

Judaism within Modernity: Challenge to Survival*

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The Jews' encounter with modernity during the last quarter millennium has proved to be of incisive import, in many ways rendering the survival of the Jewish people and their Judaism questionable. Unlike many crises in Jewish history, the present one persists and defies resolution. We ask about the specific nature of the novel situation of the Jews' encounter with modernity, about the main features of the problems engendered by modernity and their impact on the existence and survival of the Jewish people, and we want to know the challenges they face and the means they must devise in order to survive them. Such an inquiry calls for a two-pronged philosophical reflection on the historical context: On the one hand, we remind ourselves of the ways in which Judaism has responded to crises in the past, on the other hand, by counterposing the situation of Judaism in earlier times to that within modernity we attempt to show how the jolt of this encounter has led to the problems of existence and survival.

The long history of the Jewish people has been marked by a number of encounters with incisive events that rendered their continued existence questionable. Those events spelled a change or a break in the temporal conditions under which they lived, a change that threatened not just their continuance as a distinct people, but their Judaism as well. History tells us that such an event would ordinarily insure the disappearance of a people from the stage of history. But the Jews did not disappear. The remarkable survival of the Jewish people, usually under the leadership of visionaries, is attributable to the decisive responses to those events, drawn from the resources of their spiritual legacy.

How such response to the challenge to survival was embedded in Jewish consciousness from its beginnings can be gleaned from the quasi-mythical haze of biblical history. When

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the Jews nearly perished in Egyptian servitude, there arose for them a spokesman, raised in the house of the ruler, through whom the word of God was revealed and who led them to the Promised Land, there to serve their God. When the exiled Jews were sitting and weeping by the waters of Babylon as they remembered Zion, Cyrus, king of Persia, sent them home to rebuild God's sanctuary.

The most dramatic caesura in historical times occurred when the Romans destroyed this second sanctuary and built a temple to their idols in its place, forbade the teaching of the Holy Scriptures, and exiled the greater part of the Jews from their promised land. Their teachers were able to console them and to vouchsafe the continuance of the Jewish people and their Judaism by assuring them that God's presence would accompany them and would abide with them wherever they were and as long as their Diaspora would last.

Deep caesurae these in the Jews' progress through history! Yet they continued to hold fast to what came before; and they found ever new dimensions of their mission in this world – "to be a nation of priests and a holy people" – through learning and loyalty to tradition, and to realize their mission as best they could in view of the challenges of ever changing times. But then Judaism met up with modernity as the condition *sine qua non* of human life. This confrontation proved and still proves to be the caesura in Jewish history that makes the very existence and future of the Jewish people and of Judaism problematic as never before. How decisive this break was, how great the challenge it posed, can be discerned by contrasting the Jews' situation within modernity with the condition and situation of the Jews in the times of the Diaspora caused by the Romans, which prevailed until they were confronted by modernity.

Accordingly we shall begin with a review of the status of the Jewish people in that long period preceding modernity. Against this background we can then spell out the caesura of the Jews' encounter with modernity by means of an account of the characteristic problems engendered by that encounter. In light of these problems we shall try, in a third section, to elicit the prevailing spirit of modernity that has proven so problematic for the continuance of Judaism. The extent to which the spirit of modernity can be destructive of the Jewish people, as it proved to be in the Nazi 'holocaust', is the theme of the fourth section. A final section will deal with the – as yet unmet - challenge to the survival of the Jewish people and of Judaism posed by the condition of modernity, and on the basis of a distinctly modern mode of politics.

1. Between Antiquity and Modernity

These were the times when Christianity grew from a troublesome, small but obstinate Jewish sect – repudiated by the then prevalent normative currents of Judaism – to a community conscious of a faith in its own right. As such it regarded itself as the genuine continuation of Judaism directed toward the fulfillment of the redemption promised to the Jews. For the im-

port of Christian belief – according to which Jews, who did not believe in the crucified and resurrected Jesus as the redeemer, forfeited their legacy by virtue of their unbelief – was such that Christians assumed the legacy of Judaism, that is, that Christianity had become the true Judaism. This Christian position with respect to Judaism – which, unaffected in its core, survived and continued its own development – was the basis for the position forced on Judaism in the Diaspora in Europe that unfolded on a Christian foundation, namely that the continued existence of a self-certain Judaism was anachronistic. In this way Christianity disputed the right of Judaism to its own biblical heritage, often also its right to exist, whether by means of restrictions (in rights before the law, in the economy, in the exercise of professions or trades), or by means of defamation (deicides, infidels, ritual murderers, exploiters), or at times also by means of forced conversion, persecution, ghettoization, expulsion, murder.

Considering its faith to be the divinely revealed, exclusive fundamental truth, Christianity gainsaid the claim of Judaism's fundamental truth in its own right. When Christianity alone may lay claim to the absolute truth of Being, it follows that it is valid and prevails as the only truth everywhere. This is the principle underlying Christian universalism. It can be recognized in the early Christian understanding of Christ as Pantocrator, a concept derived from the Roman imperial idea rather than the Hebrew *melekh ha'olam*. The concept has been realized in various ways, for example, in the consciousness of universal mission in the Petrine church, according to which the second coming of Christ and the establishment of the reign of God presupposes the spreading of faith in Christ as redeemer. The echo of Christian universalism can be heard in the post-Christian political phenomena of imperialism and of totalitarian ideology, and surely also in the universalistic tendencies of modern German philosophy.

What can, briefly and generally, be said about the situation and survival of Judaism in the face of the challenges of those stormy times? The Jews lived in scattered groups as spiritual enclaves within principalities which, by and by, were consolidated into nation-states. Even as competing powers, and even in mutual enmity, these polities had something in common: Their right to exist rested on the grace of the Christian God, and the validation of its citizens before the law on their confessing the Christian faith. In principle this excluded the Jews from any and all duties and privileges vouchsafed by the prevailing law. They were forbidden almost all kinds of income-earning activities of the age, with the exception of what was necessary for their own subsistence. Some Jews were permitted to engage in activities which were either forbidden to Christians or hardly accessible to them, such as extending credit, and international commerce; Jews were allowed to function as councilors, financial advisors, physicians, jewelers and minters, occasionally also as diplomats. In this way Jews were useful and attained the protection of princes and bishops, and this in turn led to the status of “toleration” which, for better or worse, prevailed until the era of emancipation. Under the system of toleration Jews did not enjoy the civil rights of citizens, but were granted the right of deciding disputes among themselves in autonomous courts, i. e., on the basis of talmudic law

aided by the rabbis' competence to render judgment. The Jews' interests vis-à-vis their non-Jewish environment were pleaded by representatives who had attained privileged positions based on their usefulness to the prevailing ruler; in some cases such representatives were appointed and paid by the Jewish community.

Scattered amid peoples of Europe who were characterized by a universal and exclusive faith, Jews living between antiquity and modernity were able to maintain themselves in a spiritual enclave. Though hardly ever recognized as human beings in their own right, though often imperiled by the others, the Jews of those long centuries were often able to structure their lives as Jewish lives, and were at times able to engage creatively in the growth and development of their spiritual legacy as well as participate in that of the West, thanks to the toleration of those in power as well as the usefulness to them of individual Jews.

These are the circumstances under which Judaism encountered modernity. The radically problematic nature of the existence and survival of Judaism proved to be the consequence of that encounter.

2. Problematic Encounter with Modernity

Jews perceived their entrance into the world brought about by the various currents of modernity as the liberation from the conditions engendered by insecurity, their relegation to a lower status, and the restrictions under which they had to live for untold generations. In the wake of the general civil liberation – that great Western idea which reached full bloom in the 18th and 19th centuries – ordinary Jews sought entry into that world, and leading Jews sought to facilitate their entry. Yet entry into modernity was accompanied, step-by-step, by developments that made the nature of Judaism problematic. We can trace this with respect to the phenomena that have shown themselves as the marks of the Jewish encounter with modernity, namely, enlightenment, emancipation, assimilation, Jew-hatred (anti-Semitism), Jewish self-hatred, secularization, renewal.

Emancipation. The attainment of civil equality was the first step toward the hoped-for emancipation. It was a step forward consisting of many back-steps and side-steps. A few markers along that way will direct us to the problems connected with it. The problematic nature of the civil equality of the Jews under the conditions of modernity was a matter of learned disputation as early as the seventies of the 18th century. At the suggestion of Moses Mendelssohn, von Dohm, a proponent of the Enlightenment, supported the conditional equality of the Jews. Michaëlis, a prominent scholar of Oriental language and literature, wrote a counter-polemic, which provoked a decisive response from Mendelssohn. The question at issue was whether the Jews had the necessary qualities to be granted civil equality despite their peculiarity, or should be subject to special legislation instead. This question can be tracked like a red thread through the generations following, a question that was resolved in a fatal manner by the Nazi-regime by means of their racist ideology. The question was first taken up by the

National Assembly of the French Revolution, in connection with a proposal to include in the constitution a clause that would guarantee to Jews their equality as citizens. Basing himself on von Dohm's theses, Count Clermont-Tonnaire supported the civil equality of the Jews, however under a condition that was as well-meant as it was suspect, and has been considered as such in the generations since. He said: "Let us grant to the Jews all that pertains to them as human beings, but nothing as Jews" - as if, to a Jew, being human were separable from being a Jew. While in the end the National Assembly adopted the civil emancipation of the Jews, Napoleon burdened it with the condition of their assimilation. A generation later, the all-German National Assembly (1848/9 at Frankfort-on-Main) adopted the civil equality of the Jews with the simple sentence: "The enjoyment of civil rights and right of citizenship is neither conditional upon nor restricted by [a person's] religious confession." However, extensive debate and great hesitation preceded the adoption of this clause. Even at the last minute the attempt was made to restrict the status of equality by means of an amendment, according to which "due to their peculiar circumstances, the Israelite people are subject to special legislation." This attempt came to naught, thanks to the speech of Assembly Vice President Gabriel Riesser - a legal scholar, one of the first Jews to attain a law degree in Germany, and a vigorous proponent of Jewish emancipation - which ended with the admonition, "that exceptional laws can [not] be legislated without causing the whole fabric of freedom to suffer a fatal fissure."

Only when the civil emancipation of the Jews and their emancipation as citizens finally became official, was the problematic nature of being-Jewish under the conditions of emancipation revealed. The question arose in many different ways as to whether it was still possible or even necessary to be Jewish under these conditions. It became clear that the constitutional guarantee of the Jew's equal right cannot guarantee his right to exist as Jew. Now the prejudices came to light, on the basis of which attempts were again made, such as those mentioned above, to apply the idea of special legislation concerning the Jews to the system of modern, liberal, equal civil rights. Even though a special status of the Jews was constitutionally precluded, the prejudices against the Jews persisted in practical life, were occasionally articulated in the form of explicit anti-Semitism, and toward the end of the 19th century took the form of political programs, dealing with national, social, as well as economic concerns. Jews had to arrive at the realization that while they might well enjoy equality before the law, the prevailing rule of law was not able to guarantee that the never dormant will to exclude the Jews would not assert itself and would find a way to prevail within a given order.

What is needed for the realization of the emancipation of man with respect to his civil status and as citizen is, in the end, not merely constitutional guarantees - indispensable though these are - but what may be called the culture of liberalism prevailing in the conviction and practice of the individual fellow-citizen. To be sure, the emancipation of the Jews is a necessary condition for their life under the condition of modernity; however, it does not suffice if this emancipation is merely a formal one. The merely formal emancipation shows

how the encounter of Judaism with modernity renders the existence and continuance of Judaism questionable. Simply put, the problem consists in that, paradoxically, existing as Jew within modernity is problematic as well as ineluctable. Thus, on the one hand, the Jew is emancipated and enjoys civil equality; on the other, he continues to be regarded as a Jew in the traditional sense, together with all that this implies. On the one hand, now that it is possible for him to live freely as a Jew, he may find that he is no longer in need of his Judaism or that it has become an unnecessary burden; on the other, the Jew finds that the world that cannot forget his being a Jew evokes in him the response of being deliberately a Jew, since such a world is in need of an actual Judaism that makes a difference for good.

Assimilation. The assimilation of Jews to their surroundings is their attempt of living as Jews under the conditions of modernity, and taking advantage of the opportunities which it offers. The phenomenon of assimilation implies not merely conformance to prevailing dress, speech and ways of life, as had been the case in former times. It is, rather, a phenomenon of being a Jew within modernity, in that the Jew is drawn to its conditions, its possibilities, and its achievements, and is drawn to it both as beneficiary and contributor. Assimilation takes place between two poles. The one side rejects any adaptation to a mode of living that would render life out of the substance of Judaism impossible. The other side is drawn to an accommodation to prevailing modes of living under whose conditions no Jewish substance will, in the end, retain any validity. For the one side any deviation from Judaism would spell its irrevocable loss. The other leads to a complete break with Judaism. Life as a Jew in the times of modernity is, of course, conditional upon some degree of assimilation. Beyond that it is the nature of modernity to draw human beings to assimilation, at the very least so that they fit in and their actions seem predictable. This pull of conformity is typical of the modern phenomenon of mass society. The individual may well feel comfortable or at least secure in the anonymity of the mass, yet no one is as alienated from the substance of a faith or of a community that gives and fulfills a purpose to life as precisely such a mass man. For this reason mass man can more readily be controlled and manipulated than an aggregation of individuals who are part of a community. The invention of means of converting an accumulation of people into masses that can be influenced and controlled, is, after all, one of the dubious achievements of modernity. In regard to Judaism, the twin phenomena of conformity and mass society are the basis of assimilation.

As in the case of emancipation, assimilation of the Jews also reveals itself as paradoxical. We recall that the totalitarian Nazi regime was the most successful politization of mass society. By its destruction of Judaism, including in particular the Judaism that had assimilated most successfully, the Nazi regime gave proof of the extent to which assimilation – by means of which Jews meant to secure their entry into modernity – could run aground. For, on the one hand, if the Jew was to be and aspired to be “one of us,” assimilation is mandatory, and he should neither present himself nor be recognizable as Jew; on the other hand, assimilation is perceived as a Jewish trick that, when all is said and done, serves to hide the

fact that the person in question is nothing other than a Jew, and hence cannot be “one of us.” Since the 19th century political anti-Semites opposed assimilation, as did the Nazis later on. In this way the problematic nature of being a Jew under the conditions of modernity also shows itself in connection with the phenomenon of assimilation.

Anti-Semitism and self-hatred. We can discern two aspects of the problematic status of Judaism engendered by the modern phenomena of emancipation and assimilation, an external and an internal aspect. What is at play in either case is spiritual as well as practical opposition to Judaism. Externally opposition manifests itself as hostility toward the very being of Judaism and as the exclusion of Jews from respective communities, societies, or polities. The extreme expression of such opposition is Jew-hatred, or, as it has been called since the end of the 19th century, anti-Semitism. Within Judaism itself this aspect of its modern problematic status is sometimes expressed as the aversion against one’s own Judaism altogether, or against some aspect of it, and leads to the phenomenon of Jewish self-hatred.

Enlightenment. Even the enlightenment of recent centuries, this fundamental motive and incisive mark of modernity, has contributed to the problematic status of Judaism. With respect to Judaism we have to distinguish two moments of enlightenment. Within Judaism enlightenment served first and foremost to liberate the Jews of Eastern Europe from the misery of the desperate condition into which they had sunk through persecution and neglect. It was the purpose of Haskalah, the Jewish enlightenment, to open for the Jews the doors to the modern world, and to make their life in it possible, in particular their life as Jews. The renowned scholar Moses Mendelssohn was a leader among those who paved the way to that goal. The entry by the Jew into modernity, as promoted by Mendelssohn, could also affect his Judaism negatively and could even be perceived as a burden one was now free to shed. Mendelssohn’s own children followed this path: They sought to rid themselves of their Judaism through conversion and change of name. The other moment was the general Western enlightenment, which, on the basis of its universal concept – according to which the dignity of man issues from his fundamental freedom as rational-ethical agent – engendered the political emancipation of mankind, including the Jews. Both aspects of enlightenment led to the problematic status of Judaism, even as they were meant to promote the continuance of Judaism in the modern world: General enlightenment by incorporating Judaism into the concept of humanity as such; Haskalah by preparing the receptivity of the Jewish spirit for such a comprehensive concept.

Secularization. In the wake of emancipation something occurred that can be characterized as the secularization of the substance and the ethos of Judaism. As such this phenomenon is not suspect, indeed there are grounds for its approbation. For example, Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, the enlightened Christian poet, recognized in the main character of his epochal drama “Nathan the Wise” the embodiment of the Jewish power of reason, a reason that could bring about the peace of tolerance by disarming enmities grounded in the diversity of confessions of faith. Thus motifs of healing, of care- and help-giving, as well as the sense of

social justice are signs of the secularization of the Jewish substance. The English social philosopher Isaiah Berlin thought he recognized in Karl Marx a contemporary who, like the prophets of old, summoned mankind to social justice. And the Jewish philosopher Emil Fackenheim means to recognize in the fully secularized left-Hegelian Ernst Bloch the conscious secularization of the Jewish messianic hope, albeit in the form of a false messianism. However, this kind of secularization is not truly a realization of Jewish substance in the world; instead, it indicates the pull of modernity in which a Jew has retained a crumb of the Judaism he has long abandoned and that he has carried into his new situation.

Renewal. All these marks of the problematic encounter of Judaism with modernity show that Jews have not only been mightily drawn in by the spirit of modernity, but have eagerly surrendered themselves to its powerful current. Thus the problematic engendered by that encounter consists not only of the questionable possibility but also of the ineluctable necessity of the being of Judaism under the conditions of modernity. Jews had been aware of the problem almost since the time that it began to unfold. For Jews this awareness meant the challenge, the necessity and the opportunity to take account of the substance of Judaism, and to draw conclusions concerning its essence and its validity. Here another marker of the problematic status of Judaism under the condition of modernity comes to light, namely the great, diverse attempts at the renewal of Judaism that began in the 18th century. It must be noted that the different modes of renewal reflect the different modes of accommodating to the demands of modernity. I am not referring so much to the new articulation of the contents of Jewish faith, of Jewish ethos, of a Jewish way of life, and of Jewish practice in accordance with modern culture. I am also not referring merely to the Jewish response to the challenge of modernity, consisting in a renewed and active will to the continuance of Judaism and of Jews as Jews. Instead, I am referring to the circumstance that the efforts of renewal unavoidably require the availability and the use of modern means of wielding power, that is, political power and statecraft, and, in the end, the kind of power by means of which this traditionally peaceable people can defend the existence and survival of Judaism also with arms if need be.

The radical duress experienced by Jewry under the Nazi regime presented it with its greatest challenge to renew itself under the condition of modernity that had brought about its problematic. The actuality of this utmost challenge to the continuance of Judaism is itself an effect of the radicality whose possibility is characteristic of modernity. We shall attempt to shed light on that radical duress and on the challenge for renewal, as well as their mutual relation as phenomena of the encounter with modernity. To that end it is useful to show essential aspects of the idea of modernity that are at play in the problem we are addressing.

3. The Spirit of Modernity: Some Aspects

As is the case with all matters spiritual that are forces of history, the spirit of modernity is not easily available to conceptual definition, so also not with respect to what is essential for our topic. We express spiritual forces that are effective in history in the form of ideas which, being richer than epistemic concepts, defy universally accepted conceptual definition. Therefore we are not able to do better than reflect on the nature of modernity that corresponds to the topic at hand.

Among the aspects usually cited is the self-conscious and independent *rationality* that, devoid of obligation, is equally at the disposal of anyone – whether he be useful or harmful, the accused or the accuser, the humanist or the tyrant. Rationality is not anchored in faith, or in ethos, or in conviction.

Typically modern is also the sophisticated rigor of *critical thought* and linguistic expression, as well as their broad application not just to disciplined research but to all kinds of transactions, including the formulation, promulgation and execution of official rulings.

Significant for modernity is also the will and capacity of the minutely precise and effective execution of projects, whether scientific experimentation, or design of machinery, or artistic creation, or city planning, or political and military campaigns, or the extermination of people.

Another aspect is the modern *fascination with universality*, where all that is is taken up into a universal idea or concept or ideology, and not just the particular but all that in principle is opposed to universality, and all that defies universalization, such as: what is original in its historicity; what has yet to be enacted by virtue of reason; what has yet to be realized through the power of faith; what is yet to be created by spiritual talent. Most of us who are confronted with the great diversity of realities, are inclined to arrange it with reference to an idea that functions as a key to reality. In view of the confusion of the world, the vision of an idea can put the mind at ease. However, we are not concerned here about what has validity in individuals or among specific groups; our concern is the fascination of universality. This fascination is a matter of knowing-all where man can really not know all, and a matter of the will to bring an all-encompassing idea to bear on the actualities of the world and make the world conform to it. The force of a universal idea is immeasurable, and the modern will to have an idea prevail knows no bounds. All science, all technological achievement, all means of control, every administrative or executive organization can find itself at the disposal of the fascination with universality.

The phenomenon of the fascination with universality brings us close to what, with respect to our topic, is the underlying motive of modernity, even though the factors mentioned are presuppositions or essential components of the decisive feature. This is the *spirit of modernity*, which I see as the motive of carrying through what has been conceived in form of a universal – especially in its intellectual-communicative and political-ideological simplification – and making it the norm for determining all attainable reality and every reachable human being, and bringing it to bear in its most minute detail. This phenomenon does not only pertain to

those who, as rulers or as opinion makers, determine the direction of this comprehensive motive. Rather, every human being, all human actualities seem to participate in this decisive motive, in their own persons as well as in their limited sphere of influence. The complex nature of modern life itself seems to bring this about.

Modernity as ‘mode’, that is, in the sense of how people present themselves within the context of a given time and place, is as old as culture itself. It pertains to the areas of everyday life, such as fashions in dress and grooming, and ways of personal attitudes and social intercourse. However, modernity in the sense addressed in our topic is a matter of deliberate reference to the ancient category of *modus*, of *métron*, as articulation of the motive of giving shape to the humanity prevalent at a given time, down to the most minute detail, in accordance with norms that are themselves subject to change. The self-conscious concept of ‘modernity’ is itself the most telling designation of the spirit of that which I am proposing as the decisive feature of modernity.

Hence Jews are not only casually and tangentially swept along by modernity, but, insofar as living under the conditions of modernity is simply indispensable as well as unavoidable for any life in our times, Jews are, severally and collectively, positive participants in the prevalence of the spirit of modernity. Yet, since time immemorial, being Jewish has meant structuring the stages and moments of our temporality, even the minutiae of our everyday and our productive activity, in accordance with the direction received from the divine ground of Being. And now, since most areas of human existence have been taken over by the ever penetrating, ever encompassing motive of modernity, authentic Judaism has been and is being pushed aside to a position of unimportance, of irrelevance, of being considered old-fashioned, occasionally of mere rite and ritual, of that to which one pays lip-service, and finally of being perceived as a disturbance, as foreign, as out-of-step. In this way the fundamental motive of modernity is to be recognized as both the internal as well as the external source of the problematic nature of the present status and the future survival of Judaism, whether impelled by enlightenment and emancipation, whether in form of anti-Semitism or self-hatred, whether as challenge to renewal.

4. The Holocaust in Light of the Fundamental Motive of Modernity

The annihilation of the Jews of Europe and the destruction of European Judaism by the Nazi regime of Germany, the so-called Holocaust, is to be regarded as the most extreme use and actualization of that which we have designated as the fundamental motive of modernity. It is only in this sense that the Holocaust manifests itself as the radical form of the problematic status of Judaism through its encounter with modernity. The questions, why the Jews?, why Germany of all the places?, belong inevitably to the topic “Holocaust”, but are of secondary importance for our topic.

Let us approach this topic by stating the following series of facts:

In Nazi ideology and in the totalitarian Nazi state assertions and ideas were circulated about a part of the population designated by definition; they were broadcast by all available media-technical means, raised to quasi-scientific respectability by means of racial theorizing, promoted by means of mass-political organization. By these as well as other means and through endless repetition they were inculcated into and reinforced in the minds of the populace, they were confirmed by means of propaganda, public manifestations, actions, excesses, and decrees, the anything but subtle aim of which were that of control by terror; – and all that engendered an awareness intensified to the widely held conviction that the part of the population thus defined had no right to exist. The segment of the population selected in this way as victim was, strangely, the Jews. And another curious fact: The guardians of that ideology and masters of that state proceeded to effect the denial of the right to exist of that segment of humanity that they had defined as Jewish. They did so without regard to other possible priorities, such as economic practicalities, or the sound conduct of war. They did not hesitate to burden the national conscience, especially of succeeding generations, nor did they exhibit any universal human moral scruples. And they proceeded with the systematic and organizational know-how and thoroughness of which the Germans had always been rightfully proud: in administration, in the economy, in the processes of production no less than in the intellectual realms of scientific research and of systematic philosophy.

The right of the survival of Judaism and its validity in its own right had in the past often come into question; even the elimination of the Jews is an old idea, as attested to in the Book of Esther. And here or there Jews have been persecuted and murdered throughout the centuries of Christian Europe. However, never before had the possibility been considered of preventing, in radical actualization, the continuance of Judaism through the elimination of the Jews. This, the possibility that had never before been thought of as actualizable, now became actual: In order to execute its Jewish policy and on the basis of its new laws, the regime of a German nation set out to exterminate the Jews and organized an elaborate machinery in order to accomplish this in a systematic and rational way. And this project was carried out in the name of the German people and by Germans, ordinary people from all strata of society, as much as possible in secret and in the shadow of an ongoing war. It was carried out on the basis of directives from superior authorities, directives that were not always and everywhere approved of, yet tolerated and obeyed.

What is so striking about these events is that they did not take place in the darkness of pre-historic barbarism, and do not even fit what we know of early times, but that they occurred precisely in our time, that is, under the conditions of modernity. The question now is how to explain this on the basis of the essence of modernity. Let us proceed by trying to grasp the phenomenon of the totalitarian will.

First, to paraphrase Hegel's treatment of the will (*The Philosophy of Right*, par. 22ff), the will whose potentialities have become fully realized is truly infinite because its object is itself. Hence its object does not constitute an *other* nor does it constitute a *barrier*; instead, in its ob-

ject the will has merely returned to itself. However, only insofar as it is fully realized is the will not merely the will of a “particular individual” but “the absolute drive of the free [absolute] Spirit,” whose activity absorbs and does away with “the contradiction of subjectivity and objectivity” by “transferring” “its purposes from the determination” of its subjectivity to that of its objectivity. What is Hegel attempting here? He is aiming to base the concept of “right” on a concept of “will” whose capacity of determining what is right extends beyond the merely individually determined will of a liberalism such as that of Kant and Rousseau. Hegel relies on the authentic universality of the absolute Spirit to prove itself in the stages of *dialectical conflict*, in the conflict between historically determined particular wills, which are each to its opposite an “other” and a “barrier”. However, Hegel fails to anticipate the possibility of an historically determined particular will presenting itself as a total will, much less as a totalitarian will. It is a will that – fascinated by what, for it, counts as universality – is infinitely willing to enforce that universal as the sole valid truth, without proving itself in any “dialectical conflict.” It does so in accordance with the fundamental spirit of modernity and with the aid of all ingenious means available to modernity. Any will that may count as “other” is excluded, and in the process all “barriers” are disregarded and obliterated.

The total will aims to subdue and to absorb the particular will as well as the will of the individual. The will is totalitarian insofar as it intends to dominate all aspects of human existence. Hence the will is not bent on domination over all human beings, who as such are expendable. Rather, *total domination itself is the goal*. The emphasis lies not so much on what or who is being controlled, but on the fact that control is exercised.

It is the task of a totalitarian movement to attain the political power that alone enables the exercise of the will to total domination. To this end it is necessary to set down the ideological presuppositions which arise from the hopes, needs, and prejudices of people of various social strata. The formulation of an ideology is instrumental in bringing the masses into line; and this, in turn, is the means of realizing the will to dominate; in the end, ideological alignment is not only the means but the evidence of domination. Ideology requires propaganda, which is the main weapon of the movement; propaganda strengthens solidarity by postulating an enemy who must be opposed and can be defeated only by concerted effort. While propaganda derives its contents from traditional attitudes and prejudices, it treats these as unquestionable truths and thus removes them from critical reflection. In this way Nazi propaganda served to build on the sense of national humiliation and betrayal felt by many members of all social strata following the defeat of Germany in the First World War, and on this basis to promote the rise of the Nazi program of national ascendancy (*nationale Erhebung*); for this purpose the extant and growing anti-Semitism was a godsend, for it served to shift the blame for German misery onto Jewish shoulders.

It could hardly have been a coincidence that a totalitarian will intent on succeeding by means of a folkish-nationalistic ideology resorted to the ‘Jew’ in order to define that ‘folkishness’ through propaganda and carry it to extremes. What, after all, was the special status of

the Jews? They adjusted to the conditions of modernity and successfully settled into modern life. Not only in their own country but in those of their former enemies some Jews stood out by virtue of their achievement and even rose to prominence in areas which, in the minds of the powerless and downtrodden, seem suspect. On the other hand, Jews were themselves not only relatively powerless, but to their own detriment refrained from using whatever means they had at their disposal to attain their share of power. The example of the Jews also shows how an unchecked and uncheckable totalitarian will translates – and seems bound to translate – its ideological program into executed policy, in this case the elimination of the Jews.

The process of destruction itself provides a further indication of the nature of the totalitarian will. It is worthy of note that such a large-scale enterprise could be undertaken in such a short time; that the large scale pertains not only to the unthinkable horrendous event but to the machinery necessary to effect it. The execution of that enterprise required not only the personnel that did the murdering, which was relatively small, it also required officials of all kinds, police, transportation departments, administrative planning and financial bureaus, etc. These officials were already in place. All that was needed was an administrative order to assign these establishments and organizations their additional tasks of contributing their share to the extermination of the Jews. This order was given by the totalitarian authority, which has not only all other authorities at its disposal, but exercises its total domination by spreading the circles of responsibility as widely as possible. The totalitarian will in its absolute nature had precedence over all other instances of authority, even that of law. Whatever was issued as “order of the Leader” (*Führerbefehl*) required no justification. The fact that the annihilation could be undertaken and that it could be carried out so quickly shows the effectiveness of totalitarian power and how successfully it can establish itself and prevail. It also shows the extent to which that power was tolerated.

But how does the concrete fact of the annihilation of the Jews relate specifically to totalitarianism? In the first place, the annihilation is the logical consequence of the Nazi will to dominate, the will that regards and expresses itself in terms of the folkish-racist plus anti-Semitic ideology. Secondly, annihilation is the mode of total domination over those who, in accordance with the ideology, are not regarded as being part of that folkish will. Thirdly, the eradication of those designated as radical opponents and therefore selected as prime victims is indispensable for a total power intent on ruling as such. For this reason it is significant and by no means coincidental that the very humanity of so many Jews who were murdered was destroyed before they were biologically killed, through demoralization consequent on their civil and economic disenfranchisement, through pauperization, starvation, attrition, chicanery, confusion, deracination, etc. Ultimately they perceived death as preferable to their suffering, thus appearing to fall in with the totalitarian will that willed their annihilation. For the totalitarian will requires for its actualization the victim’s consent to his own annihilation. Only the will capable of bringing this about is able successfully to dominate totally. It is

questionable whether the Nazi state succeeded in this beyond mere appearance, for we know from German eyewitness accounts that Jews were able to die with dignity without being willing to die.

Even though the offices and operational means needed for the process of destruction were in place, the annihilation could not have proceeded without the help of the victims: this help constituted an essential element, namely that the victim of the total will submit to that will. It seems clear that the annihilation could not have proceeded so quickly and so thoroughly and so easily without that aid. Just as the Nazi officials made use of other organizations such as the economy and administration, so they made use of Jewish organizations, and appointed Jewish councils (*Judenräte*) as a means of exercising control over the Jews in the various stages of their unfolding Jewish policy. It is clear that the Jewish functionaries serving in their tragic offices meant to contribute to saving the Jews; it is equally clear that the Nazi officials knew – thanks to the means of totalitarian control at their disposal – how to conceal, even from the leading Jewish functionaries, the final aim of their Jewish policy as far and for as long as possible.

Totalitarianism, this novel form of statecraft made possible by the spirit of modernity, required new attitudes, especially new ways of behavior and human relations. In the first place, even though some critics of the times, among the Jews as well as among non-Jews, envisaged the horrendous possibilities inherent in modernity, the Jews in the Nazi state were ill equipped to foresee these dangers. Of fundamental importance to them would have been a proper understanding of this new form of wielding political power. Secondly, they were unaware of the significance of Judaism for the ideology of that particular totalitarian will and what use it planned to make of Judaism to further its ends. Hence thirdly, Jews lacked insight into the circumstance that they were not facing the same familiar form of anti-Semitism as heretofore, and that the usual ways of reacting to it were therefore bound to fail. Finally, they did not realize that a new form of action was required that included the readiness for sacrifice in resistance, resistance on the part of individuals as well as organized society; however, such a form of action, in turn, presupposed the timely use of Jewish means for a carefully prepared concentration of power. Each one of these presuppositions was lacking.

The aim of the 'Holocaust' was not only the physical extermination of the Jews, but the destruction of Judaism itself, that is, the annihilation of Jewish spiritual essence. The moral ethos of the Jews, the fundamental certitude of Jewish faith, the consciousness of the dignity of the individual, in short, the personality of the Jew who was deliberately a Jew: All this stood in the way of the totalitarian will of the Nazis, and this will found methods of doing away with and destroying it as thoroughly as possible. Along the way, not only the ethos of the Germans, in whose name Nazi Jewish policy was carried out, was corrupted. No wonder that the ethos of the Jews too was weakened and even corrupted by this implacable onslaught. Jewish faith was represented as prevarication and depravity, the Jewish person was crushed, mocked, and banished from his very humanity.

Before we pass judgment, however, let us consider in general and briefly the fate of moral ethos under the conditions of our topic. Compromise with unconditional moral imperatives is not only humanly understandable but morally justifiable if life depends on it, since only life offers the situation for moral action. However, let us suppose that the compromise of moral dictates is turned into an instrument of the destruction of morality and thus of what it means to be human. In this case, paradoxically, upholding being-human requires the sacrifice of human life. The decision whether and when this tragic limit is at hand would have to be based on knowledge and evaluation of facts. The totalitarian will has the freedom to withhold such knowledge, and is in possession of the power to do so in order to corrupt the sense of trust that bases itself on moral consciousness, and this pertains radically to the Jewish victims whose domination was total. An example: When the Soviet front reached the vicinity of **Łódź**, the inmates were told that the factories of the ghetto in which they worked were to be transferred to a location behind the front. The Jews refused to leave. The SS refrained from interceding. Instead, the Jewish Council had the task of persuading the inmates, on the basis of their trust in the Council, to give up the strike. This succeeded. The Jews were transported, albeit not to another factory far behind the front, but to the extermination camp. The Chief of the Jewish Council Rumkowski was also brought there; moreover he was handed over to criminal elements who had been inmates of the ghetto, who proceeded to kill him in an especially cruel manner; in this way they gave credibility to the belief, engendered by the Nazi henchmen, that it was the Jewish administration that was to blame for the fate of the Jews.

It is the very personality that the total will must destroy in order to succeed, the personality that, as will, originally establishes its validity as 'Existenz', as we say today. The totalitarian will must destroy the Existenz of its victim, so that consequent on this destruction the biological killing is of no significance other than that it completes the annihilation that has already taken place. What does "Existing" refer to, whose destruction is required by the totalitarian will? It refers to actualization of the human being in his temporality and his situation, by virtue of his commitment, his decisions, his actions. By the exercise of will we mean here the individual's proceeding from indeterminate possibilities into his temporal destiny. Existing can be regarded as willing, not unlimited willing but willing out of one's ground of willing, which in the case of the Jew means Jewish ethos, Jewish faith, Jewish heritage, Jewish consciousness of mission. Such willing is opposed to the claim of a totalitarian will. The totalitarian will, which as such is unlimited and which does not recognize anything outside of itself – neither a ground of willing nor another will – can only regard willing that is not its own as an obstacle to the actualization of its claim to totality, and must destroy it. The one who neither regards himself nor seeks to assert himself as total will, denies the validity of the claim of the total will. By merely claiming his validity and his place in actuality, he becomes the victim of the totalitarian will.

Inasmuch as the Existenz, i.e., the person that was victimized by the Nazi regime, was Jewish, it has to be more closely characterized. Jewish Existenz is, as we said, a mode of willing that restricts itself to a distinct ground of willing. This ground of willing expresses itself in the consciousness of a Jew such that, by divine direction, man's destiny is to realize himself in justice. Such willing, grounded on a divinely transcendent totality and as such eluding human willing, is an infinite obstacle to a totalitarian human willing. The mere existence of such willing, whose ground eludes determination by a specific human willing, challenges the totalitarian will to destroy it.

It is therefore no coincidence that the Existenz, whose total destruction was the aim that nearly succeeded, was one that believed in the actualization of a just life demanded by a transcendent power; hence the attempt was made to destroy the faith as well as the capacity to suffer that is grounded on the faith, to destroy the Jew's orientation toward the source of the meaning of life, to destroy even the will itself. If it served the aim of annihilation, the victims were at times offered distractions or pleasures such as food, alcohol, tobacco, sexual gratification, even jewelry, dancing and music. Spiritual nourishment, especially religious reflection concerning ultimate truth, was generally forbidden and frustrated. Assembly for prayer or learning was prohibited, the synagogues were destroyed. Rabbis were publicly humiliated, often most cruelly; occasionally they were forced to be members of Jewish Councils and turned into seeming participants in the process of annihilation. The chance for confession of faith was withheld from those who were selected for death. On the other hand, the process of annihilating the Jewish victims was carried out in a way that served to emphasize the senselessness of life and of the world. Whatever in Jewish consciousness was connected with faith in the transcendent grounding of man's ability to live his life, was often used, with studied meanness, not only to mock the victims, but to destroy the certitude of their faith. An example: Destructive actions such as roundups, deportations and worse were with notable regularity initiated on the Sabbath or on the first day of High Holidays. Another example: It is reported that when the Nazis decided to thin the ranks of the younger inmates at a certain concentration camp, they were required to pass under the outstretched staff held by a guard; those who did not reach the staff were selected for the gas chamber. The children understood the allusion to what, for children, is the most stirring symbolism of the Yom Kippur liturgy: "As the shepherd seeks out the flock, and makes the sheep pass under the staff, so does God consider every soul, decreeing its destiny." The adults understood the passage that follows, where "destiny" is spelled out less metaphorically: "Who shall live, and who shall die; who shall see old age, and who shall not; who by sword and who by beast; who by hunger and who by thirst..." And we, beset by memory to the end of our days, understand the will – evil in not knowing that as human will it is limited, in not knowing "others", in not knowing "barriers" – that had usurped the will of God, whose will alone is truly total, and God's power of decree. As long as there are Jews we shall not forget it, and shall teach it to our children and children's children.

The annihilation of the Jews of Europe and the destruction of European Judaism have not only made the very being of Judaism radically questionable, but also made its continued existence problematic. The Holocaust has also made the nature of German-ness and of Christianity problematic, as well as the possibility of future relations between Jews and Germans, and between Jews and Christians. Earnest reflections on these problems are ongoing in many quarters and at many levels of authority; this only in passing. We now turn to the last segment of our topic, dealing with the open question of the chances for the renewal and the future of a Judaism that has experienced its most radical caesura.

5. Power Politics and the Ethos of Enduring

Modernity is the inescapable condition of all our lives. But especially in regard to its fundamental motive, modernity calls for accommodation if individual freedom and the freedom of any texture of humanity are to survive. Such accommodation is familiar to us in the large spheres of human actuality, such as the polity, capitalism, and institutional religion. In the modern polity we see the distribution of power to enfranchised individuals, the form of representative government, the resistance to totalitarianism even by means of war, the retreat from imperialism, the protection of minorities. In modern capitalism we find the correctives of the market and credit, the empowerment of the poor through training for gainful employment and ultimately as consumers, the check on the formation of monopolies. In universalistic religions we notice hesitant steps toward tolerance of other faiths, grudging restraint on proselytizing, reluctant dissociation from temporal power. None of these accommodations, correctives, tolerances, self-restrictions are without problems, all constantly engender new problems. But there is no other alternative to totalitarianism.

The Jews and their Judaism face distinct problems as they work to insure their survival under the conditions of modernity. For, as we have seen, the confrontation with modernity brought about a deep caesura in the progression of the Jews through the ages, deeper than any other in the long history of Judaism. This time, however, there was no one to intercede for them on their further path through the ages, no prophet heralded a renewed revelation, no King Cyrus sent them home, and God's presence wrapped itself in silence.

Instead, the questionable possibility of Jewish existence and endurance, brought about by this encounter, motivated the various attempts at renewal under the given conditions. These attempts were intensified and became more thorough due to the Jewish experience of the inescapable necessity of surviving under the givens of the modern world. There was, first of all, the modern development of orthodox and liberal religious Judaism; further, the organization of the Jewish communities, the *Kultusgemeinden*, the relief organizations and charitable institutions, the organizations formed to do battle against defamation and anti-Semitism, the Jewish cultural institutions; and, finally, the shaping of a national consciousness, especially in the form of Zionism. All of these attempts were – and remain – relevant, even though the

event of the Holocaust brought about a radicalization of the question of possible renewal. I shall discuss this development below.

Among the attempts at renewal Rosenzweig's philosophical reflection about the meaning of being a Jew deserves special mention. It is his intention to clarify the meaning of being a Jew, not only in the face of but precisely under the condition of the questionable status of Judaism brought about by modernity, and does so out of the wellsprings of Judaism. In his clarification of the substance of Judaism he does not wish to derive it out of something else, something general, for example out of the human in general. For this reason Rosenzweig begins his main work, *The Star of Redemption*, by denying the possibility of cognizing "the All." That is, he rejects a kind of thinking that did not come into its own until the Enlightenment and according to which the ground of all Being can be grasped in the form of an all-comprehensive universal. On the strength of such a fundamentally cognized universal, one could then, supposedly, know all about the value and place of a particular. The motive of considering a given universal to be the universal pure and simple and hence – by not considering anything that would gainsay this – to push it through with the potent means offered by modernity; this is what we called the decisive characteristic of modernity. Rosenzweig rejects on principle a knowledge about Judaism as well as the right of deciding its fate on the basis of this motive. He also denies that there is something out there for humanity that can claim universal validity as the 'All', or to represent the 'All'. Insofar as being-human, no matter how understood, is grounded in the relationship to a unifying All, the presence of the All among men is a matter of many Alls and not of the one absolute All. This means, according to Rosenzweig's intent if not his actual words, that being human means being a risk for another way of being human. Accordingly we can say, for example, that the problem of emancipation touched on above is not to be understood as a liquidation of the Jewishness of a Jew so that he may be worthy of being granted equal rights, but as the assumption of the risk by non-Jews that there are human beings who are Jews, just as the existence of non-Jews constitutes a risk for the Jew. What it means to be a Jew under the conditions of modernity can therefore not be derived from some universal but must be gleaned from the authoritative sources of Judaism. To make this clear was the task that Rosenzweig shouldered. His intricate thought sequences cannot be reported here in all their ramifications, and I have to content myself with stating the following:

For Rosenzweig, the concept of redemption is the focal point of all the themes by means of which he draws the meaning of the problematic nature of being a Jew under the conditions of modernity out of the wellsprings of Judaism. The messianic hope, with all that it implies – the consciousness of mission, the expectation that redemption will occur here in the world, the need of the Jew to prepare himself for it – is no doubt what is most intrinsic to the Jew, what characterizes him and distinguishes him from the Christian. In order to develop this Rosenzweig needed a fundamental phenomenology of temporality and of the situation of man vis-à-vis his temporality. He developed it in the direction of a fundamental discussion

of the question of Being, which, to be sure, goes far beyond the problematic of continued existence of Judaism. However, this phenomenology supplied, in this way, the Being-context for the consideration of this central problem. He was able to do this totally out of the sources of Judaism.

Through his discussion of the problematic nature of Judaism by way of the fundamentals of Being and time, Rosenzweig was able to retain the Jew's sense of the special consciousness of mission as well as of the universal relevance of Judaism. He achieved the revitalization of the sense of a Jewish way of life, that is, of a sense of the halachic statutes and the cycles of year and life; a sense for the liturgy and what it has to offer as vehicle of remembering and learning the precepts; of a sense for the wellsprings of Judaism with its body of scriptures, its tradition and its interpretation, ever ongoing and never to be completed. Rosenzweig also arrived at a sense of being able to live under the recalcitrant conditions of modernity, i.e., of the pull of 'All'-nesses. He referred especially to the modern state and modern cultures, which overwhelm the possibilities of being a Jew and hence pose an obstacle to being merely the givens that can be shaped in accordance with a Jewish life-ethos. He also achieved a way of addressing the Jew lost in modernity who wants to be a Jew, and he does so by his founding anew Jewish learning, by his translation (with Buber) of the Scriptures into the vernacular, and so on. But even more importantly, Rosenzweig achieved a clear delimitation vis-à-vis Christianity: a delimitation of the substance of Judaism as well as of the meaning of living out of this substance in light of the problematic brought about by modernity. For this reason Rosenzweig serves as an outstanding example of the readiness for a dialogical stance vis-à-vis Christianity, based on Jewish self-consciousness and self-assertion in keeping with the challenges of modernity.

Rosenzweig died barely four years before the Nazi regime came to power. He could have no presentiment that the politics of a German government would enforce radically the problematic nature of the enduring and continuation of Judaism, and that it might almost succeed during the twelve years of its hegemony in extirpating the Jews of Europe and destroying European Judaism. For this reason he was not in a position to expand his thinking to include the question if and how it would still be possible for Judaism to continue to exist under the cloud of this ultimate challenge. Yet Rosenzweig's fundamental statements regarding the renewed self-assertion of Judaism under the conditions of modernity remain timely. However, the radical challenge, unforeseen by him, demands that the renewal he longed for originate in Judaism itself within the framework of a broader state of mind, willpower and way of proceeding in keeping with that challenge. The traditional Jewish traits of patient endurance and accommodation under changing conditions as well as reliance on and trust in the goodwill, tolerance and acceptance on the part of fellow human beings have themselves become problematic. Insofar as the necessary new attitude has to put distance between itself and those traditional ways of thinking and acting, it is a further manifestation of the problematic nature

of Judaism under the conditions of modernity. I would like to consider the new attitude under two headings: Power Politics, and the Ethos of Enduring and Surviving.

Power Politics. The politics of the survival of Judaism under the conditions of the Diaspora is as old as the Diaspora itself. However, the problematics of the continued existence under the conditions of modernity impels Judaism to take up modern means of using power, up to and including waging war. This, however, brings up the question whether the use of power as a way of assuring the continuation of Judaism under the conditions of its problematics can be reconciled with the ancient ethos of unconditional humaneness. It is the ethos according to which one confronts the fellow human being – even the enemy – by recognizing his humanity. Yet, according to the sources of their basic convictions, the Jews are obliged to assure their continued existence and to defend it. Now it has become incumbent upon Judaism to do so by using modern means of exerting power, all of which – if it is possible to reduce them to one common denominator – are basically impersonal. In other words, the means of the modern use of power tend to turn against ‘mankind’ in some vague general meaning of the term and no longer imply a mutual confrontation between individual human beings. The personal element is suspended from the basic reality of what it means to be truly human and – in accordance with the basic motive of modernity – becomes the material of a universal all-encompassing interest or will which has the collective power at its disposal. This can be seen everywhere, no matter whether it is a matter of applying political, representative, diplomatic or intelligence-technical pressure, or of ready proficiency in a battle of wits or of weapons.

In connection with several aspects of the destruction and annihilation, the politicization of Jewish survival proved to be a conscious affirmation of the endurance of Judaism in light of the destruction: whether by rejecting its impotence, whether in defiance or in rebellion against the justified despair in God and humanity, whether in saying “no” and “never” to all that would deny it. The destruction and annihilation proved itself in this connection to be the driving force toward the challenge of an effective politicization of the continuation of Jewish existence that was already achieved, albeit only to some extent, by its encounter with modernity. For the hesitant, reluctant adoption of the modern means of political action all the way to the employment of force could often be interpreted as a belated and inadequate reaction to the dangers of modernity, and even before the destructive possibilities of modern anti-Semitism coalesced into a total will to destruction and annihilation. But the compelling need to politicize Jewish survival and continuation in this world became even more acute through the overwhelming powerlessness which the Holocaust brought into focus. This led to the radicalization of the Jewish will to enter upon the stage of modern world events and to hold its ground as a political power.

We must not forget that the Jews failed, consequent upon their emancipation, to assure for themselves their legal entitlement to equal rights by developing a political power base. It was only when the reservations vis-à-vis the Jews, which could not be eradicated by the emancipation, began to have political consequences and to put in question the possibility of existing

within modernity as Jew, that the Jews began to reach for the means of using political power. They did, however, confine themselves to the areas of economics, of charitable organizations, of organizations based on a community of interests such as the *Zentralverband der Juden* in Germany. Another answer to the post-Christian, i.e., secular anti-Semitism was the emergence of the idea of a Jewish state, furthermore in the area known at the time as Palestine. Thus this special element in the history of modern Judaism, i.e., the reaching for political power, is closely connected to the problematics of the survival of Judaism in the face of modernity, exacerbated through the destruction of European Jewry by Nazi Germany.

We can follow this exacerbation of the need for political action brought about by the caesura of destruction if we look at the burning questions that were asked about the political stance of the Jews at the time of their destruction and annihilation. The questions that have turned out to be the most pressing ones, and that we have touched on earlier, are the following: How is it that the Jews did not defend themselves against their annihilation? And: How is it that the Jews could serve – unwittingly – as the means of their own destruction, moreover in their function as leaders, as *Judenräte*? How could they become the tools that were indispensable to the very process of annihilation and without which it might not have succeeded as well? There is another question that goes beyond there, namely: What is the nature of the politics of Judaism and of being-Jewish in the face of the ultimate threat to its existence? This political question, made even more acute by the Great Destruction, is the fundamental question of Jewish existence altogether, and its continuation in light of modernity.

Regarding these questions of political impotence and political empowerment the following must be said: Who among the Jews could have known or imagined that they are facing total annihilation? And that at a time when it still would have been possible to fight and before the contact with other Jews and other people in general had been broken off, before one was almost totally impoverished, before one had suffered – through starvation, neglect, desperation – the demoralization that annihilates the soul before the body is killed, a demoralization that is part of the totalitarian program of annihilation? The question of prior knowledge is the critical question that concerns the political situation in which the Jews found themselves; for the sweeping control over what was known and not known, what was to be believed and what not, all this belonged essentially to the totalitarian will and thus to the fact of the destruction and annihilation. Further: Who among the Jews might have fought? Children? Old men? Women? The sick? The weak? And the few who might have been able to fight lacked the means to do so; they had neither weapons, nor reliable intelligence, nor the backup, nor even a likely enemy. Moreover, what was there to fight for in a situation where the individual was aware only of his utter aloneness and abandonment, in a world where there is no sign that anyone gives any thought to the question whether there are any Jews left, not to speak of there being Jews on the road to annihilation? If, in this situation, there is still some will operative, then it is the will not to lose that last spark of human dignity and to let death take its course without additional suffering.

The Jews were not prepared to defend themselves – whether because of their traditional peaceableness, their lack of suspicion, or the ignorance forced on them. Now we must keep in mind that the totalitarian regime that carried out the annihilation of the Jews, made use of this very unreadiness for Jewish self-defense to carry out the extermination. This leads us to the fundamental question regarding Jewish political behavior after and in light of Auschwitz. How does Jewry still take the chance, given its experience with the totalitarian will, to have the faith that there exists any government at all that is unconditionally ready and able to guarantee the survival of Judaism at least on the basis of civil rights, and yet demands in return that the Jews renounce their readiness to defend themselves? The question arises whether the continued existence of the Jews is still possible without political power, and political power without the readiness of the individual Jew to defend this existence.

At one time Arendt declared political ignorance to be the worst thing, something no individual can afford, and that applies today especially to Jews. To be a Jew today means to be the sentinel of humaneness, to confront critically each political act, every political intention, not to let anything come to the fore, not to let anything gain influence that cannot meet the criteria of humaneness. One criterion of such a critical stance ought to be the question whether, in carrying out such a policy, it is at all possible to exist freely as a Jew and to have validity as a Jew. It almost seems that it is no accident that Jews are once again represented way beyond their numerical proportion in critical journalism and, in the independent countries where Jews live, in their elected governing bodies.

For a Jew there can no longer be politics without political power, nor political power without the readiness to defend his existence, by force if necessary, as soon and as often as it is endangered by brute force. Consequently these politics also demand that he recognize danger. To illustrate: The Jews thought that Nazi ideology was nothing other than the usual anti-Semitism; therefore they failed to recognize the uniqueness of the danger and tried to counter it by way of the tried and true methods. Jews, much as others, did not understand the true nature of totalitarianism until it was too late. But now we are obliged on the one hand not to misread the intentions of the enemy, and on the other, not to see an enemy in everyone.

The State of Israel, that is, the rebuilding of the Jewish polity as a modern state, with modern means of power, is one way among many ways in which Jewry has responded to the pressure toward modern power politics. However, the State of Israel can be seen as the exemplary Jewish response to that pressure only if the power-politization is merely the path that must be followed – by Israeli Jews as well as those in the Diaspora – to arrive at a renewal and realization of the Jewish substance. It is true of the State of Israel – as it is also of the politization of Jewry itself in the form of the modern exercise of power – that it cannot bring about, by the mere fact of its existence, the renewal and continuation of Judaism but that it is only a means to that end. Not only in the Diaspora, where Jews live among non-

Jews, but even in the State of Israel there are Jews who fail to profess the ethos of the continued existence of Judaism.

Ethos of Enduring and Surviving. It is precisely this ethos that animates the reacquisition of a Jewish substance that had been and still is threatened by the modernity that is, on the whole, the condition of any life whatever. This modern renewal of Jewish substance has been a greatly desired goal, even before the totalitarian will had strayed onto the path toward ultimately questioning the very right of Jewish existence, up to its total annihilation. However, it was precisely the caesura of the destruction that has radicalized the problematic brought about by the encounter with modernity, and has done so to the very depth of each personal-existential decision, and has developed it into an ethos of continued existence. I would like to clarify this ethos.

Judaism finds itself in an era of transition, from the experience of its utmost problematic to a time of a new validity of Judaism within history. During this time of transition Judaism surrounds itself with an ethos of transition, an ethos that cannot be determined with formal precision but can at best be described in its basic traits.

Since time immemorial the fundamental ethos of Judaism has been shaped by the Bible. It has always been the task of Judaism to realize it in the life of the community as well as in the everyday. Traditionally the actualization of Jewish ethos has taken place within the course of history, in which the conditions of the actualization of Jewish life by and large did not change essentially even if this course led through unquiet times and great events. Thus the conditions governing Jewish life remained relatively the same throughout all the centuries of the Diaspora, in spite of world-historical upheavals and the heavy blows of fate that have rained upon Jewry. The characteristic of the long years of the Diaspora was that, based on its sages, the exiled people assured for itself its participation in its biblical ethos in configuring a continuity that can be passed on to future generations. This continuity embraces each and every Jew and hence is of concern to every Jew. It is characterized primarily by the following phenomena: There is the written record of the biblically based ethos in its interpretive application and its applied interpretation. This written record is never completed, as far as its meaning is concerned, since interpretation is a living process and continues to this day. There is the blossoming of the biblically founded hope that gives us the strength to wait for the promised redeemer, and the image of the Jew as the suffering servant of God. There is the elaboration of the liturgy, derived from biblical times, which reminds the Jew of his relation to God under the conditions of priestly service in the sanctuary; this biblical relationship to God was now sublimated into ethical precepts and strengthened the Jew, living among other peoples, to meet the high demands made on him.

Thus the Jewish ethos that arose and was modified under the ever-changing conditions of the Diaspora, has always meant a handing-down of the firm revealed ethos of the Bible. It is however the living tradition of a never-ending exegesis, and these contexts surrounding the

ethos of the Diaspora are embedded in an ethos of enduring and continuing under its conditions: the fundamental spirit of this ethos has always included reverence before the inexhaustible treasure of the teachings that were handed down; before the willingness to learn on the part of even the simplest of Jews, before the men of learning; a yearning to understand even the most unfathomable course of events; letting one's fellow human being be, but also helping him; taking temporality upon oneself, and that means patience even in ultimate situations on the one hand, an ability to persevere through the passage of time; but it also means holding fast to the hope of redemption even in times of the deepest hopelessness, albeit redemption that takes place in this world, in the world of human temporality. This patient standing-fast no matter the shape of the temporality of life, and no matter what life had in store, was set down most impressively by Maimonides in his formulation of the tenet of the Jewish faith that expresses the hope for the coming of the Redeemer who had already been promised in Biblical times. Maimonides does not let the substance of what is believed here rest on mere expectation; instead, he adds the expression of existential exigency brought about by the conditions of the Diaspora, and this contains the true substance of his faithful hope: "and even if he, the Meshiach, tarries, I believe in his coming with every day that dawns." And in this ethos, which made life under the conditions of the Diaspora possible as well as bearable, there was always implied a conscious adaptation to the external conditions at a given time.

The self-understanding of Judaism as well as the corresponding call to realization of the Jewish ethos under the conditions of the Diaspora continue to remain valid, even though these conditions have suffered a rupture through modernity, and the Jewish ethos itself has experienced a caesura. As in the past, the most recent break confronts Judaism with new fundamental problematics and thus challenges us to an ethical reformulation without obliterating the basic characteristics of the ethos valid until this time.

How in these times of transition is the actuality of the perennial Jewish ethos to be upheld in a way that would do justice to the problematic nature of Judaism that it has experienced in its most recent progress through time?

We can discern a predominant fundamental state of mind indicating an ethos of transition, namely the conscious resistance, on the part of Jews, to the abandonment of Judaism for the purpose of deliverance from the misery in which humanity may find itself. The Biblical-Jewish ethos of man as the servant of God means bearing witness, to the limits of one's physical strength and as far as the sacrifice of one's own life, that the redemption of a world in need of redeeming is in need of the confirmation of truth or the fulfillment of the ethos that grows out of the directive given to the Jews, and to realize in one's own life the righteousness to which the prophets exhorted us.

But even if the world at large believes that the sacrifice of the Jews is necessary for its salvation, the Jews know that in our time this sacrifice was carried out more than six million

times. This sacrifice was a senseless one according to any criterion by which it may be judged. It will rest heavily on the conscience of whole peoples for as many generations as there will be Jews who will keep alive the memory of those who were sacrificed; yet it has hardly led to a sense of concern, nor does it lead to a real turnabout. In the last analysis sacrificing the Jews was the expression of the most profound calamity of disintegration and nihilism – and the sacrifice of the Jews was meant to bring the redemption from these. Thus the Jew also knows the following: In order to bear witness to the redeeming truth of which there is such need, so that the ethos that flows from it be realized, each Jew must shape even the tiniest aspect of his daily life in accordance with it. And only the living Jew, not a sacrificed one, can do that. Indeed, in order to prepare for this renewal of Judaism that is still to come, one that would approach the fulfillment of the command “to be a nation of priests” and “a light unto the nations”, there is need for a live Judaism, not for a sacrificed one.

The most easily recognizable fundamental stance that determines the ethos of transition is the self-affirmation of the Jew as Jew. In this way Judaism can continue to exist, in spite of its inner problematic, and even if we do not know what the future of this Judaism will turn out to be, and even less, what the world will be like in which Judaism will assert itself as a vital force.

This was demonstrated even out of the very depths of that time of annihilation:

We find it, for example, among the handful of young fighters of the Vilna Ghetto who, vowing “not to go like sheep to their slaughter”, took up a desperate battle against the Germans, knowing full well that it was hopeless and futile. As a battle hymn they took up a Yiddish poem of defiance written by the poet Hirsch Glick -- he was still a teen-ager, and would soon perish like most of his fellow townsmen – and sang it to a melody they knew from a Soviet movie. The lyrics of their song ended with the climactic “*mir sennen do!*” We are here!

Another example: After the liberation of the pitiful few from the death camps and other sites of destruction, places where the women, starving, robbed of any reason to live, hopeless, knowing that there was no way out other than death, ceased menstruating and ovulating; and yet, even before they had regained the full measure of their physical humanness, they experienced the miracle of a renewed life-impulse; they sought out the still emaciated men, there were weddings performed in the Displaced Persons Camps to which they had been brought, and even there a new generation – and thus a new Judaism – first saw the light of day. And in this way the women channeled their and their husbands’ wrath, born out of desperation, into the ethos of a new life, thus giving them the parameters of proving themselves in the light of whatever their ground of truth will demand of them. And thus the Jews, too, have increased their numbers since the end of the war, by about a million every twelve years.

These examples demonstrate: The fundamental stance of Jewish self-affirmation is a conscious “no” to the nothingness of annihilation. It is a conscious being-here (“*mir sennen do!*”) that is a rebellion against everything that would annihilate their being-here.

Thus the present-day ethos of being a Jew involves even rebellion against God, against the God who was silent in the face of Auschwitz. It is a rebellion against the despair in the Jew himself: rebellion against despairing of being a Jew; rebellion against despairing of the sense of mission on the part of Judaism in the world of men; rebellion against despairing of one’s fellow-man, in relation to whom the Jew knows out of his wellsprings that this fellow-man has been entrusted to him, and the Jew to fellow-man. And it is rebellion against despairing of the world, toward which the Jew has the same relationship of entrustedness as toward fellow human beings.

Thus the fundamental stance of self-affirmation has various aspects: here we find an ethos – refined by the problematic of being a Jew and all it entails – of a cautious relationship to God as the meaning of all Being, in spite of the Jew’s despair of God; there is also the ethos of finding one’s way back to the wellsprings of Judaism in spite of his despairing of the commandments of the Torah, whose actualization, he knows, is incumbent on him; and lastly, there is the ethos of collaborating in shaping the world in all the ways available to him, a world, in which a Jew can be a Jew, and to do so in spite of his despair of fellow-man and the world.

The fundamental stance of the self-affirmation of Judaism under the conditions of modernity and in memory of Auschwitz is thus not confined to the various ways of political action whose purpose is to assure the existence and continuation of Judaism. The stance is evident also in the ethos of regaining the Jewish wellsprings, of the renewal of Jewish substance, the realization of the mission of the Jews so that Judaism, whose continued existence is to be assured through political action, is a living Judaism. In order to be authentic, the ethos is not confined to events of a pedagogic or liturgical nature, but must be present above all in the revitalization of the Jewish way of life through one’s own personal-existential decisiveness.

Today the Jew seesaws between confident self-affirmation and worried vigilance, between external threat and inner disintegration on the one hand, and the joyous assumption of his burden on the other, the burden that consists in being chosen to the privilege of being a Jew. Today’s Jew is aware of the problematic nature of his being a Jew; and yet he can be a Jew only if he is conscious of the authenticity of his Jewishness in light of its problematic nature.

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The topic that I have raised here is one that cannot be concluded with finality, neither in its essence nor in its significance. The problematic nature of the existence of Judaism in the present as well as the future is still in the process of defining itself, and its solution is still to come.

