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The Mismeasure of the Jew

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PETER ALAN STEINWEIS. *Studying the Jew: Scholarly Anti-Semitism in Nazi Germany*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2006. Pp. 203.

RICHARD T. GRAY. *About Face: German Physiognomic Thought from Lavater to Auschwitz*. Kritik. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2004. Pp. lvi + 453.

MICHAEL MACK. *German Idealism and the Jew: The Inner Anti-Semitism of Philosophy and German Jewish Responses*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003. Pp. viii + 229.

THOMAS MITTMANN. *Vom "Günstling" zum "Urfeind" der Juden: Die antisemitische Nietzsche-Rezeption in Deutschland bis zum Ende des Nationalsozialismus*. Epistemata. Reihe Philosophie 403 Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2006. Pp. 248.

The study of the Jew in every era has been an important historiographic focus since the rise of the *Wissenschaft des Judentums* in nineteenth-century Europe, and for an obvious reason: for a small, disliked minority, it is matter of life and death how the majority conceives, constructs, and projects Jews and Judaism. If this formulation seems histrionic, I urge the reader to examine any of the four books under consideration here, or simply to glance at the catalogue of "Deadly Medicine," the U. S. Holocaust Memorial Museum exhibit currently making the rounds in American cities. At least as early as Heinrich Graetz (1817–91) Jewish scholars noted the way prominent non-Jews treated Jews and evaluated them accordingly. Many early works of the *Wissenschaft des Judentums* wore this concern visibly, bearing titles like "The Elephant and the Jewish Question" or "Dead White European Male and the Jews." Often, these

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works were little more than tabulations of pro-Jewish and anti-Jewish utterances, without clear methodology, and replete with overly optimistic assessments. Works such as Hans Leibeschuetz's *Das Judentum in deutschen Geschichtsbild*, which successfully situated the construction of the Jew in an overall *Weltanschauung* (in Leibeschuetz's case, the discipline of history), were the exception until very recently. It is thus a measure of the maturation of *Wissenschaft des Judentums* in general, as well as the specific topics under discussion, that renders the books under review worthwhile.

Alan Steinweis's *Studying the Jew* is an elegant book that delivers exactly what it promises: the story of the corruption, misuse, and outright betrayal of four scholarly disciplines (race science, religious studies, history, and sociology) in the Nazi era by its own practitioners. Steinweis pays an appropriate tribute to the first major study to document the complicity of academics in the Final Solution, Max Weinreich's *Hitler's Professors* (1946), but adds new dimensions and much nuance to what Steinweis rightly characterizes as an angry book. For Steinweis, Nazi era *Judenforschung* has little to offer in the sense of explaining Jews or Judaism, but much to offer in understanding the construction of "an ideology of exclusion and domination" (p. 5). Steinweis's opening chapter situates the world of *Judenforschung* in three contexts: first, as an example of Hitler's so-called rational anti-Semitism; second, as an example of the multifarious production of an anti-Semitic intellectual climate; and third, as an institutional entity epitomized, but not limited to, Walter Franks's Reich Institute. This chapter orients the reader to the current scholarship and also to the ultimately limited role of academics in the Nazi system. In an era of overaggrandized academic claims, it is praiseworthy that Steinweis goes no further than his evidence. Rejecting a view of these scholars as "the guiding forces of extermination," as some have done, Steinweis reminds us that his subjects were not the principal policy makers. In Nazi Germany, that role belonged to the state and party elites.

The first substantive chapter, appropriately enough, covers race science. Steinweis begins his chapter with a deft synopsis of the Czech writer Jiri Weils's novel *Mendelssohn Is on the Roof* and follows it with an elegant unfolding of the development of racial thinking in the Nazi ambit. Steinweis, like Richard Grey in his *About Face* (below), devotes considerable space to Hans F. K. Günther. The idea of "Race-Günther" making a comeback will induce a queasy feeling, but Steinweis correctly notes that anyone who has ever looked into this matter "will inevitably notice that one book was cited more than any other: Hans F. K. Günther's *Racial Characteristics of the Jewish People* (1930)" (p. 25). Expatriating on facial

types, body types, gestures, gait, speech patterns, and odor, Günther cited Jewish authorities when they bolstered his views (including Maurice Fishberg and Arthur Ruppin), ignored studies which challenged his race over environment dogma (e.g., Franz Boaz's work), and seems to have been completely oblivious to the role his own prejudices played in directing his findings and presentation. Günther, Steinweis shows, was neither the most radical German race scientist nor the most reprehensible. Nevertheless, Günther provided a foundation stone of Nazi race science. He directly influenced the formulations of the Nuremberg laws, which were, in turn, glossed by Wilhelm Stuckart and Hans Globke, both lawyers, the latter of whom was appointed Konrad Adenauer's chief of staff. (Steinweis brings several examples of figures complicit in Nazi crimes who benefited after the war from their careers in the 1930s and 1940s. [pp. 44, 91, 151].)

The 1930s was a great time to be a young graduate student and a race scientist. Steinweis writes: "Forty-seven doctoral dissertations were completed under the auspices of the Kaiser Wilhelm Institute for Anthropology" (p. 54). Walter Dornfeldt and Alexander Paul serve as two examples of this new breed. While differing in their levels of explicitness, both demonstrated the radicalization of race science and the patent anti-Semitism that was more circumspect earlier in the discipline's development. Steinweis concludes his chapter with the chilling example of August Hirt, who worked closely with the SS to study, kill, and study again the skulls of Jewish Bolsheviks. "Whereas racist scholarship had at first been intended to provide an intellectual foundation for the forced separation of Germans and Jews, it culminated in the reduction of Jews to a status no better than that of expendable laboratory animals" (p. 63).

As Steinweis notes, it took the work of the American Robert Ericksen's *Hitler's Theologians* to reveal the scandalous role played by the New Testament scholar Gerhard Kittel in the offering "intellectual cover" to the Nazis genocidal policy. In the wake of excellent scholarship on the failures of Jewish-Christian dialogue in the Weimar era (Mendes-Flohr), Kittel himself (Ericksen), on the *Deutsche Christen* (Heschel), it may be asked whether Steinweis has much new to offer—no and yes. No, if we expect new theological insights. Yes, in that the author documents a "runaway effect" in Kittel's anti-Semitic inclinations, similar to other academics under consideration; these figures become more anti-Semitic with each subsequent work. This "runaway effect" appears to be the product of career advancement and the power of an unchecked line of argument. (Martin Buber famously challenged Kittel's desire to foist alien status on the Jews—but Buber was Jewish and therefore, without any influence.)

Steinweis's discussion of the less-famous Karl Georg Kuhn offers an excellent example of how a twentieth-century scholar could caricature the Talmud as well as a late medieval Dominican friar or a Johann Andreas Eisenmenger. Professional eminence proved no defense at all against total misrepresentation. Kuhn, at least, repudiated his *The Jews as World-Historical Problem* (1939) and the excesses of the Holocaust. For his colleagues, this mea culpa was maxima enough—Kuhn was honored with a Festschrift and an entry in Germany's Who's Who.

Sociology, a younger field than theology or history, comprised demography, economics, family structure, and even epidemiology. Accordingly, Steinweis's examples in this final chapter draw from a wider sample of scholars who did not, as Kittel and Kuhn, occupy the same faculty of the same university. Having heard Professor Steinweis lecture on Peter-Heinz Seraphim in Jerusalem in 1999, I can attest his prolonged wrestling with the issue haunting this book: how could such an intelligent, well-trained, diligent scholar become a committed Nazi? Seraphim's 1938 tome *The Jews of Eastern Europe* became an indispensable handbook of the Final Solution, offering evidence of the Jew as a dangerous economic parasite and wholly unassimilable to the general population. Seraphim was a committed "segregationist" rather than an "eliminationist," to borrow a useful distinction of Donald Niewyck's. He even protested the execution of Jews as economically wasteful and heartless insofar as it included women and children (p. 150). Steinweis wonders, as should we all, whether similar revulsion would have been provoked by an encounter of the realities of mass murder on the part of the more "ivory tower" subjects handled in these pages.

This important book deserves a wide readership, but certain features will discourage it. Steinweis packs a lot into 160 pages; at times I wish he had been less disciplined. The nonexpert reader could have used a little more contextualizing of the various disciplines: a reader unfamiliar with German historiography would have benefited from a paragraph explaining the role of this discipline in the formation of the German nation, the conflicts between ultranationalists and *Kathedersozialisten* at the end of the Imperial period, and the post-World War II debates. Ironically, until very recently, the Nazi period was the only one in which non-Jewish historians sustained interest (albeit mendacious) in Jewish matters. The Nazi desire to create a counterhistory to the works of Jost, Graetz, Dubnov et al. stands in contrast to relative indifference toward the Jews on the part of earlier German historians. I would have also liked an epilogue on the dismantling of race studies as a discipline after 1945. As George Mosse argued in *Toward the Final Solution*, as the work on the Tuskegee

airmen has shown, as John Efron's *Defenders of the Race* documented, and as the current "Deadly Medicine" museum exhibit shows, race science was entirely mainstream until it was discredited by guilt by association. The reception accorded to Charles Murray's and Richard Herrnstein's *The Bell Curve* indicates how sensitive this topic has remained, even when approached from a statistical angle that avoids medical misuses of the idea of race (such as phrenology). A comprehensive study on the discrediting of this pseudodiscipline seems to me a scholarly desideratum.

Richard Gray's *About Face: German Physiognomic Thought from Lavater to Auschwitz* offers a thorough, nonnarrative history of the modern attempts to interpret the desires, dispositions, and internal character of human beings based on their body (p. xvii). While the search for an objective science of physiognomy goes back to the ancient Greeks, Gray argues that its boom period coincides with the modern era, especially in German lands. A wide range of first-rank intellectuals including Goethe, Herder, Hegel, Schopenhauer, and Husserl paid attention to this theory. The origin of this "science," in Gray's reading, lies with Lavater's *Physiognomische Fragmente* (1775–78), which sought a scientific basis for an inquiry that Lavater acknowledged as problematic, "Isn't it presumptuous to analyze faces?" (p. 338). Through his analysis of Lavater's (chapters 1–3) and Goethe's (chapter 4) advocacy of this discipline, Gray reviews the Enlightenment from a unique perspective. The second half of the book jumps to early twentieth-century developments, with chapters on Spengler, Günther, and Clauss, respectively. (This division is mine, not Gray's, and points to two, somewhat distinct, readerships: the first, those with a sustained interest in the Enlightenment and its semiotics of difference; the second, those readers whose primary interest lies in the fatal flowering of race science in the Weimar-Nazi eras. A jump from Goethe to Günther needs a better transition than it receives here (pp. 176–77.)

Gray is in command of his material, reads these sources capably, and brings a wide variety of disciplines into discussion. He offers a compelling case that this subject has been underestimated, although may go too far when he considers that scholars of German racial thought have neglected its scientific aspect as opposed to its cultural one. At several points, this reader lost the analytical implications in the vast quantity of detail, some of it repetitive. For example, in his concluding discussion, an analysis of photographer August Sander, Gray raises the possibility of a counterracist physiognomics. "Sander's photographic practice can stand as a model for the exploitation of specific technologies and artistic practices in support of a physiognomic project specifically conceived as an ideological counterforce to the reactionary physiognomics practiced so widely

throughout Germany in his day" (p. 378). Is there, or is there not, a nonreactionary use of physiognomics? Moreover, if Sander stands as the only significant counterexample to a train that was headed in one direction only, signaled by the book's subtitle, page 369 is a long wait for this insight. Considering that Gray explicitly eschews this teleological perspective elsewhere, both the subtitle and this concluding discussion beg for a clear position statement from the author.

Stricter editing (the two chapters on Günther and Ludwig Claus, for example, run 113 pages) would have made the argument sharper, and probably made the short conclusion section of each chapter unnecessary. I wish Gray had connected his semiotic discussions to those of some more traditional historians who have, in fact, provided important cultural frameworks for understanding reactionary trends in German history (such as Stern, Mosse, Nipperday, Wehler). Perhaps these reservations display the bias of a historian reading a book in Germanistik: I defer to Sander Gilman's book jacket blurb that Gray deserves reading by historians of science and those of literature alike.

Michael Mack's *German Idealism and the Jew: The Inner Anti-Semitism of Philosophy and German Jewish Responses* offers a complement to the above-mentioned works in its analysis of philosophy's role in promoting conceptions of Jewish otherness, which differed from each other but reaffirmed Judaism's fundamental alterity. As the title suggests, Mack engages on two fronts: first, to describe the anti-Semitism of German idealism; second, to explain the counternarratives created by Mendelssohn, Heine, Geiger, Graetz, Cohen, and Rosenzweig which resisted the misrepresentation of Jews and Judaism. The second half of the book, which will not come under review here, relies on the idea of counternarrative as the means of resistance to majority misrepresentation (pp. 92–93, 98). Following the lead of Susannah Heschel's *Abraham Geiger and the Jewish Jesus* (Chicago, 1998) and Christian Weise's *Wissenschaft des Judentums und protestantische Theologie im wilhelminischen Deutschland* (Challenging Colonial Discourse: Jewish Studies and Protestant Theology in Wilhelmine Germany/Tübingen, 1999), Mack regards these Jewish figures as engaged in an early form of postcolonialist discourse with respect to the Christian West. Whether it is Mendelssohn finding a way to square heteronomous religion with philosophical rationalism, Freud's insistence on the primal and the fundamental irrationality of reason, or Rosenzweig's praise of blood ties as life—giving Rosenzweig leverage against Hegel's view that Jewish aversion to blood-letting functionally demoted them as useful citizens—Jewish thinkers consciously engaged with a discourse damaging to Judaism and prone to the demonization of Jews. This section of the

book makes a signal contribution to the growing appreciation of Germany Jewry's pugnacity and merits serious consideration even if some claims may not convince. (For instance, Mack sees Freud as less hostile to religion and Judaism in particular than most interpreters do [p. 136].)

The first part of *German Idealism and the Jew* begins with Kant's transformation of Spinoza's analysis of ancient Judaism from a secularist critique of contemporary theocracy (Spinoza) into a transcendental defense of universalized Christian values and the concomitant relegation of Judaism to a dead past—an immutable “religion with a religion.” The German Aufklärung, with its more sympathetic attitude toward religion than the French Enlightenment, becomes, for Mack, an invitation to idealistic pseudoreligion masquerading as universal philosophy. Thus, despite Hegel's use of history to challenge Kantian idealism, the former retained Kant's negative views of Judaism. In an interesting discussion of Jewish dietary laws and Hegel's social theory, Mack explains that the unwillingness of Jews to enter into the cycle of violence and victimhood on the level of eating precludes them from participating in the sacrificial acts necessary to attaining collective happiness in the nation-state. Hegel's Christianity hearkened back to Rome not Israel. Rome's willingness “to inflict pain on immediate being” (p. 61) made it ultimately able to transcend the this-worldly, which Judaism cannot do. Mack distinguishes between the early and late Hegel, as well as the seeming conflict between his philosophical derogation and his political acceptance of Jewish emancipation. Mack convincingly demonstrates that both Kant and Hegel reflect a Protestant upbringing and a decidedly Marcionist streak.

I read this book when it first appeared and the flaws (its use of academic jargon, the relative weight of these pronouncements when judged against the entire corpus of work, neglect of some seminal historical discussions of these matters, overdrawn distinctions) did not disappear on a second reading. However, in light of persisting discussions of how Europeans configured Jews and how Jews resisted with their own counter-narratives, the merits of this work not only remain but seem magnified by the passage of time on the ongoing academic discussion.

Thomas Mittmann's *Vom “Günstling” zum “Urfeind” der Juden: Die antiemitische Nietzsche-Rezeption in Deutschland bis zum Ende des Nationalsozialismus* uncovers Nietzsche's role in radicalizing anti-Semitic discourse, but the emphasis is on the different (and remarkably distinct) ways in which Nietzsche's oracular but ambiguous pronouncement shifted meaning from Nietzsche's own lifetime until the Nazi era. Mittmann's book mitigates the pitfalls of reception history by focusing on middlebrow and high-level reception and offers a reminder that any major figure, such as

those discussed by Steinweis, Gray, and Mack, cannot be taken solely on their terms and in their own words. The historian must factor into any evaluation of their role in forwarding the Jewish Question how these figures were understood in subsequent generations. (This is less of an issue for Steinweis, who focuses on scholars in the Third Reich itself, and on their demonstrable roles in providing intellectual cover for the Final Solution to the Jewish Question.) Mittmann addresses the issue of reception principally within the perspective of anti-Semitism. Despite a chapter on intra-Jewish discussions of Nietzsche, and the Jewish desire to portray Nietzsche as a defender, a subject successfully handled by Steven Aschheim's *The Nietzschean Legacy*, Mittmann focuses on how anti-Semites absorbed Nietzsche's teachings. This reception showed surprisingly clear developmental stages. Whereas Nietzsche seemed to most anti-Semites in the Kaiserreich one of the Jews' minions (imagining Nietzsche as anybody's "*Günstling*" boggles the mind), Weimar anti-Semites saw him as a battler against Jewry. By Nazi Germany, he had been raised to the status of anti-Jewish prophet.

While Mittman demonstrates clear stages in Nietzsche's reception, all of Nietzsche's readers reacted to a fundamental reality: Nietzsche's anti-Judaism was central to his worldview and a necessary part of his Hellenic versus Hebraic calculus. (Unless I have missed something, a comparative study treating the "Hellenism and Hebraism" debate in Germany as opposed to Western Europe and especially Great Britain would seem to me a scholarly desideratum). Nietzsche, though arguably the most acute analyst of German anti-Semitism (see especially his discussion in *Beyond Good and Evil*, which compares German and Western Jewries, reflects on the basic anti-Semitism of most Germans, and acutely notes the blend of fear, jealousy, and alterity), combined anti-anti-Semitism with anti-Judaism. His contempt for anti-Semites was more political and localized; his contempt toward the spirit of Judaism, more thoroughgoing and deep-seated. Nietzsche remained suspicious of those with Jewish backgrounds even when their Judaism/Jewishness no longer defined them in any important sense. His limited contact with Jews early on (pp. 23–28), from the perspective of someone interested in philo-Semitism, makes his ability to combine anti-anti-Semitism and anti-Judaism less surprising: elitist disgust with anti-Semitic parties and propaganda was much more widespread than sympathy with Jews, Judaism, or Jewishness.

In the end Mittmann deepens, but confirms, the initial "take" on Nietzsche by Western scholars following World War II. Nietzsche, ultimately, aided the radicalization of German anti-Semitism and played into the Nazi Weltanschauung—his own disdain for contemporary anti-Semitism

and the admiration of Jewish Nietzscheans notwithstanding. One might add that for a book that began as a dissertation (Ruhr-Universität, Bochum 2005), Mittmann's is admirably well organized, well written, and concise—not virtues usually associated with this genre, and all the more praiseworthy for the sorts of material (popular press, family archives, handwritten correspondence) with which Mittmann builds his case. I wish that Mittmann had engaged a little more with his own take on the secondary literature (he works with sources in German, English, French, and Italian), in particular the works of Aschheim and Wistrich, but these are small quibbles with an excellent piece of work.

In light of these works, one could conclude that the mismeasure of the Jew was one of the great interdisciplinary “achievements” of the modern era. The only serious dissent to this train of thought, Henry Wasserman's *False Start: Jew Studies at German Universities during the Weimar Republic*, argues that neither brilliance nor apostasy was required for Jews in Judaistik to obtain a foothold in German universities. In the end, the very limited nature of their professional success, and the fact that even in their own field Jewish university teachers neither set the scholarly agenda (this occurred in the rabbinical academies) nor destabilized the fundamental anti-Jewish prejudices of their German Protestant sponsors, indicates to me just how aptly Wasserman's own book title captures the reality. Despite their best efforts, Jewish sages from Mendelssohn (eighteenth century) to Geiger (nineteenth century) to Benno Jacob (twentieth century) failed to change the paradigm of Jewish alterity and inferiority. Thankfully, it appears that twenty-first-century scholars—Jewish and non-Jewish—are well on their way to that paradigm change.

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