fully worked-out theory. As Durkheim himself acknowledged, his observations were only a preliminary and tentative step toward elucidating this phenomenon. To develop a full-fledged Durkheimian sociology of anti-Semitism, one would need to address at least four limitations and lacunas of his analysis.

First, while Durkheim’s attempt to develop a morphology of anti-Semitism was a distinctive and potentially valuable contribution, “Anti-Semitism and Social Crisis” focuses almost entirely on its acute form. Durkheim made little effort to analyze the chronic form of anti-Semitism, nor did he provide a systematic and sustained comparison of the two forms in terms of their causes, functions, and remedies. Had he done so, he might have been able to carry on a richer and more fruitful dialogue with his socialist and Zionist contemporaries. After all, the socialist and Zionist movements were more concerned with the chronic form of anti-Semitism found in Germany and Russia than the acute form found in France, and some of Durkheim’s disagreements with them may simply have been due to their preoccupation with different forms of anti-Semitism. They were, in a sense, talking past rather than to one another.

Second, prior to the publication of “Anti-Semitism and Social Crisis,” Durkheim ([1897] 1951) made a careful distinction between social integration and social regulation. “Society,” he wrote, “is not only something attracting the sentiments and activities of individuals with unequal force. It is also a power controlling them” ([1897]

1951:241). Durkheim suggested that the suicide rate was related to integration as well as regulation. By combining these two dimensions of social order (integration and regulation), he was able to develop a four-fold typology of suicide (egoistic, altruistic, anomic, fatalistic). In contrast, Durkheim's analysis of anti-Semitism is formulated entirely in terms of social regulation and its absence (anomie). The relationship between anti-Semitism and social integration is thus left unclear. By incorporating social integration into his analysis of anti-Semitism, it would perhaps be possible to develop a more complex typology of this phenomenon as well.

Third, Durkheim's theory of anti-Semitism rests in part on the familiar scapegoat thesis, but he did not adequately explain why the Jews were selected for this role. "Those persons whom opinion already disfavors are naturally singled out for this role," he noted, but surely the Jews were not the only group in *fin-de-siècle* France who fit this description. As Brustein and King (2004:37) pointed out, "the scapegoat thesis fails to inform us why Jews rather than other minorities became scapegoats for national distress or why in certain societies where Jews were present, other groups served as scapegoats." Such an explanation is needed to complete Durkheim's analysis.

Fourth, Durkheim ([1895] 1982:119–25) was usually careful to distinguish the causes of social phenomena from their functions. Because "our need for things . . . cannot [by itself] produce them" ([1895] 1982:120), he noted, the function of a social phenomenon does not explain its origins. Although a complete explanation of the phenomenon would include both cause and function, "*the efficient cause which produces it and the function it fulfils must be investigated separately*" ([1895] 1982:123, emphasis in the original). However, in "Anti-Semitism and Social Crisis," Durkheim appears to violate his own sociological method by muddling together the cause and function of anti-Semitism. He seems to suggest that anti-Semitism arises *in order* to restore social solidarity and unite society around hatred of the Jew. To refine and complete Durkheim's analysis, one would need to provide a causal explanation of the origins of anti-Semitism and separate it clearly from Durkheim's analysis of the function it fulfils, in much the same way that he separated the causes and function of the division of labor.

Fifth, "Anti-Semitism and Social Crisis" makes little use of the analytical tools that Durkheim developed to investigate "symbolic structures and processes in the modern world" (Emirbayer 1996:115). These tools were a product of Durkheim's growing interest in religion. In religion, he saw both the germ from which all other social phenomena were derived and a model of how secular symbolic processes work (Alexander 1988). Although this turn to religion began in the late 1890s, when Durkheim wrote "Anti-Semitism and Social Crisis," he did not fully develop the theoretical tools to investigate symbolic structures until the publication of *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* in 1912. There, Durkheim suggested that "religious beliefs, and by extension, other cultural formations, are organized according to a binary logic: They embody symbolic polarities that divide social and metaphysical reality into such antithetical categories as the rational and the irrational, the intelligible and the mysterious, the sacred and the profane . . . . Within the fundamental 'genus' of the sacred, moreover, one encounters additional subdivisions, between such categories as the pure and the impure, the divine and the diabolical, and the guardians of order and the dispensers of chaos . . . . Symbolic formations, in short, exhibit a complex internal structure and organization" (Emirbayer 1996:115–16). As Emirbayer (1996:117) points out, this "late Durkheimian approach . . . offers . . . a powerful means to investigate the internal structure of symbolic formations" and the

“cultural logics [that] *constrain and enable* action” (emphasis in the original). Unfortunately, however, “Anti-Semitism and Social Crisis” is devoid of such investigations; it contains no exploration of the internal symbolic structure of anti-Semitism as a cultural formation. Perhaps if Durkheim had dealt with the topic of anti-Semitism later and studied the phenomenon more extensively, he might have addressed this omission. In any case, this kind of cultural analysis would be necessary to complete and extend Durkheim’s theory of anti-Semitism.<sup>26</sup>

### *Durkheim and the Sociology of Contemporary Racism*

The debate in which Durkheim was involved about the nature and causes of anti-Semitism in Europe bears some striking analogies to contemporary debates about racism. Now, as then, social analysts remain divided about the role of affect, interests, and ideology. This is evident from the work of Sears, Hetts, Sidanius, and Bobo (2000), who usefully distinguish three broad theoretical models of racism: social-psychological, social-structural, and political. Despite the preliminary nature of Durkheim’s analysis of anti-Semitism and its resulting limitations, it has valuable implications for each of these models.

Perhaps the most prominent example of *social-psychological theories* is the symbolic-racism model, which “emphasizes the deep embeddedness and durability of white racism independent of actual group interests” (Manza 2000:829); it traces whites’ political behavior to their negative feelings toward blacks and their commitments to traditional values that blacks are perceived to violate (Sears et al. 2000:16–22). While Durkheim’s analysis of anti-Semitism shares some important commonalities with this model, it also reveals some of its limitations. Durkheim ([1897] 1951, [1895] 1982) was careful to distinguish sociology from psychology, and he insisted that a social fact cannot be explained by the psychological properties of individuals. A Durkheimian approach would therefore caution us against overly individualistic explanations of ethnic and racial antagonism, explanations that focus primarily on individual attitudes, affect, and value commitments. His own analysis of anti-Semitism draws attention to its functions not just for individuals (e.g., to manage anxiety) but for society as a whole. Moreover, because Durkheim stressed the importance of how individuals are associated and organized, his analysis of anti-Semitism provides a bridge to social-structural theories; it suggests that negative affect (those persons whom opinion already disfavors) is not sufficient to generate collective violence against minorities or their civil exclusion. Rather, it is the combination of affect and value commitments with social-structural conditions (*anomie*) that produces these outcomes.

*Social-structural theories* contend that “racial and ethnic groups experience a sense of competition over scarce resources (which has a real, not purely symbolic foundation), and dominant groups generate stereotypes of subordinate groups to justify their dominance” (Manza 2000:830; see Sears et al. 2000:22–27). These theories are akin to the Marxist explanation of anti-Semitism and those Zionist explanations that stressed economic competition, and they are therefore vulnerable to some of the Durkheimian criticisms noted earlier. Most importantly, by assuming already existing solidary groups, group-interest theories presuppose precisely what a Durkheimian

<sup>26</sup>See Wilson (1982) on the symbolic polarities that characterized anti-Semitic ideology. Jews, of course, were always linked to the negative terms in these polarities. For a general discussion of how the Durkheimian categories of pure and impure structure civil discourse, see Alexander (2006:53–67).

approach helps to explain: how groups are formed and held together, how solidarity is established and maintained, and how the boundaries of solidarity are contracted or expanded.

*Political theories* explain opposition to contemporary racial policies in terms of political ideology rather than racist sentiments or group interests (Sears et al. 2000:27–31). From this perspective, “attitudes toward racial policy are at heart about politics”—specifically, the proper role of government in resolving social problems—“and not race” (Sears et al. 2000:29). These theories may be useful for explaining opposition to specific policies that aim to help minorities, but they seem less helpful for understanding mass mobilization for the civil exclusion of minority groups or collective violence against them. This is particularly so when hostility to those groups can be found (as it was during the Dreyfus Affair) on both sides of the political spectrum. For these kinds of phenomena, in which it is not just assistance to minorities but minorities themselves who are attacked, a Durkheimian theory that emphasizes the restoration of solidarity through scapegoating may prove to be more cogent.

#### *Durkheim and the Sociology of Contemporary Anti-Semitism*

“Anti-Semitism and Social Crisis” has gained renewed relevance in the light of recent concerns about a revival of anti-Semitism at the turn of the millennium (All-Party Parliamentary Group Against Anti-Semitism 2006; European Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia 2004, 2006; Harrison 2006; Taguieff [2002] 2004). As Laqueur (2006:207) remarks, “antisemitism is a historical topic, but because it has not yet ended, it is not solely of historical interest.” Today anti-Semitism is found not only in far-right groups in the West, but is also present within left-wing circles (Laqueur 2006:182–89), including the anti-globalization movement, and is widespread in the Muslim world (Laqueur 2006:191–206). In the contemporary context, anti-Semitism is linked to anti-Zionism. While the two are by no means synonymous, there is currently considerable overlap between them, and anti-Zionism provides a cover and vehicle for the reemergence of anti-Semitic sentiments, imagery, and motifs (Cohen 2003; Hirsh 2007; Markovits 2007:150–200). Despite growing public attention to this resurgence of anti-Semitism, it remains undertheorized by contemporary sociology. One reason for this is undoubtedly the tendency to dismiss concerns about anti-Semitism as an attempt to silence criticism of Israel. No country should be immune from criticism. However, *ad hominem* arguments cannot be considered valid in the social sciences, and criticism of Israel should not blind sociologists to the existence of a pervasive and dangerous anti-Semitism in our time. While Durkheim’s analysis of anti-Semitism cannot be transposed to current circumstances without taking into consideration the dramatic changes that have taken place since his time—most fundamentally, the genocide of the Jews in Europe and the birth of the state of Israel—it nevertheless remains a source of insight.

Postone (2006) provides one of the few serious attempts within contemporary social theory to explain the current resurgence of anti-Semitism, and his analysis therefore serves as a useful starting point for reconsidering Durkheim’s contributions. Postone argues that anti-Semitism cannot be understood simply as political blowback to Israeli policies. “While American and Israeli policies have doubtlessly contributed to the rise of this new wave of anti-Semitism, the United States and Israel occupy subject positions in the [anti-Semitic] ideology that go far beyond their actual empirical roles” (2006:99). Focusing on anti-Semitism in the Arab world,

Postone traces it to the worldwide collapse of Fordism, the inability of that region's authoritarian regimes to adjust, and the regional *déclassement* that has resulted. Anti-Semitism serves in this context as “a fetishized anticapitalist ideology which claims to make sense of a world perceived as threatening” (2006:101); it “understands the abstract domination of capital—which subjects people to the compulsion of mysterious forces they cannot perceive—as the domination of International Jewry” (2006:99). “This ideology may be sparked and exacerbated by Israel and Israeli policies,” he acknowledges, “but its resonance is rooted in the relative decline of the Arab world against the backdrop of the massive structural transformations associated with the transition from Fordism to neoliberal global capitalism” (2006:101–02). While in Postone's view anti-Semitism is a form of resistance to these transformations, it is a profoundly reactionary rather than progressive form (2006:102); it is once again the socialism (and the anti-imperialism) of fools (2006:99).

Postone's thesis is essentially an updated and reconstructed version of the analysis originally put forward by Engels. While it is therefore open to some of the same Durkheimian criticisms, it can also be reformulated along more Durkheimian lines. Recall that Durkheim saw anti-Semitism not as a reaction to capitalist modernization per se, but as a reaction to the anomie that was associated with the transition to modern capitalism. Recall, too, that in Durkheim's view anomie could also have noneconomic sources. A neo-Durkheimian theory might understand contemporary hatred of Jews and the Jewish state as a residue of chronic anti-Semitism in some parts of the world, where it never really subsided, and as an acute phenomenon in other parts of the world, where it is linked to particular social crises. Such crises would certainly comprise the neoliberal economic restructuring that Postone emphasizes, which has produced on a global scale the kind of anomie that Durkheim described in *The Division of Labor*, but they would not be limited to it. Contemporary crises would also include the dramatic series of terror attacks by Islamist radicals in recent years (in Israel since 2000, the United States in 1993 and 2001, Spain in 2004, and Britain in 2005) and the aggressive military and police responses to them, all of which contribute to the perception of a violent and intensifying “clash of civilizations” (Huntington 1996) that threatens to spill outside of and perhaps even overwhelm regulatory frameworks at the domestic and international levels.<sup>27</sup> In this context of global anomie, where it is feared that the “law of the strongest” will prevail (cf. Durkheim [1893] 1984), the Jewish state and the international “Lobby” that is said to promote its interests (the contemporary equivalent of the “Jewish Syndicate” denounced by the anti-Dreyfusards) are held responsible. As French diplomat Daniel Bernard reportedly put it, “the current troubles in the world were all because of ‘that shitty little country Israel.’” “Why,” he added, “should the world be in danger of World War Three because of those people?” (Amiel 2001).<sup>28</sup> From a Durkheimian perspective, this scapegoating serves to restore social solidarity

<sup>27</sup>The interpretation of recent geopolitical conflicts as a “clash of civilizations” is questionable, but the point is that such conflicts indicate a weakening of social regulation. Bergesen and Lizardo (2004) suggest that the current wave of international terrorism is associated with a weakening of U.S. economic hegemony, which formed the basis of an “American Peace” during the Cold War (2004:48), and America's subsequent “defensive maneuvering to maintain militarily what implicitly was guaranteed previously through economic hegemony” (2004:46). If this analysis is correct, it would account for the rise in global anomie and link the economic and geopolitical crises described here.

<sup>28</sup>In this context it is worth recalling the rumors, spread by Arab and Iranian media, that Israel was responsible for the destruction of the World Trade Center in 2001 (Cox 2001; Michael 2008); Malaysian prime minister Mahathir Mohamad's remarks that “the Jews rule the world by proxy” and “get others to fight and die for them” (Reuters 2003); and the allegation that the “Israel Lobby” is to blame for the U.S. invasion of Iraq in 2003 (Mearsheimer and Walt 2007). What Wilson (1982:422) wrote about the Jewish

(albeit in a pathological way) at three levels: the *global level*, where it is believed that the dissolution of Israel as a Jewish state would cleanse the Middle East of a foreign and polluting element and thus bring about harmonious and peaceful relations between the Muslim world and the West; the *regional level*, where it helps to unify an otherwise heterogeneous Muslim world and at the same time to construct an equally heterogeneous Europe in postnationalist terms as the progressive and civil antithesis to a putatively backward and anti-civil Jewish nationalism; and lastly the *political-ideological level*, where it serves to unify an extreme left bereft since the end of the Cold War of the ideologies that once gave it coherence while brokering alliances between the extreme left and Islamist groups (e.g., the Respect Party in Britain).<sup>29</sup>

A Durkheimian perspective suggests that ultimately such scapegoating will only add to human suffering without addressing the underlying causes of today's "social malaise." Indeed, it diverts attention from the difficult but vital task of building effective regulatory institutions that can moderate social conflict, introduce more justice into economic relations, deepen and spread moral individualism, and effect greater harmony and less tension between national and world patriotism. Of course, as Durkheim recognized, this work cannot be accomplished by means of sociological theory alone. However, if the interpretation of Durkheim's ideas set out in this introduction is sound, it may perhaps help "reasonable men . . . to struggle victoriously against public madness" once again.

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Syndicate applies equally well to the Israel Lobby. The former concept was "ostensibly anchored in reality as a way of referring to the Dreyfusard campaign," just as the latter concept is ostensibly anchored in reality by references to lobbying organizations like the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC). But in both cases, the concept "immediately conferred an overdetermination on its object, and allowed it, at the same time, to flow into a near cosmic design."

<sup>29</sup>It is a cruel historical irony that Jews, who were once denigrated as an "Oriental" presence in Europe, are now denounced as a "European" presence in the Middle East. On terror and solidarity, see also Alexander (2004); he notes how the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, rather than demoralizing Americans as their perpetrators intended, strengthened social solidarity among and with Americans. Durkheim's work shows how social crises can foster more pathological forms of solidarity as well. Following the Durkheimian perspective outlined here, one would expect a possible revival of militarism (in both the West and the Muslim world) in addition to a resurgence of anti-Semitism.

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## Anti-Semitism and Social Crisis (1899)†

EMILE DURKHEIM

To speak with competence about anti-Semitism, some studies would be necessary, which I have not done. I can therefore only give you my impression.

First of all, there would be grounds, I believe, to distinguish between French anti-Semitism and foreign anti-Semitism, which seem to me to be two phenomena with very different meanings. The evidence for this theory is that the countries where anti-Semitism is most longstanding understood nothing about the events which recently occurred in France [i.e., the Dreyfus Affair]. Germany may have been reluctant to

†Translated by Chad Alan Goldberg with the generous assistance of Ivan Ermakoff, Anne Genereux, and Florence Vatan.

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understand what was going on; but this does not hold true for Russia and yet it has demonstrated the same disapproving amazement.

If Russia has been so surprised and so shocked, it is mainly because it recognized none of its own experiences in the passions which were then stirred here.

What distinguishes the two states of mind, it seems to me, is that German or Russian anti-Semitism is chronic, traditional, while ours constitutes an acute crisis, due to passing circumstances. The first [state of mind] has an aristocratic character; it springs from contempt and haughtiness. Ours is inspired by destructive, violent passions, which seek to assert themselves by all means. Moreover, it is not the first time that the phenomenon occurred in this form.

One has already seen it in the regions of the East, at the time of the [Franco-Prussian] war of 1870; being myself of Jewish origin, I was then able to observe it closely. The Jews got blamed for the defeats. In 1848, finally, an explosion of the same kind, but much more violent, occurred in Alsace.

These comparisons suggest that our current anti-Semitism is the consequence and the superficial symptom of a state of social malaise. It was the case in 1870 as in 1848 (there was, in 1847, a very serious economic crisis).

When society suffers, it needs someone to blame, someone upon whom to avenge itself for its disappointments; and those persons whom opinion already disfavors are naturally singled out for this role. It is the pariahs who serve as expiatory victims. What confirms my interpretation is the manner in which the trial of [Alfred] Dreyfus, in 1894, was greeted. There was a fervent joy in the streets. People celebrated as a success what they should have marked by public mourning. As a result of the trial, people finally knew whom to blame for the economic troubles and the moral distress through which they lived. Evil came from the Jews. The fact was officially certified. By virtue of that alone, it seemed that everything was already better and they felt comforted.

Undoubtedly, secondary circumstances may have played a role. The vaguely religious aspirations that recently emerged found an outlet in this [anti-Dreyfusard] movement; certain failings of the Jewish race could be invoked to justify it. But these are secondary causes. The failings of the Jew are compensated by incontestable virtues, and, if there are better races, there are worse ones too. Moreover, the Jews lose their ethnic character with extreme rapidity. Only two generations and it was gone.

As for causes of a religious order, suffice it to say that faith was not any less ardent 20 or 30 years ago; yet anti-Semitism was not as strong then as it is now.

It [French anti-Semitism] is therefore, above all, one of the numerous indications that reveals the serious moral disturbance from which we suffer. Consequently, the true means to curb it would be to put an end to this state of trouble; but this work cannot be done in a day. There is nevertheless something that is immediately possible and urgent to begin.

If one cannot eradicate the evil at its source, one can, at least, fight this peculiar symptom which aggravates it. Since we need all our strength to renew ourselves, we should not dissipate it in futile struggles.

One does not allow a sick person to take revenge upon himself for his distress and tear himself up with his own hands.

To arrive at this outcome, it would first be necessary to repress severely all incitement to hatred of citizens against one another. Undoubtedly by themselves, repressive measures would not be sufficient to change people's minds; however, they would remind the public conscience, which is numbed, to feel what an odious crime this

is. Next it would be necessary that, while reprimanding anti-Semitism in theory, one does not in actual practice reward and hence encourage it; that the government take responsibility for enlightening the masses about the error in which they are kept and avoid even the appearance of looking for allies in the party of intolerance.

It would be necessary “finally that all reasonable men, instead of contenting themselves with a casual reprimand, might have the courage to affirm their feelings aloud, and might join forces to struggle victoriously against public madness.”