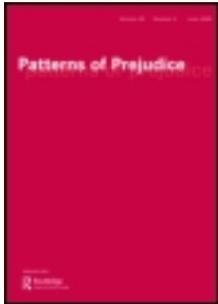


This article was downloaded by: [University College London]

On: 06 January 2013, At: 17:16

Publisher: Routledge

Informa Ltd Registered in England and Wales Registered Number: 1072954 Registered office: Mortimer House, 37-41 Mortimer Street, London W1T 3JH, UK



## Patterns of Prejudice

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:

<http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/rpop20>

### Modern antisemitism and the emergence of sociology: an introduction

Marcel Stoetzler <sup>a</sup>

<sup>a</sup> London

Version of record first published: 19 Apr 2010.

To cite this article: Marcel Stoetzler (2010): Modern antisemitism and the emergence of sociology: an introduction, *Patterns of Prejudice*, 44:2, 107-115

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/00313221003714296>

PLEASE SCROLL DOWN FOR ARTICLE

Full terms and conditions of use: <http://www.tandfonline.com/page/terms-and-conditions>

This article may be used for research, teaching, and private study purposes. Any substantial or systematic reproduction, redistribution, reselling, loan, sub-licensing, systematic supply, or distribution in any form to anyone is expressly forbidden.

The publisher does not give any warranty express or implied or make any representation that the contents will be complete or accurate or up to date. The accuracy of any instructions, formulae, and drug doses should be independently verified with primary sources. The publisher shall not be liable for any loss, actions, claims, proceedings, demand, or costs or damages whatsoever or howsoever caused arising directly or indirectly in connection with or arising out of the use of this material.

## Modern antisemitism and the emergence of sociology: an introduction

*Without rancor or hatred, in the spirit of sociology and psychology, I seek to examine the debased condition into which France has fallen. . . . My mission as a sociologist is to show people as they are.*

—Edouard Drumont, 1886<sup>1</sup>

The question of Jewish emancipation (the ‘Jewish question’), and the question of whether, how or to what extent Jewish emancipation ought to be revoked (the primary concern of antisemitism in the period following emancipation) drove European (or ‘western’) social and political thought in what has come to be called the long nineteenth century: that is, the period when ‘modern society’ materialized in the form of so many national societies, and when modern, Enlightenment thought was translated into a concern, at least between the lines, with the continuing creation and reproduction of societies as nations. Talk about a paradigm, a catalyst, a discursive framework or sometimes the elephant in the room: disputes over Jewish emancipation and equality (or difference) constituted one of the principal terrains on which patterns of modern social and political thought were developed (not to say their patterns of prejudice), and they were one of the spices that made things fiery. Marx’s famous two-part essay ‘On the Jewish Question’ is perhaps the clearest case: theoretical propositions of tremendous moment and radicalism were first formulated in a dispute over the ‘Jewish question’, which had been triggered by some Prussian draft legislation that, in the process, was shelved and all but forgotten. (Most of those who find those propositions that subsequently developed into Marx’s

The four papers published here were developed from presentations at a conference that took place at Manchester University in November 2008 (see [www.arts.manchester.ac.uk/subjectareas/religionstheology/anti](http://www.arts.manchester.ac.uk/subjectareas/religionstheology/anti)). I would like to thank the School of Arts, Histories and Cultures, the Centre for Jewish Studies and the Department of Religions and Theologies at Manchester University, and the BSA Social Theory Study Group for financing the conference, and all the participants who made it such a pleasant and inspiring event. Thanks also to Vic Seidler, with whom I first discussed this project during my fellowship at Goldsmiths, University of London, as well as Robert Fine, Detlev Claussen, Christine Achinger and Moishe Postone.

1 Edouard Drumont, in a 1886 text that dealt with reactions to his *La France juive*, quoted in Pierre Birnbaum, *Jewish Destinies: Citizenship, State, and Community in Modern France* (New York: Hill and Wang 2000), 106.

critical theory worth discussing bracket out, probably in an automatic reflex, the fact that the text had anything at all to do with Jews and the so-called 'question', while most of those who pay attention to this obvious fact fail to get to grips with the complicated argument of Marx's piece.)

The contemporary reader is required to take a leap of historical imagination to grasp what the 'question' could have been in the first place and how it could have been the occasion for serious thinking and debating.<sup>2</sup> Marx's text, though, is part of a tradition that earlier also included, for example, Christian Wilhelm Dohm's *Über die bürgerliche Verbesserung der Juden* (On the Bourgeois, or Civil, Amelioration of the Jews) of 1781. This text and the debate about it were about Jews, as it says on the tin, but also about much more: they were about the emerging modern concept of society and its historical dynamic, and the 'Jewish question' was one of the grounds on which these issues were discussed.

I came to this subject somewhat indirectly. Some years ago I began a Ph.D. that was initially meant to be about liberal and socialist conceptions of the 'nation', and a critique of the textbook distinction between 'civic' and 'ethnic' nationalisms. While exploring source materials that would show why this distinction was less than helpful, I came across Walter Boehlich's 1965 edition of the so-called 'Berlin Antisemitism Dispute', the *Treitschke-Streit* of 1879–81.<sup>3</sup> This, then, became the sole topic of my thesis. I was fascinated by the ways in which Heinrich von Treitschke himself, but even more so his critics, and also some of his radical antisemitic supporters, mobilized whole conceptions of society, state and individual, complete with accounts of culture, religion and economy, and threw them into the struggle over the 'Jewish question'. A key figure in the Berlin Antisemitism Dispute on the side of the Jewish community was Moritz Lazarus, a social scientist of great importance (but very little known now except to specialists in this area of intellectual history), as well as the teacher of, for example, Georg Simmel and a decisive influence on Franz Boas. Max Weber's father, Max Weber, Sr, was involved in organizing a declaration by notables of German liberalism who found Treitschke's sympathies for antisemitism somewhat inappropriate. I began working on this material documenting a defining episode in the development of late nineteenth-century German liberalism because it resonated so strongly with concerns from contemporary social and sociological theory. In the process, I began seeing what would subsequently become the discipline of sociology emerging out of the context of (national) liberalism, hence the family resemblance. The dispute on antisemitism in particular could not but have had an impact on the thinking of the founders of 'classical sociology', many of whom (such as Weber and Simmel, but also

2 This is in stark contrast to the pathetic prattle we get from present-day antisemitic ideologues, who are usually third-rate *apparatchiks*, often without much of an actual *apparat*, and who usually operate at a level that hardly deserves to be called 'thought'.

3 Walter Boehlich (ed.), *Der Berliner Antisemitismusstreit* (Frankfurt-on-Main: Insel 1965).

visiting students like W. E. B. DuBois) actually sat in Treitschke's lectures.<sup>4</sup> Durkheim also, at a crucial stage in his early career, visited several German universities and tapped happily into just this intellectual milieu. The present publication might be seen as the first instalment of the exploration that those first of all cursory observations provoked.

In the introduction to the volume *Sociology Responds to Fascism*, Stephen P. Turner wrote in 1992 that 'reformers of various political persuasions' felt ambivalent about fascism as they saw it 'as a potential catalyst for the changes they advocated'. 'There are many very direct connections between fascist ideas and early sociology.'<sup>5</sup>

The romantic notion of reweaving a social order destroyed by impersonality, shared by Tönnies, Durkheim, and many others, such as Spann, contributed, however indirectly, to the climate of opinion in which fascism took hold. So did the elitism of Pareto and Mosca.<sup>6</sup>

The contributions to this special issue of *Patterns of Prejudice* focus on a dimension of this topic that is both narrower and wider than the connection of sociology and fascism: namely, that of sociology and antisemitism. It is narrower since antisemitism is not the only and not even the most defining characteristic of fascism (with the possible exception of German National Socialism), and wider because it occurs in all western political traditions and functions universally as a bridgehead or gateway that allows, in specific historical situations, members or whole sections of those traditions to wander off into supporting, joining or at least tolerating fascist movements and regimes. This is the significance of the topic.

In his paper 'Ethnos, Race and Nation: Werner Sombart, the Jews and Classical German Sociology', Y. Michal Bodemann demonstrates two things: one, that German sociology in its 'classical' period by and large avoided dealing with the 'Jewish question', let alone antisemitism, but discussed issues that can be understood as 'displacements' of it; and, two, that Werner Sombart, in spite of formally rejecting racial categories, put forward a racial, not to say racist, account of 'the Jews' based on the notion of a Jewish essence outside history and society.

Tellingly, the first meeting of the German Sociological Society in 1910 featured a paper by the 'racial biologist' Alfred Ploetz, indicating that the organizers of the meeting thought that positioning the emerging discipline of

4 The influence of the Berlin Antisemitism Dispute on the young Max Weber has been pointed out in Gary A. Abraham, *Max Weber and the Jewish Question: A Study of the Social Outlook of His Sociology* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press 1992), but the connection has since remained unexplored.

5 Stephen P. Turner, 'Sociology and fascism in the interwar period: the myth and its frame', in Stephen P. Turner and Dirk Käsler (eds), *Sociology Responds to Fascism* (London and New York: Routledge 1992), 6, 7.

6 *Ibid.*, 9.

sociology in relation to 'racial biology' was a matter of high priority. Ploetz basically saw social problems as the effect of racial impurities, and perceived a dichotomy between *society*, which, in his view, was altruistically committed to support and preserve the weak, and *race*, which aimed to exterminate the weak in order to preserve itself. He more or less implied that this conflict should be resolved in favour of race. The surprising element in Bodemann's account of the debate is probably less that Sombart leaned towards this perspective but the way in which the more 'progressive' sociologists Tönnies and Weber criticized it. The former argued that preserving 'cripples', for example, might benefit the nation, as they might be 'great minds', pointing to Moses Mendelssohn as an example. Opposing Ploetz, Weber defended the concept of social policy as it could help people who had perfectly good genes but had simply fallen on hard times. (This is an argument that is probably familiar to a British readership that remembers debates of the early 1940s on the welfare state in Britain.)<sup>7</sup> Weber dismissed the concept of racial instincts because scientific evidence was, 'so far', still wanting. Bodemann argues that further discussions on the decline of ancient Greece and the 'Negro question in America' were displacements for what was studiously not discussed: the in-these-circles widely perceived decline of German national culture and the related issue of the 'Jewish question'. The reader of Bodemann's article will not conclude that the sociologists did not *want* to discuss it, but that they apparently felt they *ought* not to for fear such debates might spin out of control and threaten the carefully guarded scientificity of the whole sociological project.

Bodemann then compares three discourses on 'the stranger' by Simmel, Sombart and Tönnies. For Simmel, the stranger (of whom 'the Jew' is only a prominent example) is the product of the increasing division of labour. The 'social type' of the stranger is socially constituted ('constructed', as 'social constructionists' would say). Sombart describes strangers similarly a few years later but 'essentializes' them: the Jews are Jews, are called Jews and remain Jews, a product of the nomadic life in the desert 'they' once led. In keeping with this vulgar discourse, Sombart has no time for Simmel's sophisticated play with the idea that the stranger is both distant *and* close, indifferent *and* involved, which for Simmel makes the Jew/stranger only a slightly more extreme version of the modern individual.<sup>8</sup> Bodemann then draws our attention to an essay by Ferdinand Tönnies, written two years after Sombart's notorious book, and concludes that both writers, who came from the same reform-oriented, National Liberal milieu—although the former would soon join the Social Democrats, and the latter the National Socialists—had not hugely differing things to say about the Jews.

7 Nira Yuval-Davis, *Gender and Nation* (London: Sage 1997), 31.

8 This pattern of thought bears comparison with Marx's argument half a century earlier: Christian society can emancipate the Jews because they merely play its melody, if a bit louder and on a stronger beat.

This present issue will also point to an early use of the term 'new antisemitism', various versions of which have been recycled so many times since, defined even then as an antisemitism that 'may be unconscious' and that 'also has been adopted by most of the so-called modern Jews', as Rabbi Izsák Pfeiffer claimed. Pfeiffer wrote this in 1914 in Hungary, and the 'new antisemitism' he referred to was that of a journal called *Huszadik Század* (Twentieth Century), the first sociological periodical in Hungary, founded in 1900 by Oszkár Jászi and associated with the Hungarian Society for Social Science. This is the subject of Kati Vörös's contribution, "'The Jewish Question'", Hungarian Sociology and the Normalization of Antisemitism'.

*Huszadik Század* published the first Hungarian translation of Marx's 'On the Jewish Question' in 1903, at a time when clerical and conservative publications would regularly deploy antisemitic slurs against progressive and socialist-inclined authors, like the early sociologists around the journal *Huszadik Század* (many of whom were indeed of Jewish background). Marx's piece was published because, in the opinion of the editors, it showed that socialist theory could be critical of the Jews, a form of self-defence that is unlikely to have impressed the antisemitic enemies of modernizing reform. *Huszadik Század* continued to be widely regarded as 'cosmopolitan' and 'radical', that is, 'Jewish'. Nevertheless, as Vörös argues, *Huszadik Század* was the journal that initiated the most influential debate on the 'Jewish question' and perhaps contributed more to the development of modern antisemitism (or 'new antisemitism') than did the darkest clericalists. In 1910 the journal published a detailed review of the lectures by Werner Sombart that would in the following year be published as *Die Juden und das Wirtschaftsleben* and, in spite of criticizing it for being overly speculative, lauded it for having given 'scientific form' to ideas that had been 'in the air'. The book was warmly recommended as an unbiased study of the 'Jewish question'.

The next stage in the development described by Vörös was the publication of the book that came closest to being the Hungarian equivalent of *Die Juden und das Wirtschaftsleben* (by which it was strongly influenced), Péter Ágoston's *A zsidók útja* (The Path of the Jews) of 1917. The author was a Social Democrat and a regular contributor to *Huszadik Század*. Ágoston (who repeatedly assured his readers that he was not meaning to be antisemitic) recommended that Jews should either fully assimilate or 'leave the host country'. On the other hand, as Vörös points out, he was also somewhat critical of Sombart who he thought attributed to the Jews too much agency and historical importance. (He thought Sombart was Jewish.) When in the ensuing debate Jewish publications (and only Jewish publications) attacked what they discerned as 'scientific antisemitism' sailing under the flag of sociology, Ágoston's 'well-meaning objectivity' was defended in *Huszadik Század* against the hostile attitudes of those who suffered from a 'persecution complex'.

In the spirit of proper scientific objectivity, the dispute on Ágoston's book was followed up by a research survey organized by the journal: 160

'representatives of the Hungarian political and intellectual public' received a questionnaire that echoed Ágoston's *problematique*, and 50 replied. As Vörös describes it, the raising of the 'Jewish question' in a proper social scientific manner confirmed to the public that such a question actually existed, which seems to have been 'a liberating experience' for many. Subsequent publication of the survey in book form resulted in the first sociological bestseller in Hungary. Vörös concludes that *Huszdik Század* and its authors, like Ágoston and Jászi, contributed significantly to the 'normalization of antisemitism' in Hungary.<sup>9</sup>

Marcel Stoezler's article, 'Antisemitism, Capitalism and the Formation of Sociological Theory', is based on the following premise: if, first, antisemitism can be understood as a discourse that speaks to a set of actual or perceived conflicts, processes and problems inherent in modern society—none of which have of course anything causally to do with Jews, except in the minds of the antisemites—and if, second, sociology is also a discourse that speaks to the same conflicts, processes and problems, the two are inevitably competing discourses fighting over the same ground, trying to win over and mobilize the hearts and minds of the perplexed individual members of such societies. If this is granted, it is of little surprise that the one will adopt characteristics of the other when its way of thinking (reasoning, ideology, imaginings, rhetoric) seems to work well: antisemites will become quasi-sociologists (see the epigraph from Drumont with which I began), and sociologists will be part-time antisemites, to varying degrees respectively. Their convergence will likely be stronger if the individuals in question originate from the same political, cultural or social milieu, such as (in Germany) the late nineteenth-century National Liberal milieu that produced most sociologists and quite a few antisemites, but that is a minor point. The real issue concerns what one had to say (think, feel, imagine) about that tremendous and encompassing revolution, the emergence of modern capitalist, industrial, individualistic, national and liberal society.

Stoezler treats this constellation as an instance of the dialectic of enlightenment, in the sense developed by Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno. In his essay, that moves to and fro between France and Germany, he constructs a shared point of reference in Saint-Simon, one of the major figures who proposed ways to react to, embrace, secure and develop the outcomes of the French Revolution and, in so doing, was a principal inspiration to what subsequently became the discipline of sociology on the one hand, and the tradition of 'early' or 'utopian' socialism on the other. Stoezler then discusses two crucial moments in the history of modern antisemitism: Charles Maurras, whose as it were atheist Catholicism was inspired by Auguste Comte's positivism (who in turn of course took his notion of the 'positive' from Saint-Simon), and, several decades earlier,

<sup>9</sup> Ironically, in 1919, Jászi and Ágoston had to leave the country after having participated in the revolution.

Alphonse Toussenel and Pierre Leroux, who developed socialist critiques of bourgeois society that were also antisemitic. Maurras's obsession with monotheism (which he thought led to anarchy and for which he held Protestants and, more fundamentally, Jews responsible) was inspired by Comte; the antisemitic socialists' fixation on the Jews as an unproductive, exploitative and corrosive 'financial aristocracy' derived, *ex negativo*, from Saint-Simon's celebration of the struggle of the productive against the parasitical classes (while Saint-Simon and the Saint-Simonians themselves counted bankers and Jews among the ranks of the productive).

Whereas up to this point positivism and a post-revolutionary ideology of productivity demarcate the points where societal progress tips over into its opposite—namely, where enlightenment negates itself as antisemitism—subsequent sections of Stoetzler's essay close in on the complementary issue of the polemic against a straw man by the name of 'utilitarianism' that is typical of classical sociology. This theme is introduced through a reading of a section from Max Weber's *Die protestantische Ethik und der Geist des Kapitalismus* in which Weber develops his notion that, once upon a time, there was ethically driven, Calvinist capitalism in which people rather religiously performed accumulation for its own sake, and concern with material wealth was but a 'light cloak' that would certainly not have suffocated its wearer and his Protestant ethic (*his* indeed). Along came utilitarianism and turned it into that 'casing hard as steel'. Jews played no great part in this account for the simple reason that they represented a backward, pre-modern form of capitalism—pariah capitalism—that was neither here nor there. Weber's friend and colleague Werner Sombart took Weber's notion and changed around some of the underlying value judgements: for Sombart, early capitalism was robust, military and heroic, and things went downhill when the Jews started commercializing everything, turning heroic capitalism into a parasitic and utilitarian version. The important point here is that the two narratives are easily translatable into each other, in spite of having been formulated as competing and alternative: both are based on rumours about the Jews rather than historical analysis. Not much in the liberal version of the theme 'how capitalism turned from a good thing into a bad one' prevents it therefore from being transformed into the anti-liberal one. Stoetzler proceeds to make the same point about Emile Durkheim: perhaps the most paradoxical and disturbing part of this argument is that Durkheim, even in the moment when he was doing battle with the anti-Dreyfussards, reproduced aspects of the antisemites' polemic against 'egotistical utilitarianism' and the dismal science of 'Spencer and the economists'. In conclusion Stoetzler suggests that (classical) sociology and antisemitism share a concern with the perceived dissolution of society by capitalism and individualism, and the effort to halt this dissolution by combining the creation of a reformed, benign form of capitalism with some form of communal, 're-binding' (re-ligious) morality. It seems that, as long as this remains the central perspective, images of 'the Jews' as somehow

incongruent with this difficult and precarious effort tend to slip back into the picture.

In 'Circumventions and Confrontations: Responses to Antisemitism in the Work of Georg Simmel, Franz Boas and Arthur Ruppin', Amos Morris-Reich emphasizes a 'generational dimension': Simmel and Boas were both born in 1858 (incidentally, the same year as Durkheim), Boas, who never converted, to an assimilated Jewish family, Simmel, who was baptised a Protestant, to parents who had converted. Ruppin, by contrast, was born in 1876, which means, so Morris-Reich argues, that he grew up after the assimilationist ideal held by many Jews of the previous generation had been blown to pieces by the intensified antisemitism of the 1880s. Morris-Reich identifies a delicate paradox: while the commitment to assimilation made many Jews hesitate to respond too directly to antisemitism, it also contributed, as in Boas's and Simmel's work, to the development of non-racial, (in today's terminology) anti-essentialist and culturally relativist conceptions; on the other hand, the breakdown of the assimilationist perspective resulted in Ruppin's more robust reaction to antisemitism, but one that was itself coloured by the racialism that characterized the intellectual environment in which he was educated.

Simmel never directly engaged in a critique of antisemitism but the sociological categories he developed can be understood as an implicit critique, or deconstruction, of the category of race from within sociological theory. Morris-Reich argues that Simmel displaced any notion of 'substance' by conceiving of 'social form' and 'social type'—his central categories—as constituted by individual 'interaction'. While 'social form' is a more general term (basically a restatement of Moritz Lazarus's notion of the *Verdichtung*, the 'condensation' of individual acts into fixed patterns that are just slightly less independent and actual than what Durkheim would have called 'social things'), 'social types' are such forms constituted, as Morris-Reich puts it, by 'the specifiable reactions and expectations of others'. Interestingly, Simmel rules out the possibility that an actual individual could ever be fully explained by the 'types' that fellow members of society create: individuality is ultimately impossible to subsume under any category, form or type (a position that points back to Kant and forward to Adorno). 'Racial difference' can in this framework only be theorized as a 'social construct' (which does not mean, though, that 'Jewish difference', for example, does not exist). Morris-Reich concludes that Simmel's radical epistemological and ontological individualism meant a 'circumvention', a way of dealing with antisemitism while not dealing with it.

While resembling Simmel in some ways, Franz Boas was much less extreme in several respects: he was less adverse to entering into immediate battle with the enemy (he published at least two important texts against racism and antisemitism, in 1923 and 1934), and he much less consistently excluded the category of race from his work, at least in his earlier period. Boas's strategy was to destabilize and transform the category of race, not to

bury it. The real contrast, in Morris-Reich's article, is with Arthur Ruppin, who wrote extensively on antisemitism. Prompted perhaps by persistent experience and observation of antisemitism, Ruppin postulated an extra-historical and irrational 'group instinct' that made members of 'groups' (or societies) force 'aliens' to assimilate. Unlike Simmel and Boas, however, Ruppin, who was a leading functionary of the Zionist movement, opposed assimilation as being no less dangerous to Jewish existence than antisemitism, which he saw as a natural and inevitable reaction to actual Jewish difference. All three authors discussed by Morris-Reich aimed to address what they respectively saw as the decisive issue: for Simmel, the recognition of 'social forms' as what they are, socially constituted and not ontological givens; for Boas, human nature as it interacts with the (human) environment; for Ruppin, the irreducible differences between Jews and non-Jews and their unavoidable effects. From there, each developed differing strategies to engage antisemitism.

Taken together, the four pieces present the following picture. Bodemann argues that (German) sociology most of all avoided addressing the issue of antisemitism and the positioning of Jews in society, and was ambivalent, to put it politely, on the rare occasions when it did. Vörös shows that (Hungarian) sociology—in spite of, and also somehow by way of, its being 'progressive'—actively contributed to antisemitism by making the 'Jewish question' look like a legitimate problem to which a solution had to be found. Stoetzler argues that the authoritarian aspects of positivism and an ideology of productivity can be found at the heart both of the modern antisemitism that emerged out of 'early socialism' and the sociological tradition, and that this ambiguity was complemented in classical sociology by a tendency to construct a benign form of capitalism by blaming social corrosion on 'egotistical utilitarianism', a discursive strategy that was likewise shared by antisemites. Morris-Reich points to a link between some social scientists' responses to antisemitism and whether they grew up while the assimilationist perspective of (German) Jewry was still (sort of) intact, namely, before *circa* 1880, or afterwards: while intact, assimilationism seems to have encouraged a critique of racialism but a reluctance to challenge antisemitism; the break with assimilationism (as in Zionism) seems to have encouraged a challenge to antisemitism but not to racialism.

*Marcel Stoetzler*  
*London*