

Article

We Spring from that History: Bernard Lazare, between Universalism and Particularism

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Abstract: This paper examines the evolution of Jewish identity in the works of writer and critic Bernard Lazare. It suggests that Lazare’s oeuvre elucidates one of the central tensions in modern Jewish thought: the division between those thinkers who use the reputedly universalist Greek philosophical tradition as a lens to analyze and critique Judaism, and those who use the Jewish textual tradition to challenge and reconceive non-Jewish philosophy. Lazare situated himself on both sides of this divide during his life. In his early work, he used the universalist, laical ideology of French republicanism to attack what he perceived as the inflexible, regressive, anti-modernist character of Talmudic Judaism. Lazare’s thought later shifted in the wake of his involvement in the Dreyfus Affair, and he sought to reclaim an ethnic, nationalist conception of Jewish identity as the source for a communal Jewish political response to rising anti-Semitism. Yet through a close reading of Lazare’s writings, the paper suggests that Lazare’s intellectual evolution was never as complete or totalizing as he perhaps wished. His earlier work occasionally used Jewish sources to critique philosophical universalism, while hints of philosophical critiques of the particularism of Jewish texts such as the Talmud remained in his later revalorization of Jewish identity. Lazare thereby reveals how universalism and particularism remain mutually implicated within modern Jewish thought. The paper thus suggests avenues for Lazare to be productively read within the broader canon of modern Jewish thinkers.

Keywords: Judaism; modern Jewish thought; France; Jewish nationalism; Dreyfus Affair; Jewish question; philosophy of religion

1. Introduction: Jewish Thought between Athens and Jerusalem

In his panegyric to his master Jacob Gordin (1896–1947), the influential Algerian-born French Jewish rabbi Léon Askénazi (1922–1996) wrote that one of Gordin’s greatest innovations for modern Jewish thought was to use Judaism as a lens to judge the modern world for the first time, rather than judging Judaism on the basis of the ethical and cultural standards of modernity. In the past “the attitude of academics dealing with traditional Jewish content was, in general, to take as criterion of evidence the postulates of philosophical thought”¹ (Askénazi 1995, pp. 14–15), so that even for scholars who themselves came from Jewish backgrounds and had studied Jewish sources, “to think, even and above all, of Judaism was first to think it in Greek”² (Askénazi 1995, p. 15). Gordin’s great innovation, according to Askénazi, was to call for a “radical reversal”³ (Askénazi 1995, p. 15) of the direction

¹ *Réhabilitation des intuitions immédiates de la conscience juive comme cohérence de pensée: l’attitude des universitaires traitant des contenus traditionnels juifs était, en général, de prendre comme critère d’évidence les postulats de la pensée philosophique.*

² *Penser, même et surtout le judaïsme, c’était d’abord le penser en grec.*

³ *renversement radical.*

of this judgment. No more would Judaism have to justify itself based upon the standards imposed by the universalist philosophical tradition, a tradition that claims that its metaphysical and ethical truths can be derived from the universal human faculty of reason alone, independent of particular revealed religious traditions. Instead, now “it was the so-called universal thought which, in turn, had to be evaluated according to the criteria of Jewish consciousness”⁴ (Askénazi 1995, p. 15). For the postwar disciples of Gordin, it would no longer be Judaism that would have to justify to the non-Jewish world its continued existence as a small minority religion in modernity, a religion whose very survival resisted the Christian teleological vision of a future universal conversion of all of humanity to the one true faith, as modern Jewish thinkers dating back to Moses Mendelssohn had been so preoccupied with doing. Now, it would be modernity that would have to justify its philosophical values before Judaism.

The effect of this “radical reversal” of the relationship between Jewish thought and the reputedly universalist Greek philosophical tradition was to displace the universal from its privileged position at the center of philosophical thought, so that “there was no longer a dichotomy of principle between general culture and Jewish tradition”⁵ (Askénazi 1995, p. 15). This, in turn, would demand a radically new understanding of the relationship between the particular tradition of the Jewish people and non-Jewish philosophy. Rather than defining the particularism of Jewish law and ritual in contradistinction to the supposedly rational universalism of the philosophical tradition, Jewish tradition could be used to deconstruct and call into question false claims of universalism, claims that are in fact blind to their own contingency. If the Greek philosophical tradition makes claims for the universal validity of both ontological and ethical truths, unrelated to the contingent cultural and religious background of the person making such claims, then it would seem on the surface to be the antithesis of the Jewish tradition, a tradition that understands itself to be the ongoing revelation to one particular national community of people. Yet for Gordin and Askénazi, this universalist philosophical tradition, which derives from ancient Greece and was later adopted and promulgated by Christian thinkers, has consciously failed to question the particularity of its own assumptions, the extent to which it has internalized the particular, contingent cultural assumptions of the Christian West without realizing or acknowledging this fact. If the Greek tradition, dating back to Parmenides, provides totalizing ontological explanations of the nature of the universe as a whole, “comprehensive accounts of whatever there is” (Lloyd 2012, p. 39), while the Christian tradition promises a universal soteriological horizon for all who will accept the truth of the revelation through Christ, then the alliance of Greek ontology with the Christian religion in the West has offered a totalizing account of the universe that effaces all human difference in favor of a vision of a singular human community united in a final messianic redemption.

This vision, however, remains willfully blind to the fact that its reputed universalism is actually rooted in a particularly Christian teleological vision of history, a vision rooted in the ontological tradition passed down from the Greeks. Thus, this Greco-Christianity can far too easily be mobilized to justify violence against all those who insist upon maintaining their cultural particularities in the face of the forward march of history toward the universal human community. The only means to displace this Greco-Christianity from its hegemonic position at the center of Western thought, a position that has allowed it to make false claims to universal, unconditioned validity that it in fact cannot support, is to turn to a particular tradition that is uncontaminated by the failures of universalist philosophy. If the cataclysm of the Second World War proved that Athens and Rome had failed, then it would take Jerusalem to displace them from their privileged position in the West.

For Askénazi, this alternative to the failures of Western metaphysics is precisely what Gordin found in the Jewish tradition, a means to expose the fact that philosophy that makes claims to universalism stills remains situated within “the universe of the Christian tradition”⁶ (Askénazi 1995,

⁴ *C’était la pensée dite universelle qui, à son tour, devait être évaluée aux critères de la conscience juive.*

⁵ *Très vite, il n’y eut plus de dichotomie de principe entre culture générale et tradition juive.*

⁶ *L’univers de la tradition chrétienne.*

p. 15). By using Jewish sources to question and critique philosophy, we would come to see that the philosophical tradition that calls itself universalist, which believes that its truths can be reached by any human being in any cultural context through the faculty of reason alone, is in fact merely its own particular, a particular rooted in the contingent Greek and Christian heritage of Europe. Jewish particularism could then become the foundation for a new, true universal, a universal that would be more than merely a Greco-Christian particular in disguise, so that "'Jewish thought' was formulated as universal in its own way"⁷ (Askénazi 1995, p. 15). Jewish particularism would come to be an exemplar for this new universal, a particular instantiation of universalist principles. If the Western universalist tradition had died in the gas chambers at Auschwitz, then any new philosophical or ethical universalism would have to begin from the particular sources of the tradition which the Shoah had nearly destroyed. Through Askénazi's readings of his master, Gordin came to be seen as the intellectual patriarch for a strand of postwar Jewish thought that reclaimed Jewish particularism as a necessary precursor for any universalism that could still stand in the wake of the Shoah. This would have to be a universal built atop the particular.

Askénazi's reverent ode to Gordin offers a possible means of understanding one of the central polarities within modern Jewish thought. Jewish thinkers in modernity have historically oscillated between earlier attempts to use the Occidental tradition of reputedly universalist philosophy to understand, justify, and at times critique Judaism, an intellectual lineage running from Moses Mendelssohn (1729–1786) through many 19th century Jewish scholars and rabbis such as Zadoc Kahn (1839–1905), and later attempts to use the Jewish textual tradition as source material to challenge and reconceive the assumptions of non-Jewish philosophy, an intellectual approach which can be attributed to modern Jewish thinkers such as Franz Rosenzweig (1886–1929) and Emmanuel Levinas (1906–1995). Modern Jewish thought, then, may perhaps be categorized on a continuum of whether it submits Jewish tradition to the external judgment of abstract philosophical universalism, or whether it begins with Jewish particularism and uses this particularity as the grounds for a new model of universalism that decenters the priority of the Greco-Christian tradition.

It is within this intellectual dichotomy that we may read the works of the little studied late-19th and early-20th century Jewish writer Bernard Lazare (1865–1903), a writer situated precisely on the knife-edge between these two intellectual approaches. Born into an assimilated French family and raised with little education in traditional Jewish sources (Hammerschlag 2018, p. 30), Lazare began his career as a typical 19th century French Jewish universalist, who viewed the particularism of Talmudic and rabbinic Judaism as antithetical to the post-Enlightenment concept of universal citizenship which France had striven to adopt in the wake of the Revolution. In the wake of the Dreyfus Affair, Lazare radically reconceived his understanding of his own Jewish heritage. Lazare came to see a self-conscious return to the particularism of Jewish heritage, and to Jewish texts such as the Talmud, as his people's only possible antidote to the deracination and rootlessness that characterize the modern capitalist man, cut off from his own past and unable to lay claim to the intellectual resources bequeathed to him by his own unique history and culture.

Yet the tensions within Lazare's oeuvre, and the incomplete nature of his attempt to move from one side of this continuum to the other, uniquely illustrate the challenges facing Jewish thinkers attempting to negotiate the encounter between the particular traditions and texts of Judaism and the modern philosophies that call themselves universalist, rooted in Greece and running through European Christian thought and into modern secularism. Lazare's inability to revalorize Jewish particularism fully, and the traces of his earlier thought that remained even within his later works, perhaps allow us to question whether the dichotomy between Jewish thinkers who understand Judaism in the light of philosophy and those who understand philosophy in the light of Judaism can ever be a total or complete one. A new consideration of Bernard Lazare within the framework of modern Jewish

⁷ *D'emblée, la «pensée juive» se formulait comme universelle à sa manière.*

thought can thus help to elucidate the tension between these alternating currents, and to reconsider the relationship between philosophy and Judaism in modernity. Lazare's oeuvre provides a lens to examine how the ghosts of the putatively universalist, Greco-Christian philosophical critique of Judaism continue to haunt even those Jewish thinkers who attempt to reach beyond it.

2. Background: The Jew in Late 19th Century France

In an article in which he attempts to define and situate the place of modern Jewish thought within the broader emergence of European modernity, Paul Mendes-Flohr argues that a central determinant factor of the modern European Jewish experience was the Jewish people's exit from the ghettos and concomitant "entry into the modern world" (Mendes-Flohr 2005, p. 735). The Jewish people's exposure to the secular world, a process that began in the late 18th century and accelerated rapidly throughout the 19th, forced Jewish thinkers "to re-articulate and even radically re-evaluate the theological presuppositions of Judaism in the light of the modern, secular experience" (Mendes-Flohr 2005, p. 735). Modern Jewish thought, then, was fundamentally defined by a historically contingent process of secularization that enabled the Jewish people to interact with non-Jewish philosophical sources after centuries of sociocultural isolation. The category of modern Jewish thought is conceived as inextricable from the sociopolitical conditions that enabled and perhaps forced its creation.

Of course, Christian thought itself underwent a radical rethinking in light of modern challenges to the authority of Scripture and Revelation, but for Mendes-Flohr, what separated modern Jewish thought from other modern European religious thoughts was the political and social circumstances that gave birth to it, the fact that "Jews first encountered the modern world during the protracted struggle in eighteenth and nineteenth century Europe to attain political emancipation" (Mendes-Flohr 2005, p. 735). Because of the fact that European Jews first encountered modernity, and the philosophical presuppositions underpinning it, at a time when their political and social status was in rapid flux and when debates over "the Jewish question" occupied the European polity in a diverse array of locales, modern Jewish thought was "often guided by an apologetic motive" (Mendes-Flohr 2005, p. 736), as Jewish thinkers attempted to justify the continued survival of Judaism within the modern world, and to demonstrate how the particularism of Jewish law could coexist within a modern universal, secular concept of citizenship. This apologetic defense of Judaism took place against a backdrop of harsh debates about the possibility of Jewish integration and citizenship, at a time when many statesmen demanded that Jewish "difference needed to be dissipated before equality could be extended" (Samuels 2016, p. 18). If the particularism of Jewish law served as a barrier to the entry of the Jews into a modern model of universal citizenship, then the Jew who wished to defend Jewish law had to accept the philosophical premises of universalism and to defend Jewish law on these grounds. Any attempt to defend Judaism on the terms of its own particularism would simply reinforce the prejudices of those Christians who demanded the abolition of Judaism.

As the first modern European state to grant equal citizenship rights to its Jews, the French nation perhaps embodied this philosophically universalist model of citizenship more than any other. As a result, late 19th century French Jewish thought was dominated by thinkers who submitted the Jewish tradition to the judgments of abstract philosophical universalism. For many of these thinkers, the Jewish tradition itself had outlived its usefulness, and modernity had rendered the continued survival of Jewish particularism a historical anachronism. For example, for the half-Jewish historian and philosopher Joseph Salvador (1796–1873), Jewish law served only to enable the Jewish people to maintain their national distinctiveness and to survive as a culture in exile into modernity, when their covenantal law could then reemerge and influence modern society in the form of "this popular humanity, this sympathy and philanthropy" which are "nothing but the law and the principle

of the people incarnated in Israel"⁸ (Salvador 1860b, pp. 4–5). For Salvador, the external practices of the Jewish law, those particular rituals and customs that divide the Jews from the surrounding nations, do not constitute the essence of the message of Judaism; rather, the law is only that which "is applied to constituting"⁹ the Jews as a people throughout their long exile and to ensuring that they do not perish from the earth before their time has come to emerge from isolation and help to build a fraternity of all nations (Salvador 1860a, p. 362).

Salvador believed that the true message of Judaism was contained within the prophetic texts of the Hebrew Bible, texts which promise an overcoming of the particularity of Jewish law in favor of a universal brotherhood of man that crosses ethnic and religious boundaries. The prophetic message of Judaism, for Salvador, offers "the long-term promise, the prophetic idea of a universal assembly of peoples"¹⁰ (Salvador 1860a, p. 363). The true message of the Mosaic Law is found not in its particular religious statutes and practices, but rather in the promise of a future universal human covenant that the prophets found hidden in this law, a path toward "the future or prophetic organization of human society"¹¹ (Salvador 1860a, p. 344). The Mosaic covenant that bound the Jews together as a people throughout the centuries was not valuable for the specific juridical content of its individual religious laws, but rather served as one unique exemplar of the emerging democratic national consciousness that was spreading across the entire globe in the 19th century, a new consciousness embodied in the post-revolutionary republicanism of Salvador's native France (Salvador 1860a, p. 85). The prophetic message of Judaism, for Salvador, is contained not within its statutory laws, but rather in its messianic promise of "every democratic form" that foretells the emergence of "a universal wisdom of nations" that will one day come to be instantiated in "a Jerusalem of a new era"¹² (Salvador 1860b, p. 372). In Salvador's reading, the Mosaic covenant models a rational religion which functions as a precursor to the nonsectarian universalism of modern republicanism, a form of government that will one day come to govern all of humanity. The Biblical prophets understood that the Mosaic covenant contains within it "a promise of a universal covenant"¹³ (Salvador 1860a, p. 61).

The particularism of Jewish law can therefore serve for Salvador only as an instrumental means to enable the Jewish people to preserve their prophetic message of philosophical universalism until the modern age. Once this transpires, the Jews have fulfilled their historical mission and may disappear as a people:

It must be remembered again that the Jewish people were not created as a people for themselves alone, but in the universal interest attached to the name of the people [. . .] It is in this sense that it should not be regarded as an ordinary nation, but rather as a people systematically consecrated to an idea, a principle, as a messianic people or initiator. From them on, the force or spirit that killed the ancient people was supposed to kill at the same time the idea, the principle irrevocably associated with its existence.¹⁴ (Salvador 1860b, p. 4)

⁸ *En dehors de tout dogme, quelque admirable que soit le zèle en faveur des faibles, des malades de corps et d'esprit, des affligés; quelque extension et puissance qu'il convienne d'attribuer à cette humanité populaire, à cette sympathie et philanthropie particulièrement divinisées en la personne de Jésus, elles ne se renferment pas moins dans un ordre déterminé. Elles ne restent autre chose que le droit et le principe peuple incarnés en Israël, en Jacob.*

⁹ *s'applique à constituer.*

¹⁰ *la promesse à long terme, l'idée prophétique d'une assemblée universelle de peuples.*

¹¹ *l'organisation future ou prophétique de la société humaine.*

¹² *Chaque forme démocratique, chaque peuple, doit s'entendre avec les autres sur certains principes, certains points; on doit s'entendre sur une loi générale de sociabilité; on doit aspirer à une sagesse universelle des nations. De là résulte toujours, et conformément à mon objet, la nécessité future et logique pour tous les peuples renouvelés de se rebâtir un centre commun, de retrouver leur expression personnelle, et leur légitime garantie dans une Jérusalem d'ère nouvelle.*

¹³ *une promesse d'alliance universelle.*

¹⁴ *Afin d'éclairer la figure et ses conséquences, il faut vous rappeler de nouveau que le peuple juif n'a pas été créé peuple pour lui seul, mais dans l'intérêt universel attaché à ce nom de Peuple. Vous en savez le comment et le pourquoi. C'est en ce sens qu'on ne doit pas le considérer comme une nation ordinaire, mais bien comme un peuple systématiquement consacré à une idée, à un principe, comme un peuple messianique ou initiateur. Dès lors, la force ou l'esprit qui tuait le peuple ancien était censé tuer du même coup l'idée, le principe irrévocablement associé à son existence.*

For Salvador, then, Jewish particularism can only be justified insofar as it preserves a message of higher philosophical universalism that is instantiated in the words of the Hebrew prophets; once this message has been transmitted to the nations, the Jews have completed the task for which they were put on this earth. In this way, Salvador's vision of a universal moral purpose for the Jewish people accords with a Christian supersessionist reading, whereby Judaism must eventually fade away in favor of a religious vision that applies to all of humanity, without regard for ethnicity or nationhood. Salvador simply argued that rather than fulfilling their mission with the arrival of Christ, as the Christian supersessionist would argue, the Jews fulfilled their moral mission with the arrival of 19th century French republicanism and its ideal of a universal, nonsectarian concept of citizenship built upon abstract ideals of liberty, patriotism, and human fraternity, and not upon historically contingent ties of religion or ethnicity.

Similarly, for French Jewish philologist and Orientalist James Darmesteter (1849–1894), the great message of Judaism lay in its prophetic texts, such that “in accordance with the prediction of the Prophets, Judaism had become something universal”¹⁵ (Darmesteter 1895, pp. 266–67). Just as for Salvador, Darmesteter saw the historical survival of the Jewish people through their particular law as no more than an instrumental means to preserve this universal prophetic message, and thus the outward forms of ritual Jewish practice served only as a bearer of a prophetic core underlying the Mosaic law; as Darmesteter wrote, “as for Judaism, if it had its right and its reasons to endure, it was as depository and guardian of the Bible”¹⁶ (Darmesteter 1895, p. xii). In Darmesteter's reading, the great innovation of prophetic Judaism was precisely to elevate a universal ideal of justice above the particular practices of Jewish law, so that “the conversion of ritual Jehovism to prophetic Jehovism raised the moral level of the nation and the government”¹⁷ (Darmesteter 1895, pp. 59–60). This prophetic moment represented nothing less than a major innovation in the history of human religion; Darmesteter claims that prior to this period when the prophets of the Hebrew Bible found and described the universal message hidden beneath the statutes of Jewish Law, all religions could be merely particular and national in character, and could not make universally binding moral claims upon humanity as a whole, “because religion did not consist in universal and absolute dogmas, but in details, in practices, in histories; religions were national and local, not universal”¹⁸ (Darmesteter 1895, p. 257).

Prophetic Judaism, as distinguished from the sectarian Judaism embodied in the ritual practices of the Mosaic Law, was for Darmesteter nothing less than the invention of the possibility of a universal religion, a new religion grounded upon moral ideals applicable to all humans in all cultural circumstances that would one day govern all human relationships. Thus the Biblical prophets arrived “to proclaim a new doctrine, a unique God in the world and a law of justice for all men. They create the universal religion [. . .] whose dogmas and orders could and should find an echo in every human heart, whatever the blood that beats there”¹⁹ (Darmesteter 1895, p. 265). What prophetic Judaism offered was the birth of the possibility of a religion that could make universal moral claims on all humankind, separable from particular practices and rituals; this possibility was later taken up by the Church during “the Christian era”²⁰ and reached a larger population (Darmesteter 1895, p. 265). If many Christian histories of religion divide the ethnic particularism of Jewish law from the universal ethical and soteriological vision of the Christian Church, then Darmesteter's project was to locate the

¹⁵ *Conformément à la prédiction des Prophètes, le judaïsme était devenu quelque chose d'universel.*

¹⁶ *Quant au judaïsme, s'il a son droit et ses raisons de durer, comme dépositaire et gardien de la Bible.*

¹⁷ *La conversion du jéhovisme rituel au jéhovisme prophétique éleva d'ailleurs puissamment le niveau moral de la nation et du gouvernement.*

¹⁸ *Dans ces temps-là, on ne se convertissait pas d'une religion à l'autre, parce que la religion ne consistait pas en dogmes universels et absolus, mais en détails, en pratiques, en histoires; les religions étaient nationales et locales, non universelles.*

¹⁹ *La scène change avec les Prophètes; ils viennent, vers le vile siècle avant l'ère chrétienne, proclamer une doctrine nouvelle, un Dieu unique dans le monde et une loi de justice pour tous les hommes. Ils créent la religion universelle, c'est-à-dire une religion sans analogue jus-qu'alors et dont les dogmes et les ordres pouvaient et devaient trouver un écho dans tout coeur humain, quel que soit le sang qui y bat.*

²⁰ *l'ère chrétienne.*

first stirrings of ethical universalism back within Jewish history itself, arguing that Christianity in fact borrowed its ethical vision from the Jewish prophets.

If the Greco-Christian promise of a universally valid religion, in accord with the truths of philosophy attainable through the faculty of human reason alone, promises a singular, totalizing ethical message that effaces all religious particularities, then Darmesteter agreed with this vision, but simply tried to argue that Judaism embodied it before Christianity did. Thus did Darmesteter divide the values of Judaism between “an individual ideal, realizable in the present, and a universal ideal, to be realized in the future”²¹ (Darmesteter 1895, p. 295). The survival of the Jewish people, enabled by the particularity of the Jewish law and the state of Jewish separation which its practices maintained, offered one unique historical path to the universal moral *telos* of a united Christian Europe, so that “Israel would have only secondary significance in the Catholic union of the future,” a union that would represent the final culmination of “the Biblical and messianic idea”²² (Darmesteter 1895, p. 366). For Darmesteter, as for Salvador, Jewish particularism could only be justified for as long as Judaism instantiated a prophetic message that would one day have universal significance; once this message had been delivered, the continued survival of Judaism within modernity no longer served a philosophical purpose for humanity at large that could be defended upon universalist grounds.

Other late 19th century French Jewish scholars and community leaders such as chief rabbi Zadoc Kahn argued for the continued survival of Judaism in the modern republican state, but they nonetheless did so by submitting Judaism to the judgment of philosophical universalism, arguing that Judaism was worth preserving because it was the purest instantiation of the universal values of the French Revolution, and thus could help to spread these values among the French citizenry at large. For Kahn, Judaism constituted the “purest and most demanding moral doctrine, which is the most representative of true humanity, which encourages what gives strength and health to societies, and, lastly, which puts love of the fatherland and absolute respect of the law above all” (Kahn 2018, pp. 20–21). Kahn identified Judaism as a source for modern secularist principles such as religious tolerance and liberty, principles “which have become the foundation of the French law”²³ (Kahn 1875, p. 293). Kahn argued that because Judaism offers a heritage that may teach universally applicable values of religious freedom, values that are essential for the construction of the modern secular state, the particular traditions of Judaism are worth preserving to help educate humanity in these values. Thus the modern secular state should allow a place for the continued survival of the Jewish people and practice of the Jewish religion within it, not merely for the sake of the Jewish people alone, but for the sake of the citizenry at large.

Jewish values were for Kahn completely in consonance with French values, both preaching “the love of God, love of men, cult of work, and devotion to the fatherland” (Kahn 2018, p. 28). The survival of Judaism was essential for the modern French state because Judaism already contained within its heritage the same universalist values which the modern French nation was now working to embody in its polity, those “eternal truths that have their expression in Judaism and that we consider as our *raison d’être* in the history of humanity” (Kahn 2018, p. 23). For Kahn, then, the moral *telos* of the Jewish people was to preserve and instantiate these universal values of tolerance and religious freedom, values “worthy of a country of religious liberty,” which he claimed had always been part of the Jewish tradition since time immemorial (Kahn 2018, p. 24). After their emergence from the isolation of the ghetto and into the light of the modern secular state, leaders of the Jewish community would now help to teach these values to their own people and to the French citizenry at large, to serve as the famous “light unto the nations” described by the prophet Isaiah (Isaiah 49:6). The role of Judaism was primarily pedagogical, to spread the universal values of “patriotism and civic virtue” that the modern state depended upon for its nonsectarian model of citizenship (Kahn 2018, p. 22). Though Kahn held

²¹ *un idéal individuel réalisable dans le présent et un idéal universel à réaliser dans l’avenir.*

²² *Israël n’aurait qu’une signification secondaire dans l’union catholique de l’avenir. C’est le caractère même de l’idée biblique et messianique qu’elle n’a pas besoin d’expression matérielle et de centre politique, l’union qu’elle vise étant celle des intelligences.*

²³ *qui sont devenus le fondement de la loi française.*

a far more optimistic vision for the future of French Judaism than did writers such as Salvador and Darmesteter, all agreed that Judaism remained valuable in modernity only insofar as it accorded with reputedly universalist philosophical and ethical ideals. The particularity of Judaism was subordinated to abstract philosophical universalism, and the continued survival of Judaism could only be justified insofar as it could be made to accord with this universal.

Thus, Lazare was born into a French Jewish milieu whose leading intellectual figures were deeply committed to judging Judaism on the basis of philosophical universalism. For some French Jews, this meant viewing Judaism as a tradition that had outlived its usefulness in modernity and could be consigned to the dustbin of history; for others, it meant identifying Jewish values with French republicanism in an attempt to demonstrate that Judaism still had a role to play in 19th century France, and that its survival was worth defending. In both cases, it was the axiological presuppositions of universalist philosophy that were employed to judge Judaism, and not those of Judaism that judged philosophy. At the beginning of Lazare's writing career, he largely adopted this dominant conceptual approach of his community of assimilated French Jews, submitting the Jewish tradition to the dictates of philosophical universalism, and finding it deeply lacking. The later tectonic shift in Lazare's thought in the wake of the Dreyfus Affair, when he moved from judging Judaism on the basis of philosophy to reclaiming Judaism as a lens to critique the perceived failures of philosophy, thus represents a key conceptual movement in the intellectual approach of French Jewish thinkers, a movement that anticipated the postwar generation of thinkers such as Gordin and Askénazi.

As a thinker who straddled both sides of this intellectual divide within a short period, Lazare's work enables us to consider one of the major conceptual divisions within modern Jewish thought. A reconsideration of Lazare's thought can thus help us to rethink the relationship between Jewish particularism and philosophical universalism in modern Jewish thought, and to question how these ideals may remain mutually implicated even in those thinkers who strive to reject one in favor of the other.

3. "The Bonds of the Rabbinical Code": Universalism in the Early Lazare

"I have been charged by some with being an anti-Semite, by others, with exhibiting too great bias in defending the Jews, and my writings have been judged either from the anti-semitic or the philosemitic standpoint" (Lazare 1903, p. 5). This quote, from Bernard Lazare's 1894 work *L'Antisémitisme, son histoire et ses causes* (Antisemitism, Its History and Causes), may be seen as a fitting summation of Lazare's entire career, during which he moved from vituperative attacks on the Jewish community for being backwards and trapped in particularistic legalisms that divided the Jews from modernity, to later attempts to revalorize precisely this same particularism as the source for a Jewish communal political response to anti-Semitism. Yet his move between these two intellectual poles was perhaps never as total as he wished to portray it.

Before he took up the sociopolitical dimensions of the Jewish question, Lazare began his career as a symbolist poet and short story writer, and many of his early literary writings reveal a fascination with the Jewish textual tradition as a heritage of stories upon which the modern writer may draw. Lazare's 1892 short story collection *Le Miroir des Légendes* (The Mirror of Legends) contains several retellings of traditional Jewish narratives. In "*L'Éternel Fugitif*" ("The Eternal Fugitive"), Lazare's retelling of the story of the golden calf from the Book of Exodus (Exodus 32:4–8), Lazare offers the character of Samiri as an alternative Israelite leader to Moses, a vision of a developmental path not taken by the Jewish people.²⁴ When Moses goes up to Sinai to receive the Law, the Israelites feel abandoned and forsaken. Samiri exploits this despair by encouraging the people to abandon their Yahweh, offering them in his place "a god in accordance with our desires, whom we will break if he does not obey our prayers"

²⁴ Interestingly, the name "Samiri" comes from the Quran, which gives this name to the creator of the golden calf. This name does not appear in the Hebrew Bible, and it does not seem to appear in rabbinic literature either.

(Lazare 2017a, p. 16). Samiri appears in this story as an urbane and even proto-modern figure, briefly offering the Jews a pathway out of “the fear of the divine that incites meditations; the fear that provokes prayers” in favor of “bodies, liberated from customary and henceforth fallacious dreads [. . .] able to enjoy” (Lazare 2017a, p. 17). Samiri thus offers the Israelites a glimpse of the sensualist hedonism that characterizes monotheistic fantasies of pagan cultures. This would mean the end of Israelite difference through assimilation, as Lazare confirms by describing Samiri’s followers as “mingling Gomorrah, Sodom and the sins of other cities” (Lazare 2017a, p. 18).

This assimilationist rejection of the monotheistic spiritual in favor of the pagan bodily and sensual of course cannot last, and so Moses descends from the mountain and banishes Samiri (Lazare 2017a, pp. 18–19). As Samiri departs, Moses foretells that the Israelites will one day commit an even greater and less forgivable crime than the golden calf:

One somber morning, out there in the promised Canaan, the accursed one who still mocks his master will strike the one who, bearing the cross, will climb the hill; then your laughter will salute his last mockery, and in your hearts, you will think as he does. On that day, you will be abandoned by your father; he will winnow you in the wind of his fury; he will disperse you over the earth, like grains of wheat impotent to take root; the veil will be torn from your sanctuaries; you will be a dead nation, and the world will be lost to you forever. (Lazare 2017a, p. 20)

By invoking the cross, Lazare’s Moses augurs the coming Jewish rejection of Christ, a rejection that will doom the Jews to centuries of unending exile. This is a more irremissible crime than the erection of the golden calf; for the golden calf, *Elohim* “has chastised you and not annihilated you”, but the Jewish God will not forgive his people’s refusal to accept the Messiah that will one day be sent to them (Lazare 2017a, pp. 19–20). Here Lazare appears to internalize the Christian theological interpretation of the Jewish exile; according to Lazare’s character of Moses, it is because the Jews will spite Christ instead of recognizing him as their Messiah that they will be dispersed across the earth by their God. The Jews cling to a vain hope in a messianic future when their exile will end, because they refuse to accept that in fact their Messiah has already come. They deny the concrete fulfillment of the stated ideals of their own faith.

Thus “*L’Éternel Fugitif*” sketches two paths to assimilation out of Judaism, both of which the Jewish people reject. The figure of Samiri offers assimilation into pagan sensuality, while Christ fulfills the messianic promises of the Jewish religion. The Jews can accept neither, and so they are doomed to suffer as a useless remnant in their separation from the other nations. Indeed, it is hard to avoid the note of regret in Lazare’s tone that the Israelites did not choose Samiri’s path of assimilation early in their history, avoiding the problem entirely. As this tempter departs, the Israelites “furtively [. . .] turned their heads, and with regretful sighs, they watched the solitary Samiri, who was drawing away into the desert” (Lazare 2017a, p. 20).

Yet Lazare’s belief in the possibility of assimilation as a path out of Jewish difference and into universalism seems belied by the story “*Les Incarnations*” (“The Incarnations”), which appears to expound an ethnic definition of Jewishness. Lazare narrates this tale in the first-person, unlike the other stories in *Le Miroir des Légendes*, perhaps hinting at a personal identification between Lazare and his unnamed European Jewish narrator. This narrator encounters a Chinese Jew, and is immediately struck by how this man does not appear to be fully ethnically Chinese, “for certain features of his visage differentiated him clearly [. . .] his complexion, bistre rather than yellow, his eyes deprived of a canthus, and his fleshy red lips attested a non-Mongolian race and attached him to a divergent ethnic type” (Lazare 2017b, p. 143). In a nod to common stereotypes, the narrator identifies this Chinese man as a Jew by his nose, “long, curved, holed by wide, mobile nostrils [. . .] might have been described as a nose like an eagle’s beak, or a nose like a vulture’s beak” (Lazare 2017b, p. 143). It is the nose that suggests to the narrator that he is speaking to a fellow Jew, suggesting that there must be some marker of ethnic Jewishness that cannot be effaced by cultural assimilation. Thus Lazare’s Jew is both marked

and unmarked, both capable of blending into the background of “one of the little cafés where the silent clients were smoking” (Lazare 2017b, p. 142), while retaining some visible signifier of Jewish identity that identifies him to his fellow Jew. Jewishness becomes to an extent irremissible.

Indeed, this “schismatic Celestial Jew” remains Jewish even though he has by all accounts largely assimilated into the culture of China, rejecting the “metaphysics” of traditional Judaism in favor of belief in “Confucius, who was very wise” (Lazare 2017b, p. 144). Despite his apparent assimilation, the Chinese Jew still retains some vestigial remnant of Jewish identity, which led him to depart China, “moved by the very natural desire to know my coreligionists scattered to the four corners of the world” (Lazare 2017b, p. 145). The Chinese Jew thus identifies himself with the Jewish people, yet he nonetheless recounts his overwhelmingly negative impressions of the Jews he has met during his travels in impersonal, almost anthropological terms, bluntly referring to the Jews as “that race” (Lazare 2017b, p. 145). This Chinese Jew is both Jew and not, both assimilated out of Jewishness and trapped within it. He describes this paradox of Jewish identity as both escapable and inescapable by stating that he has “found that race, which is renowned everywhere for its unbreakable unity, more multiple than any other” (Lazare 2017b, p. 145). Thus Lazare appears torn throughout *Le Miroir des Légendes* over whether Jewish identity is constituted by Talmudic religious practices that can be overcome through assimilation and acculturation, or as an essential, and even racialized, ethno-cultural identity that continues to determine even those Jews who have worked to forsake it. This tension would play out throughout Lazare’s entire corpus.

Lazare’s fascination with the literary tropes of Jewishness led him to examine the history of the Jewish people more seriously in the years after the publication of *Le Miroir des Légendes*. His *L’Antisémitisme*, first published in 1894 and reprinted shortly after his death, represented one of the first serious attempts by a Jewish thinker to try to understand Christian European anti-Semitism on its own terms, without clear apologetic motives for the Jewish community; Lazare stated that his goal in this work was “to write neither an apology nor a diatribe, but an impartial study in history and sociology” (Lazare 1903, p. 5). Yet for all his exaggerated claims of impartiality, Lazare’s text is hardly bereft of underlying ideological and axiological assumptions.

Throughout the text, Lazare largely but not exclusively adopts the ideology of *régénération* associated with French Revolutionary statesmen such as Abbé Grégoire (1750–1831). While Grégoire was widely seen by both Jews and non-Jews alike as a strong defender of the rights of the Jews of France, due to his strident calls for Jewish emancipation and the end of legal and economic restrictions on the Jews, these calls were always premised upon the assumption that the Jews were a backwards and uncultured people, whose “difference was manifest in every aspect of their physical appearance, from their putatively deformed bodies to their supposedly unpleasant odor” (Samuels 2016, p. 14). Grégoire took it for granted that the Jewish people were morally and physically inferior to French Catholics; he simply argued that these differences were not ontological and innate, but were rather a result of the degraded circumstances in which the Jews lived, so that in fact the harsh and discriminatory laws imposed upon the Jews by Christian Europe were responsible for the degraded state in which they found themselves. Grégoire wrote in 1787:

Instead of bridging the gap which separates the Jews from us, we liked to enlarge it; far from providing them with reasons to enlighten themselves, to improve themselves, all the avenues of the temple of virtue and honor have been closed to them. What could become of the Jew, overwhelmed by despotism, proscribed by the laws, fed with ignorance, tormented by hatred? [. . .] He was despised, he became despicable; in his place, perhaps we would have been worse.²⁵ (Grégoire 2002, pp. 36–37)

²⁵ *Au lieu de combler l’intervalle qui sépare les Juifs de nous, on s’est plu à l’agrandir; loin de leur fournir des motifs pour s’éclairer, s’améliorer, on leur a fermé toutes les avenues du temple de la vertu et de l’honneur. Que pouvait devenir le Juif accablé par le despotisme, proscrit par les lois, abreuvé d’ignominie, tourmenté par la haine? Il ne pouvait sortir de sa chau-mière sans rencontrer des ennemis,*

Since the moral inferiority of the Jewish people was a result of their isolation from the civilizing influences of modern Christian civilization, the logical solution was to integrate the Jews into the broader Christian society, and in the process to improve their moral character through regeneration. The Jews, concluded Grégoire, were “only waiting for a change on our part, to change with us”²⁶ (Grégoire 2002, p. 90).

Lazare largely adopted this ideology of *régénération* in his *L'Antisémitisme*, calling for the gradual moral improvement of the Jews through assimilation, but with one significant alteration. Whereas Grégoire could still point to discriminatory laws that kept the Jews apart from Christian Europe, blocking the assimilation that he prescribed, Lazare wrote a century later, decades after France had first provided Jews with equal citizenship rights. Consequently, he placed much of the blame for Jewish difference and social isolation upon the Jewish people themselves, arguing that it was their stubborn insistence upon clinging to the backwards legal codes of Talmudic and rabbinic Judaism that kept them socially isolated and morally degraded. This is why, in Lazare's telling, there was more anti-Semitism in eastern Europe than in France, where the process of assimilation was further along, for “in western Europe where the Talmud nowadays has lost its influence and the Jewish *cheder* has given place to the public school, the hereditary hatred of the Jew for the Christian has disappeared in the same proportion as the hatred of the Christian for the Jew” (Lazare 1903, p. 320). French Jews are less morally degraded, and consequently less hated, because they spend less time studying the Talmud and more time on secular subjects.

The problem for Lazare is that this assimilation was prevented not only by laws imposed on the Jews from outside, as Grégoire would have argued, but by the very teachings of the Talmudic rabbis themselves, who demanded total separation from the surrounding nations in order to maintain Jewish distinctiveness. Lazare derisively quotes an unnamed Talmudist saying:

“Do not cultivate strange lands, soon you will cultivate your own; do not attach yourself to any land, for thus will you be unfaithful to the memory of your native land; do not submit to any king, for you have no master but the Lord of the Holy Land, Jehovah; do not scatter amongst the nations, you will forfeit your salvation and you will not see the light of the day of resurrection; remain such as you left your house.” (Lazare 1903, pp. 22–23)

Because this Talmudist demands total isolation and resistance to all foreign law, the Talmud becomes in Lazare's reading the chief antagonist to the entry of the Jewish people into modernity. The precepts of Talmudic Judaism must be overcome, for they have kept the Jews separate from the nations, as the Talmud reinforces “egotistic, cruel and nationalist precepts directed against strangers” (Lazare 1903, p. 264). It is the Talmud, and the Talmud alone, that preserves Jewish particularism and prevents Jewish assimilation, for “Talmudism [. . .] held the mass of the Jews bound to strict observances and narrow ritual practices” (Lazare 1903, p. 17). Here Lazare submits the Talmud to the dictates of philosophical universalism, and finds it absolutely wanting. In those rare instances when the Jew has truly adopted the universalist philosophy of post-Enlightenment political republicanism, such as among a small segment of elite French Jews educated in French secular schools, “his own peculiar laws have also disappeared” (Lazare 1903, p. 367). Lazare contrasts the eastern European *juif*, still clinging to his backwards religious customs, with the modern and assimilated French *israélite*, whose very existence testified to the possibility that a wholehearted embrace of French republicanism could lead to the overcoming of the particularism of Jewish law. In this depiction, the philosophical universalism of the modern secular state must ultimately come to abolish the particularistic laws of

sans essayer des insultes. Le soleil n'éclairait que ses douleurs; martyr de l'opinion, il n'avait rien à perdre ni à gagner pour l'estime publique, même lorsqu'il se convertissait, parce qu'on ne voulait croire ni sa sincérité ni à sa vertu. Il était méprisé, il est devenu méprisable; à sa place, peut-être eussions-nous été pires.

²⁶ *La cause et l'effet sont corrélatifs: supprimons les causes, et nous verrons qu'ils n'attendent qu'un changement de notre part, pour changer à notre égard; d'ailleurs il en coûte à l'homme pour haïr.*

Talmudic Judaism; this is the only way to eliminate the scourge of anti-Semitism. At this stage in Lazare's thought, universalism and Talmudic Judaism cannot possibly coexist.

Lazare notably identifies the Talmud as the source of the practice of usury for which Jews have been so hated throughout the centuries, writing that Talmudic laws have kept the Jews from intellectual advancement in other occupations, so that "the Jews who succeeded in keeping a free brain and proud spirit were in the lowest minority", ensuring that "they had no capabilities for anything outside of commerce and usury" (Lazare 1903, p. 125). Yet ironically, it is just this practice of usury, and other such practices of predatory capitalism, that will ultimately ensure that anti-Semitism fades away, for such hated capitalist practices naturally stir up popular prejudices "against the Jewish capitalist, but in so doing it gently leads them toward Socialism" (Lazare 1903, pp. 374–75). Socialism, and the consequent abolition of particularistic cultural attachments in favor of the universal class identity that Marxism foretells, will in turn lead to "the elimination not only of the economic cause [of anti-Semitism], but also of the religious and ethnic causes which have engendered it" (Lazare 1903, p. 375). By forcing Jews into predatory practices that in turn fuel popular support for Marxist politics and their concomitant abolition of religion, Talmudic Judaism contains within itself the dialectical seeds of its own destruction.

Lazare, then, wants to subject Judaism to the philosophical dictates of universalist philosophies such as Hegelianism, of which Marxism represents the final flowering. Yet even while he employs universalist Marxism to critique the particularistic Judaism of the Talmud, there are moments throughout the text when Lazare seems to reverse this polarity, arguing that the edifice of philosophical universalism represented by Marxism is in fact constructed upon the intellectual foundations of Jewish particularism. Lazare identifies Marx's Jewish heritage as essential to his political project, and he shows a deep concern for reclaiming Marx within the tradition of Jewish thought, describing Marx as "the descendant of a long line of rabbis and teachers, he inherited the splendid powers of his ancestors" (Lazare 1903, p. 315). Here Lazare even attempts a recuperation of his despised Talmud, identifying Marx as someone who "had that clear Talmudic mind which does not falter [. . .] he was a Talmudist devoted to sociology and applying his native power of exegesis to the criticism of economic theory" (Lazare 1903, pp. 315–16). This attempt to situate Marx within a lineage of Jewish thought brings Lazare uncomfortably close to the essentialist, deterministic picture of Jewish identity that his repeated demands for Jewish assimilation (Lazare 1903, p. 365) would otherwise seem to contradict. After all, if the purpose of assimilation is to enable the Jew to become part of the broader Christian culture and abandon his difference, then the baptized Karl Marx would seem to provide an ideal model for how such assimilation allows the Jew to abandon Talmudic particularism in favor of philosophical universalism.

Yet Lazare instead claims that certain essential characteristics of the Jewish religion render Jews uniquely suited to revolutionary leftist politics, so that socialism may be seen as directly linked to "the passionate thirst for liberty of the ancient Hebrews", and "the activity of the Jew revealed itself in the very work of revolution" (Lazare 1903, p. 307). To draw this connection between Jewishness and leftist politics, Lazare contrasts the Jewish focus on this-worldly justice, rooted in commandments performed during one's time on earth, with the Christian deferral of reward to the afterlife:

Thus the conception the Jews formed of life and death furnished the first element of their revolutionary spirit. Starting with the idea that good, that is justice, was to be realized not beyond the grave—for beyond the grave there is sleep, until the day of the resurrection of the dead—but during life, they sought justice, and never finding it, ever dissatisfied, they were restless to get it. (Lazare 1903, p. 285)

Lazare likewise identifies Judaism as the source for "the equality of men", a belief that evolved out of the prophetic Jewish elevation of "the belief in one and universal God" above the purely national God of the earlier Hebrew scriptures (Lazare 1903, p. 285). Thus the socialist Lazare finds historical and theological reasons that lie behind the Jewish overrepresentation in leftist politics, a fact he underscores by dutifully listing the numerous Jews involved in European socialism during his day

(Lazare 1903, pp. 312–13). It is perhaps unsurprising that in his 1933 book *Au Signe de Flore* (At the Sign of Flora), the explicitly anti-Semitic “integral nationalist” Charles Maurras (1868–1952), a major ideologue of the powerful far-right political movement *Action Française*, cited this section of Lazare’s text approvingly; Maurras claimed Lazare had finally furnished him with his definitive proof that “the Jew is a revolutionary agent”²⁷ (Maurras 1933, p. 51).

Lazare, then, makes the somewhat paradoxical argument that the Jews are uniquely responsible for both the philosophical universalism of Marxism, the culmination of the Hegelian historical project, and for the socioeconomic conditions of usurious capitalism that made Marxism necessary in the first place, so that the Jew is “found among the representatives of industrial and financial capitalism, and among those who have vehemently protested against capital” (Lazare 1903, p. 312). Lazare’s *L’Antisémitisme* winds up as a deeply conflicted work. At times Lazare sees Talmudic Judaism as the antithesis of philosophical universalism, which must come to destroy it, while at other times he wants to reclaim Judaism as the particular exemplar of socialist universalism. Both strands of thought remain at work within the text, and they are never fully resolved.

Moreover, Lazare typically sees the social isolation of many European Jewish communities as a result of the backwards Talmudic legal restrictions which the Jews have accepted, laws which render the Jews “the victims of this isolation which was due to their guides, the rabbinites” (Lazare 1903, p. 191). Yet there are moments throughout the text when Lazare seems to want to reclaim Jewish isolation as uniquely constitutive of the true social solidarity and mutual aid that makes ultimately universalist political projects such as socialism possible. He writes that it is because of their shared experiences of persecution and suffering that the Jewish people have developed strong bonds of solidarity:

In those evil hours they cuddled one to the other and felt themselves brethren; the bond that joined them was fastened more tightly. To whom could they tell their complaints and their feeble joys, if not to themselves? From these general desolations, from these sobs was born an intense and suffering brotherhood [. . .] Amidst the groans and oppressions they were forced more than ever to live among themselves and to band more closely. For did they not know that on their journeys they would find a safe refuge with the Jew only, that if sickness befell them on the way, a Jew alone would help them like a brother? (Lazare 1903, p. 121)

Here Lazare sees Jewish particularism not as antithetical to philosophical universalism, but rather as constitutive of the very sentiments and conditions that make the true universalism of socialism possible, a universalism built upon the genuine shared emotional bonds of brotherhood and fraternity that come from a shared history, and not on mere bloodless philosophical abstractions such as liberty or equality. Rather than submitting Judaism to universalism, here he situates universalism upon the foundations of Jewish fraternity. True socialism is rendered possible because of the shared experiences of oppression and suffering that bind the Jewish people together. This passage demonstrates the first stirrings of the model of a new universalism built atop Jewish particularism to which Lazare would devote the rest of his life.

4. “Henceforth I am a Pariah”: Lazare’s Revalorization of Jewish Particularism

Shortly after the publication of *L’Antisémitisme*, Mathieu Dreyfus (1857–1930), elder brother of the falsely convicted Captain Alfred Dreyfus (1859–1935), contacted Lazare and requested his assistance with the public defense of Captain Dreyfus (Hyman 1998, p. 103). Lazare’s active involvement in the Dreyfus Affair, and his ensuing realization that anti-Semitism could strike not just the backwards, legalistic Talmudic *juif* but even the assimilated, patriotic French *israélite* who had by all accounts accepted the philosophical tenets of French political universalism, permanently altered Lazare’s relationship to his own heritage. At Mathieu Dreyfus’s request, Lazare researched the case and

²⁷ *Le Juif est agent révolutionnaire.*

produced a lengthy pamphlet entitled *Une erreur judiciaire: la vérité sur l’Affaire Dreyfus* (A judicial error: the truth about the Dreyfus case), which the Dreyfus family paid to print and distribute to French politicians, journalists, and other notables (Hyman 1998, p. 103). This pamphlet represented the first attempt to lay out the facts of the case in a systematic fashion and to demonstrate that Captain Dreyfus had been the victim of a miscarriage of justice (Hyman 1998, p. 103).

While much of the pamphlet simply narrates the problems with the government’s case against Dreyfus in a manner that the modern reader is unlikely to find groundbreaking, the pamphlet is nonetheless notable for the rare moments when Lazare breaks from his self-consciously objective, journalistic tone, and becomes more personal and reflective. At one point in the pamphlet, Lazare argues that despite his status as an assimilated *israélite*, Captain Dreyfus remained essentially Jewish, and for this reason he was necessarily guilty before his accusers, no matter the specific facts of the case:

Did I not say that Captain Dreyfus belonged to a class of pariahs? He was a soldier, but he was Jewish and it is as a Jew especially that he was persecuted. It is because he was Jewish that he was arrested, it is because he was Jewish that he was tried, it is because he was Jewish that he was sentenced, it is because he is Jewish that the voice of justice and truth cannot be heard in his favor, and the responsibility for the conviction of this innocent falls entirely upon those men who provoked it by their unworthy excitations, by their lies, and by their calumnies [. . .] They needed a Jewish traitor fit to replace the classic Judas, a Jewish traitor who could ceaselessly remind one each day to bring down his reproach on a whole race; a Jewish traitor who could be used to give a practical sanction to a long campaign, of which the Dreyfus Affair was the last act. (Lazare 1897, p. 9)²⁸

This passage represents a milestone in Lazare’s thought, as he identifies the Jews here as “a class of pariahs”²⁹ (Lazare 1897, p. 9), in an essentialized fashion. While certain passages of Lazare’s *L’Antisémitisme* display a similarly essentialized notion of Judaism, here Lazare portrays Dreyfus as someone who was destined to be persecuted from the very moment of his birth as a Jew, as part of a lineage of hated and oppressed Jews dating all the way back to Judas, Jews whom the Christians had systematically subjugated and afflicted regardless of the personal characteristics of the particular Jew. It did not matter that Captain Dreyfus was by all accounts an assimilated modern *israélite* who was deeply committed to the philosophical tenets of French liberal citizenship and who had little or no formal education in Talmud or other Jewish sources, or that he was sufficiently loyal to the French state that he volunteered to serve in the French military (Hyman 1998, pp. 100–1). None of this mattered, because Dreyfus had been forced to play a role that had been scripted for him millennia earlier, from the first moment when Judas became the Christian scapegoat for the murder of Christ. Dreyfus was guilty in the eyes of his accusers not because of what he had done, but because of who he was. Indeed, despite Lazare’s meticulous effort to document the facts of the case and to demonstrate Dreyfus’s innocence of the specific charges leveled against him, there is a sense here in which Dreyfus could never truly be innocent. Dreyfus was a Jew, and as a Jew, he was ontologically guilty in the eyes of his Christian accusers before he even became consciously aware of what Jewishness meant.

Lazare’s essential identification of the Jew as pariah, the outcast whom Christian Europe could never truly accept as equal no matter how much he tried to assimilate to their values, became the

²⁸ *N’ai-je pas dit que le capitaine Dreyfus appartenait à une classe de parias? Il était soldat, mais il était juif et c’est comme juif surtout qu’il a été poursuivi. C’est parce qu’il était juif qu’on l’a arrêté, c’est parce qu’il était juif qu’on l’a jugé, c’est parce qu’il était juif qu’on l’a condamné, c’est parce qu’il est juif que l’on ne peut faire entendre en sa faveur la voix de la justice et de la vérité, et la responsabilité de la condamnation de cet innocent retombe tout entière sur ceux qui l’ont provoqué par leurs excitations indignes, par leurs mensonges et par leurs calomnies. C’est à cause de ces hommes qu’un tel procès a été possible, c’est à cause d’eux qu’on ne peut faire pénétrer la lumière dans l’esprit de tous. Il leur a fallu un traître juif propre à remplacer le Judas classique, un traître juif que l’on pût rappeler sans cesse, chaque jour, pour faire retomber son opprobre sur toute une race; un traître juif dont on pût se servir pour donner une sanction pratique à une longue campagne dont l’affaire Dreyfus a été le dernier acte.*

²⁹ *une classe de parias.*

basis for his attempt to revalorize Jewish particularism as the source for a productive political Jewish identity. If the Jew was to be regarded as pariah no matter what he did, if the slanderous treatment of Captain Dreyfus had convinced Lazare that assimilation was no longer a viable option in the fight against anti-Semitism, then all that remained was for the Jew to embrace his pariah status and use it as the source for a reclamation of a positive Jewish identity. In his manuscript *Le fumier de Job* (Job's Dungheap), left unedited and published after his death, Lazare for the first time explicitly identified his personal fate with that of the Jewish people as a whole, writing, "I am a pariah [. . .] I have overcome the pride of being a Jew, I know why I am one, and that binds me to the past of my own people, links me to their present, obliges me to serve them, allows me to cry out for all their rights as men" (Lazare 1948b, pp. 44–45). Whereas previously Lazare had identified the Jewish people's unwillingness to assimilate to the values of their home countries as the source of anti-Semitism, here he strove to redeem Jewish particularism and difference as the source of Jewish strength, describing the Jewish people as "ever the ancient stiff-necked people,³⁰ the unruly and rebel nation" (Lazare 1948d, p. 86). If previously he had demanded that the Jews give up this rebel status, now he wanted his fellow Jews to hold their heads high and embrace their uniqueness and difference.

Notably, Lazare's return to a positive Jewish identity did not necessarily mean a return to strict practice of the *halakhic* laws of the religion of Judaism, for the Jewish nation contains among it "some practicing Israelites—orthodox or liberal—some deists of course, some pantheists after the fashion of Philo or that of Spinoza, perhaps some positivists and materialists, and certainly some atheists" (Lazare 1948a, p. 55). Rather, this was a redefinition of Jewishness along explicitly nationalist and political lines, as a people who proclaim that all across the earth, wherever they reside, "There is a Jewish nation" (Lazare 1948a, p. 60). Lazare's Jews would cease to strive for assimilation and would fight for their political rights as Jews, as a self-contained nation fighting for its own political needs and goals. In order to proclaim this, Lazare fell back into an essentialized notion of Jewish identity. While he did not go so far as to embrace a strict racial determinism, conceding that "there are several Jewish types" (Lazare 1948a, p. 56) depending on where the individual Jew lives, he did argue for "an identity of origin" (Lazare 1948a, p. 56) among all Jews and even went so far as to affirm that there are "ethnographic types" (Lazare 1948c, p. 124) which "belong only to the Jews" (Lazare 1948c, p. 124). If assimilation is impossible, it is because the Jew cannot cease to be a Jew, no matter what customs he practices or what values he holds. He is a member of the Jewish nation from birth, and he can never truly forsake this identity.

Somewhat ironically, this essentialized concept of the Jews as a separate nation that could never assimilate into a liberal individualized concept of citizenship put Lazare in agreement with the anti-Semites whom he claimed to be fighting. Lazare readily conceded these charges, writing that the most hardened anti-Semite understood the national status of Jewish identity more authentically than did the assimilated universalist French *israélite*, who strove to transform Judaism into a mere confessional religious identity along the lines of Protestantism. For Lazare, the anti-Semite at least intuitively understands the ineradicable fact of Jewish difference:

Especially in those countries where the Jews can take solace for the contempt shown them in the very fact that their emancipation has been sanctioned, it is common that one wants to find in Judaism no more than a religious confession. This may be tactics, this may be a policy—that of the ostrich—but it is not the truth! In this particular case, the anti-Semites are right. (Lazare 1948a, p. 55)

³⁰ It is worth noting that Lazare similarly describes the Biblical Israelites as "a stiff-necked people" in the story "The Eternal Fugitive" in his collection of short stories *Le Miroir des Légendes* (The Mirror of Legends), but in this story it is a term of opprobrium used to condemn the Jews for their stubbornness. Thus, Lazare is in this instance literally recuperating his own language about the Jewish people. This phrase itself appears to be a paraphrase of קשה-עריף from Exodus 32:9, a description used by God to describe the Israelites to Moses after the sin of the golden calf.

If the proclamation of a Jewish nation aided the cause of the anti-Semites, then so be it; as Lazare wrote, “people told me that by affirming the permanence and the reality of a Jewish nation, I made myself an ally of the anti-Semites. I have reflected a great deal upon this grave complaint, and I insist upon remaining, on this point, in alliance with the anti-Semites” (Lazare 1948a, p. 60).

French Jews had tried the strategy of fighting anti-Semitism by abandoning their status as a nation and becoming no more than “Frenchmen of the Israelite faith” (Lazare 1948d, p. 89), and the Dreyfus Affair had demonstrated just what an abject failure this strategy had been. Assimilation means that the Jew “forgets the miserable ancestor from whom he is sprung” (Lazare 1948a, p. 57), but in the process of this deliberate and self-conscious forgetting, the Jew likewise loses any grounds for which he might develop a positive sense of his own identity. The assimilated Jew, the Jew who tries to become no more than a Frenchman of the Israelite religion, can only look upon himself in relation to the Christians, to whom he can never fully be equal; he can only ever see himself “from the point of view of Christian anti-Semitism, for which the Jew can only be tolerated in a Christian state” (Lazare 1948d, p. 94). Far better for the Jew to accept his difference and to accept that as a separate nation, he can never truly be part of the nation where he resides, even if this means accepting and internalizing some of the tenets of anti-Semitism. For it is only as the self-contained Jewish nation that the Jews may develop the sense of cohesive social solidarity that can ground a shared Jewish political response to anti-Semitism.

Here, Lazare returns to the image of the Jew as a suffering Other, an image toward which he gestured several years earlier in *L'Antisémitisme*. Because Jewish national identity was forged amidst shared collective experiences of persecution and collective trauma, it is uniquely constitutive of compassion and social solidarity, so that Jewish nationalism grounds a commitment to “the brother in suffering and in despair” (Lazare 1948d, p. 90). The positive sense of Jewish difference which Lazare wanted to inculcate “was born of that national brotherhood which was strengthened throughout the centuries by all the discriminatory laws under which we have suffered” (Lazare 1948d, p. 89). This means that for Lazare, essential Jewishness necessarily implied compassion for the weak and the hurting. Jewish difference could ground a Jewish political response to anti-Semitism precisely because it has always been a difference based in compassion for the downtrodden and in the prophetic cry that “From Judah are come forth justice and brotherhood” (Lazare 1948d, p. 101).

Notably, this is a demand for justice based in Jewish particularism, but it ends in the universal. Lazare is careful to note that his vision of a Jewish nationalism rooted in social solidarity and in the memories of Jewish suffering and persecution can in no way constitute a form of “that chauvinistic, narrow, and absurd patriotism which leads peoples to set themselves up against each other as rivals or as enemies” (Lazare 1948a, p. 73). Lazare, on the contrary, demanded a universal internationalism grounded upon Jewish nationalism, in which the Jewish nation would ultimately “set up bonds between nations not of diplomatic friendship but of human brotherhood” (Lazare 1948a, p. 73). Here Lazare calls for the true, authentic universalism that he believed could only be grounded upon the true brotherhood rooted in Jewish particularism. A universalism rooted only in abstract ideals of liberal equality, and not in the particular cultural memories of the Jewish people, could only lead to “a fragmented humanity made up of a multitude of cellular organisms” (Lazare 1948a, p. 74). A true internationalism, in contrast, depends upon rootedness in the particular; Lazare writes that “for internationalism to take root, it is necessary that human groups should previously have won their autonomy; it is necessary for them to be able to express themselves freely, it is necessary for them to be aware of what they are” (Lazare 1948a, p. 75). At this stage in his thought, Lazare had concluded that the true universal could only be constructed atop the particular.

However, this depiction of the Jews as the essentially downtrodden people forced Lazare to accept and internalize certain common anti-Semitic stereotypes about rapacious Jewish capitalists, in order to explain the existence of those assimilated *israélites* who did not seem to display the social solidarity which Lazare identified as fundamental to the character of the Jewish nation. Lazare argues that these “Frenchmen of the Israelite faith” (Lazare 1948d, p. 89) had consciously and willfully abandoned their Jewish identities, and “in ceasing to be Jews, they have lost the power which would have allowed them

to combat that prejudice and its effects" (Lazare 1948d, p. 98). Here, Lazare returns to the image of the Talmud that was so fundamental to his arguments in *L'Antisémitisme*, but to diametrically opposed ends. Whereas previously Lazare had argued that the Talmud "united to corrupt the Jew to his very depths [. . .] to the exclusive occupation of commerce and of usury" (Lazare 1903, p. 333), now he argued that in fact the Talmud was "antitrade and antiusury" (Lazare 1948c, p. 120) and that we can find "no doctrine based on trade either in the Bible or in the Talmud" (Lazare 1948c, p. 121). Rather, usury was a foreign practice imported into Judaism through its interactions with outside cultures, first with the Roman Empire, and later with Christianity (Lazare 1948c, pp. 118–122).

Indeed, it is precisely the return to the principles of the Talmud that will protect modern Jews from the corrupting influence of predatory financial capitalism, for "no law has been harsher toward usury than the biblical law and the talmudic law sprung from it" (Lazare 1948c, p. 117). Thus, whereas the anti-Semite sees capitalism and moneylending as endemic to Judaism, Lazare saw it as a tragic result of that assimilated *israélite* who had "de-Judaized himself" and so "became corrupt upon contact with Christian society" (Lazare 1948d, p. 93). Despite seeing these Jewish capitalists as those who had forsaken their Jewish identities, rather than as the exemplars of Jewishness, Lazare in all other ways was as harsh to these *israélite* capitalists as was any far-right anti-Semite, writing that "this Jewish bourgeoisie, rich and not Jewish, is our garbage, our rubbish; we must rid ourselves of it; and if it is unable to protect itself against anti-Semitism, it is not our job to help it" (Lazare 1948d, p. 99). This Jewish bourgeoisie had willfully removed itself from the Jewish people through its own conscious choices, and the most pressing task for the Jewish proletariat was now to "become indifferent" (Lazare 1948d, p. 99) to this deracinated bourgeois class in order to focus on its own cultural and material needs.

Thus Lazare to an extent accepted and internalized anti-Semitic stereotypes against Jews. If the anti-Semite saw the Jews as fundamentally rootless and deracinated, Lazare agreed with this view of the bourgeois *israélites* but saw their deracination as a result of their deliberate decision to forsake their roots, to abandon "everything which binds them to the past and everything which joins them to their brothers in this world" (Lazare 1948d, p. 98). Despite the radical revolution in Lazare's thought between *L'Antisémitisme* and *Le fumier de Job*, one essential quality therefore remained constant through Lazare's entire life. In both texts, anti-Semitism was the Jew's own fault, whether because of his stubborn refusal to abandon the legalistic texts and practices of rabbinic Judaism, or because he was too eager to give up these very same texts and practices in the name of the false bargain of assimilation. The moral polarity of the Jewish tradition was reversed, but the Jew remained responsible for creating his own plight, through his own conscious choices and his own internal qualities.

If previously Lazare had seen the Talmud as a backwards and particularistic text which the Jew had to surmount in order to enter universal modernity, now he saw it as a fruitful cultural storehouse which provided the Jew with the resources he needed to reclaim his particular identity in the face of rising anti-Semitism. Lazare never approached the Talmud as a binding religious text, and his friends report that he personally remained "very sincerely an atheist" throughout his life (Péguy 1948, p. 27). Yet he came to see this text as a vital part of the shared cultural memory that linked the Jewish people across the earth, and as particularly suited to the socialist political project which he wanted the Jewish working classes to embrace, due to the fact that "you will find this glorification of manual work, and of work of any kind whatever, on every page of the Talmud" (Lazare 1948c, p. 116), and that "all talmudic legislation was designed to favor the poor man, the tiller of the soil, and the worker" (Lazare 1948c, p. 118). Consequently, the Talmud was an ideal medium to inculcate socialism in the modern Jewish proletariat.

In the end, Lazare tried to combine his commitment to Jewish particularism with his commitment to socialism, portraying these two values as absolutely in accord. This became a way for Lazare to reunite the particular and the universal. Lazare's Jews are united by a shared history of suffering, and this history has birthed a tradition of ideas to which this one particular people can uniquely lay claim. Their common history and textual tradition provides the Jews with certain unique ideas

and memories, “certain categories of ideas, certain possibilities of feeling and emotion,” to which the Jewish people have unique and exclusive access, ideas which “belong only to us” (Lazare 1948a, p. 59). Yet despite insisting on the Jewish people’s privileged ownership of their own tradition, Lazare nonetheless insists that the ideas produced by this tradition will in the end have universal applicability, so that one day Jewish nationalism may ground a true universalism in which nations live alongside one another in peace according to the “socialist orthodoxy” (Lazare 1948a, p. 75) which Lazare finds in the Talmud. Lazare concludes by demanding that the Jew must “learn how to build your own house, a house where you will welcome all men” (Lazare 1948d, pp. 100–1), a phrasing that explicitly joins together the particular and the universal. Lazare calls for the Jews of his age to embrace and reclaim their particular heritage, and in so doing, they will come to support a Jewish socialist political program that will ultimately have universal applicability. If Lazare began his career by judging the particularism of Judaism by the standards of abstract philosophical universalism, he ended by constructing a new socialist universalism atop the foundations of the Talmud and other sources of Jewish particularism. In Lazare’s later thought, the true universal must be constructed atop the Jewish particular, a particular that serves as an exemplar.

In order to hold together the particular and the universal, in order to construct a new vision of universalism rooted in particularism rather than opposed to it, Lazare’s thought reached a contradiction. To argue for a productive category of Jewish difference, “that indubitable Jewish brotherhood” (Lazare 1948a, p. 60) that results in shared solidarity and compassion for the downtrodden, Lazare had to invoke an essentialized notion of Jewishness. Because he defined the Jews as a self-contained nation who have experienced “a common history” (Lazare 1948a, p. 59) of oppression and subjugation, Lazare could appeal to some essential concept of Jewish identity that has been shaped through this history. Lazare writes that Jewish history “involves common traditions and customs” which “have left their mark upon us, have given us habits, and even more, a like attitude of mind thanks to which [. . .] we look upon things from the same angle” (Lazare 1948a, p. 59). Jewish history establishes “a common past, common traditions and ideas” (Lazare 1948a, p. 59), which forms “the link which unites the Jews of the five continents of the globe” (Lazare 1948a, p. 60). Such rhetoric veers dangerously close to an essentialized notion of “the Jew” as a figure who possesses some ahistorical essence, a fundamental character of mind that can be abstracted from his particular historical circumstances, in order for Lazare to portray Jewishness as uniquely suited to socialism. Lazare reveals this ahistorical essentialism when he describes the anti-mercantilism he finds in the Talmud as an “essentially Jewish concept” (Lazare 1948c, p. 116).

Yet Lazare’s Jew remains at the same time absolutely historically determined, shaped by historically contingent circumstances that are wholly determined by the Christian society at whose mercy he lived, “throughout the whole world [. . .] governed by discriminatory laws” (Lazare 1948d, p. 101). This suggests that the essentially “Jewish mind” (Lazare 1948b, p. 48) to which Lazare wanted to appeal for his sense of Jewish brotherhood is in fact an historically contingent phenomenon, and that if the Jews across the globe were to be liberated from the oppression to which they have so often been subject throughout their history, they might in time come to develop different habits of mind, habits not defined by this shared experience of suffering alterity. Lazare’s only response is to claim that such liberated Jews would be “hardly Jews any more” (Lazare 1948d, p. 98), appealing to an essentialized category of Jewishness that resists the historical contingencies which shaped it. The tension appears irresolvable. For Jewish particularism to become a productive category, Lazare must appeal to some essential category of the Jew for this particular to inhabit, yet to hold onto a universal moral end without retreating into pure particularism, he must appeal to a history of oppression which has shaped this essential Jew and given him his cry for universal justice and compassion. To return to particularism without wholly forsaking the universal, Lazare’s Jew must be both historicized and ahistorical, both essential and contingent.

Furthermore, we can find in Lazare’s later work evidence that he had not wholly forsaken the philosophical tendencies of his earlier work. If *L’Antisémitisme* displays hints of Lazare’s later attempt

to ground universalism upon particularism, through its attempts to locate something essentially Jewish in revolutionary socialism and in Karl Marx, then *Le fumier de Job* is likewise unable to fully escape from the shadow of Lazare's submission of Jewish particularism to the criteria of philosophical universalism. Firstly, Lazare's depiction of the Jew as the essentially downtrodden figure of Christian Europe remained overdetermined by Christian categories. Defining the Jew in terms of his oppression by the Christian majority necessarily involved defining him through discourses imposed upon him from outside. Lazare sharply castigates those assimilated *israélites* who "look upon themselves always in relation to the Christians, never as themselves" (Lazare 1948b, p. 43), and he demands that Jews understand themselves from now on only from "the Jewish point of view" (Lazare 1948d, p. 80). Yet his attempt to reclaim a positive definition of Jewish particularism remains overdetermined by Christian discourses about the Jew as minority religion, the remnant that clings to life in Christian Europe despite having outlived its usefulness. Lazare, to be sure, wants to give a positive moral valence to this state of clinging to life "in exile [. . .] when the Jewish conscience reached its greatest heights" (Lazare 1948d, p. 90), yet this necessarily involves defining Jewish identity in terms of the suffering imposed upon the Jew by the Christian majority, suffering which was in many instances justified by doctrines of philosophical universalism to which the Jew was always seen as falling short. A Jewish particularism rooted in subjugation and oppression can never escape the shadow of the universal category that imposes and inflicts that oppression.

Secondly, and perhaps more significantly, Lazare's positive model of Jewish particularism is rooted in a fundamentally Hegelian model of history, even if he never cites Hegel explicitly in *Le fumier de Job*.³¹ In his attempt to reclaim a positive identity of working-class Judaism, Lazare cites what he claims is "the history of the classes among the Jews", contending that "the class struggle has always been lively inside the [Jewish] communities" (Lazare 1948c, p. 126). But the history of the class struggle, which Lazare depicts in quite explicitly Marxist terms, necessarily implies that this struggle will one day be completed with the proletarian overthrow of the bourgeoisie and the establishment of international socialism. In his short 1899 text *Antisémitisme et Révolution* (Antisemitism and Revolution), written well after Lazare had begun to reassess his relationship to his Jewish heritage in the wake of the Dreyfus Affair, Lazare went so far as to argue that the history of class struggle was in fact the fundamental universal dynamic driving human history, and that this universal was far more philosophically significant than was anything internal to Jewish identity:

So let this band of bourgeois speak to you of Semites and Aryans, of Aryan conceptions and of Semitic corruptions, of Aryan nobility and of Semitic abjection, of Aryan morality and of Semitic morality. These are big words that have no meaning; don't let them trouble your brain: they do not mean anything. There are no Aryans, there are no Semites: there are the poor and the rich, the exploiters and the exploited. There is no Aryan morality or Semitic morality, one admirable and the other ignoble: there is a universal and secular morality, wide and free, and there are religious moralities, narrow, intolerant, particular to a few groups of men stupefied by an irrational faith.³² (Lazare 1899, pp. 14–15)

Here Lazare attacks ethnic particularism as a distraction from the true historical dynamic of the class struggle, a distraction deliberately and maliciously inculcated by "this band of bourgeois"³³

³¹ Lazare does cite Hegel four times in *L'Antisémitisme*, indicating that he must have been at least loosely familiar with Hegelianism. Moreover, the great extent of his appreciation for Marxism makes it unlikely that he would have been wholly unfamiliar with the Hegelian historical model upon which Marxism was premised.

³² *Laisse donc cette bande de bourgeois te parler de Sémites et d'Aryens, de conceptions aryennes et de corruptions sémitiques, de noblesse aryenne et d'abjection sémitique, de morale aryenne et de morale sémitique. Ce sont de grands mots qui n'ont pas de sens; no te laisse pas troubler la cervelle par eux: ils ne veulent rien dire. Il n'y a pas d'Aryens, il n'y a pas de sémites: il y a des pauvres et des riches, des exploiters et des exploités. Il n'y a pas de morale aryenne et de morale sémitique, l'une admirable et l'autre ignoble: il y a une morale universelle et laïque, large et libre, et il y a des morales religieuses, étroites, intolérantes, particulières à quelques groupes d'hommes abêtis par une foi irraisonnée.*

³³ *cette bande de bourgeois.*

(Lazare 1899, p. 14) who want to divide the working classes to keep them from uniting under the “universal and secular morality”³⁴ (Lazare 1899, p. 14) that is socialism. This is a classically Marxist conception of religion and ethnicity, seeing them as little more than obstacles to be surmounted in the name of the ultimate universal that will only come with socialism.

While Lazare perhaps does not go as far in *Le fumier de Job* as he does in *Antisémitisme et Révolution*, there are hints of this post-Hegelian universalism within the former text as well. In *Le fumier de Job*, Jewish particularism is useful and productive precisely—and exclusively—insofar as it is uniquely productive of the social solidarity that will lead the Jews and the working classes as a whole to embrace the ultimate ethical universalism that is international socialism. Lazare may not have endorsed Hegel’s claim that the Jews are “the most reprobate and rejected” of all peoples (Hegel 1977, p. 206), but he appears unable to escape from the notion that Judaism remains judged and determined by the universalist criteria provided by the Hegelian historical model. In *L’Antisémitisme*, Lazare tried to address this tension by arguing for Marxism as itself a fundamentally Jewish political ideology, which would thereby resituate the Marxist criteria for judging Judaism as internal to Judaism itself. But this merely relocates the problem, for the only standard upon which Marxism can be judged the superior form of political organization is a universal standard based upon a Hegelian model of history that will one day efface all cultural differences in the final synthesis of humanity; this universal historical *telos* is the metric under which Marxism submits itself for judgment.

Moreover, in *Le fumier de Job*, Lazare attacks Marx for his conclusion in *Zur Judenfrage* (On the Jewish Question) that “Jewish emancipation in its ultimate meaning is the emancipation of mankind from Judaism” (Marx, as cited in (Lazare 1948c, p. 112)). Lazare claims that such a statement could only be made by someone who does not truly understand Jewish tradition, someone who “knew nothing about the Jews; his father had been converted to Protestantism, and he had left his son wholly in ignorance of the religion, the history, and the present position of those to whom he was linked by so many spiritual bonds” (Lazare 1948c, p. 113). If previously Lazare had wanted to claim Marx as somehow essentially Jewish, now he appeared desperate to push Marx outside of the bounds of Jewish identity. This claim that Marx’s attacks on Judaism reveal his general ignorance of Jewish culture is perhaps the only way that Lazare can hold onto a broadly Marxist conception of history while rejecting Marx’s specifically vituperative comments about Jewishness. This, in turn, forces Lazare into contortions in his own oeuvre, switching from reclaiming Marx as a Jew in the work in which he is least concerned with reclaiming Jewishness as a whole, to expelling Marx from the Jewish people in the work in which he wants more broadly to reclaim Jewishness as a positive identity.

Perhaps the internal tensions evident in Lazare’s project reflect his broken relationship to his Jewish heritage in a larger and more totalizing sense. As a perpetual outsider to the Jewish tradition, he proved unable to inhabit fully a uniquely Jewish critique of philosophical universalism. Raised amidst a French Jewish tradition devoted to using the exegetical tools of philosophical universalism to critique and judge Judaism, and lacking extensive formal training in Jewish sources such as the Talmud, Lazare was never able to wholly develop into the Jewish critic of French society that he strove to become. Yet perhaps it is Lazare’s very failure to fully inhabit a Jewish identity, and the glimpses of philosophical universalism that remain within his attempt to reclaim Jewish particularism, that make him such a productive figure for modern Jewish thought. Lazare’s later thought illustrates the liminal position of the Jewish outsider who attempts to return to the Jewish tradition, and helps to shed light on why it is so difficult for a thinker trained in non-Jewish philosophy to reclaim a Jewish identity. Lazare wanted desperately to use Judaism as a lens to critique modern philosophy, but the philosophical critique of Judaism offered by thinkers such as Hegel remained an undercurrent even within his later work. Even as he identified himself with the Jewish people, Lazare was to a great

³⁴ *une morale universelle et laïque.*

extent only ever able to look upon the Jewish tradition as an outsider, as someone alienated from his own history.

In this way, Lazare's very status as a perennial outsider to his own religious and ethnic tradition is emblematic of the conflicted place of the modern assimilated Jew, equally unable to abandon his tradition fully or to inhabit it fully. Perhaps it is Lazare's very status as a perpetual outsider, a Jew within the world of philosophy and a philosopher within the world of Judaism, that makes his work important to modern Jewish thought. Lazare's later writings remind us that the Jew has long been defined as the perpetual Other in Christian Europe, the people that may only ever dwell "in the society of others and not in its own" (Lazare 1948b, p. 41), forever alienated by persecution and legal restrictions from full assimilation into Christian society. Lazare, then, is the Other of the Other, doubly alienated both from modern Christian society and from his own Jewish tradition—and in this way also doubly modern and doubly Jewish.

5. Conclusions: The Inability to Escape the Universal

One may perhaps view Bernard Lazare's project as a microcosm of French Jewish thought, and indeed of modern Jewish thought as a whole. Lazare began by submitting the Jewish tradition to the reputedly universalist philosophical standards of modernity, and he judged Talmudic and rabbinic Judaism harshly upon these standards. Later in his life the psychological shock of the Dreyfus Affair reoriented his relationship to his own Jewish heritage, and he began to use the particularism of Jewish culture and Jewish literary sources to construct a new model of international socialist universalism. This paper has argued that modern Jewish thought may be situated between these two poles, along the movement between judging Judaism based on the philosophical discourses of modernity, to judging modernity based upon Judaism in the postwar years. It has likewise argued that Bernard Lazare, whose own oeuvre demonstrates both sides of this continuum, provides a fruitful test case to apply this particular model of modern Jewish thought.

However, this paper has also attempted to demonstrate that Lazare's thought shows how frequently and how easily one side of this spectrum of modern Jewish thought may become implicated within the other. It has attempted to show how Lazare relied upon Jewish particularism even in the work in which he ostensibly submitted Judaism to the judgment of philosophical universalism, and how he likewise revealed himself as incapable of fully escaping from the shadows of universalism while he attempted to reclaim Jewish particularism. In so doing, I wish to suggest that the work of Bernard Lazare points to the mutual implication of universalism and particularism within modern Jewish thought, to the fact that even thinkers who strive to begin their projects on one side of the dichotomy or the other may often wind up reabsorbed within the mutually constitutive dynamics of both of these ideals. The proposed model that situates modern Jewish thought between these two poles is necessarily an incomplete model which does not map onto actual modern Jewish thinkers in a complete or uncomplicated manner. But perhaps it is precisely the incompleteness of this model that renders it useful, demonstrating how universalism and particularism remain productive as heuristic guidelines toward which modern Jewish thinkers orient their thought, even while they also demonstrate the impossibility of fully inhabiting either of these categories. Lazare appears to have recognized this fact late in his life, which may help to explain why, rather than attempting to suppress his earlier work in an attempt to impose an artificial consistency upon his oeuvre, he in fact authorized a posthumous reprinting of *L'Antisémitisme*, apparently viewing this text as essential to a complete understanding of his intellectual journey (Vidal-Naquet 1996, p. 290, n14).

We may conclude, then, with the words of French Catholic poet, essayist, and editor Charles Péguy (1873–1914), a fellow Dreyfusard activist and close personal friend of Lazare, who helped to keep Lazare's memory alive after his death. In an essay commemorating his friend's life, Péguy notes that Lazare felt deeply at home amidst the transitory nature of the modern urban landscape (Péguy 1948, pp. 38–39). Péguy quotes Lazare as saying that "I only begin to feel at home when I arrive at a hotel," a saying which Péguy claims illuminates the Jewish people as a whole, describing it

as “one of those phrases which illumine a man, a people, a race” (Péguy 1948, p. 39). If this statement which Péguy attributes to Lazare is true, it is more than a little ironic, given that it would mean Lazare felt most at home in the modern urban hotel, one of the most visible markers of that rootlessness and deracination which Lazare was trying to help the modern Jew escape. It appears, then, that Lazare remained haunted by the very same deracination of abstract modernity to which he accused the more assimilated members of his own people of falling prey, and that he himself proved unable to inhabit fully the particular past which he willed his people to reclaim. Lazare, who spent the last years of his life in a desperate struggle to reclaim a Jewish identity not determined by the Christian lens, is today remembered in part due to the writings of his Christian friend Charles Péguy, who saw the Jews fundamentally as wanderers, people for whom “every crossing is the crossing of the desert”, for whom “the stones of dwellings will ever be the canvas of tents” (Péguy 1948, p. 38). The Jewish pariah was in the end unable to escape from the Christian gaze. One hopes Lazare, whose mind was ever alert for such contradictions and paradoxes, would have appreciated the irony.

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