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*"Racial Ideals Lead  
Mankind Into Decadence"*

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ANTHROPOLOGY AND ANTI-SEMITISM:

Was Rudolf Steiner An Anti-Semite?

A study

First English edition

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“All is race; there is no other truth.”<sup>1</sup>

(Benjamin Disraeli, British Prime Minister)

“Any person who speaks of race ideals today  
is speaking of impulses which lead mankind into decadence.”

(Rudolf Steiner, 1917)

## Introductory Remarks

### 1. Motivation

There is a definite reason for publishing this study. A number of allegations have recently been publicly levelled against Rudolf Steiner in Germany; they pertain to his supposed anti-Semitism and racist attitude. The intention of these allegations is obvious: they are an attack on Waldorf schools and other institutions that base their activity on Rudolf Steiner’s teachings, because the necessity is seen to establish “political correctness” in this sensitive area of society. But Steiner is not the only target. The Holocaust has sharpened sensibilities considerably. Other prominent personalities have also been the addressees of such accusations in recent times: Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, for example. Goethe, an anti-Semite! A charge of this sort – which, incredible as it may seem, was actually brought forth – can be sure to command the attention of the general

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1) Quote from Leon Poliakov, *Der arische Mythos (The Aryan Myth)*, Vienna

public. It will certainly also elicit strong refutations, because anyone with even an inkling of Goethe's achievements will find this accusation just too extreme and in complete contradiction to the man and his work. However, it is possible to find remarks by Goethe which, if one does not know and take into consideration their historical background, would seem to corroborate this claim.

If such accusations are levelled against Rudolf Steiner, it is a good deal more difficult to defend him. His work is much less well known than Goethe's, and therefore the accusations appear to be more believable. This makes such claims harder to refute.

There has been an inflation of allegations of anti-Semitism in recent years which has not been particularly conducive to combating real anti-Semitism. Jens Jessen drew attention to this inflation and its pernicious effect in the German weekly periodical *Die Zeit*, No. 49/2000. Only "sophrosyne", the little esteemed secondary virtue of level-headedness, will in the end be able to secure the survival of the primary virtue, the opposition to true anti-Semitism.

And indeed: if Steiner's real intentions were dealt with and people became sufficiently familiar with them, that is, if sophrosyne were to hold sway, it is hardly conceivable that anyone would reap the benefits of sensationalism by accusing Steiner of being an anti-Semite.

This allegation is contained, for example, in the publication *Rasse Mensch (Race: Human)*<sup>2</sup>, especially in the contribution of the co-editor Petrus van der Let entitled *Neger, Juden, Frauen und andere Rassen (Negroes, Jews, Women and other Races)*. Peter Bierl makes similar allegations in another book<sup>3</sup>. The following authoritative study will refute these allegations levelled against Rudolf Steiner. They are based on a collage of fragments from Rudolf Steiner's works attempting to construct an attitude of racism which does not exist in Anthroposophy. In its very foundation Anthroposophy is universal, humanistic and emancipatory; through this collage it is distorted in an unprecedented manner. On their literary merit alone, the writings of Van der Let, Bierl and others would deserve to be ignored. Anyone with even a passing knowledge of Anthroposophy should be able to realise how inappropriate the charges are. But since, as experience shows, the unsuspecting reader does not always recognise the slanderous nature of the allegation of racism, and

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- 2) Christian Schüller, Petrus van der Let, *Rasse Mensch. Jeder Mensch ein Mischling (Race Human. Every Human of Mixed Race)*, Aschaffenburg 1999. Van der Let is an Austrian representative of an Anti-Esoteric Connection (AEC), which in Germany counts Jutta Ditzfurth, Oliver Geden and Peter Bierl, in Switzerland the one-man *Aktion Kinder des Holocaust (Project Children of the Holocaust)* and the theologian Ekkehard Stegemann in Basle as members. The Anti-Esoteric-Connection unites ideologists of the Right and Left in the attempt to discredit Anthroposophy through public insinuations of a non-existent racism.
- 3) Peter Bierl: *Wurzeln, Erzengel und Volksgeister. Die Anthroposophie Rudolf Steiners und die Waldorfpädagogik (Original Races, Archangels and Folk Souls. The Anthroposophy of Rudolf Steiner and Waldorf Education)*, Hamburg 1999.
- 4) German translation of this report: *Anthroposophie und die Fragen der Rassen, Zwischenbericht der niederländischen Untersuchungskommission "Anthroposophie und die Frage der Rassen"*, Schriftenreihe KonText, Info3-Verlag, 1998.

believes the fragments to be representative of the views of Steiner, we see the necessity of refuting these distortions and untruths.

The present study will first discuss and analyse Steiner's alleged anti-Semitism, as this claim at present enjoys a certain popularity. A second study will subsequently deal with remarks by Steiner that some authors consider to be racist. A Dutch research commission classified them as discriminatory in its preliminary report *Antroposofie en het vraagstuk van de rassen (Anthroposophy and the Question of Race)*, of 1998.<sup>4 5</sup>

Some of these issues have already been discussed in journals and other publications. But as yet we do not have a comprehensive discussion of the whole subject. We will endeavour to incorporate the other investigations into our study through references and footnotes.

## **2. The report of the Dutch Commission**

We will begin with some comments on the report of a Dutch commission on the question of whether an inherent racism can be found in Anthroposophy.

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5) The second study was published in April 2002 in *Verlag Freies Geistesleben*, Stuttgart. Title: *Rassenideale sind der Niedergang der Menschheit. Anthroposophie und der Rassismusrwurf. Racial Ideals Lead Mankind Into*

In Holland, a study was published on April 1, 2000 on the question of the view of different races in Anthroposophy. The study was conducted under a mandate of the Anthroposophical Society in The Netherlands by a commission chaired by the anthroposophical lawyer Dr. Th. A. van Baarda, an expert on discrimination legislation.

The reason for the study was the appearance of publications in the Dutch media about a supposed racial doctrine of Rudolf Steiner's and the fear that this doctrine might have an effect on teaching in Waldorf schools. The key question was whether Rudolf Steiner taught a racial doctrine, in the sense of a seemingly scientific theory, on the basis of which the superiority of one race over others is allegedly legitimised.

The 720-page study is based on an extensive documented analysis of the issue of racism and a discussion of 245 quotations from Steiner's collected works. The commission comes to the conclusion that of Rudolf Steiner's complete works, encompassing 89.000 pages,<sup>6</sup> 12 quotations<sup>7</sup> - taken in isolation - can be experienced as

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*Decadence. Anthroposophy and the Allegation of Racism.* English translation forthcoming.

- 6) The 89.000 pages constitute the printed transcripts of circa 6000 lectures, not originally intended for printing. In addition, there exist 29 written works, circa 15 volumes of printed essays, articles, letters, poetry and dramas, and reproductions of works of art by Rudolf Steiner.
- 7) The final report (published in 2000) mentions 16 quotes. The 12 quotes mentioned in the preliminary report (1998) will be discussed in detail in the second study in this series. The 4 quotes of a possibly discriminatory character added in the final report do not require a special discussion. Their possible misinterpretation falls within the scope of the discussion of

discriminating according to present legislation in Holland on discrimination. The commission, however, also comes to the unambiguous conclusion<sup>8</sup> that *there principally can be no question of racism in the works of Rudolf Steiner:*

“[...] Steiner emphasises the importance of the spiritual development of man and mankind, while the influence of somatic factors (that includes belonging to a specific race) becomes less and less important in the course of this development. Because of this, there exists a basic contradiction between biological racism and the anthroposophical view of man. According to the anthroposophical view of man, biological characteristics, that includes biological differences between races, have no influence on his or her essential being [...] (p. 312 of the German translation, p. 294 of the Dutch original.)“

“[...] Proportionally and substantially, the attention that Steiner gives to the theme of races in his extensive work is so small, that for this reason alone there can be no question of a racial doctrine. Steiner’s work admittedly contain a view of how differentiations have arisen during the evolution of humanity. This view is one aspect of his spiritual scientific research, that contributes to an understanding of what has evolved, without passing judgement on the value of different races [...] (p. 312 of the German translation, p. 295 of the Dutch original.)”

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the 12 other quotes.

8) See footnote 4.

With regard to the above mentioned 12 quotes, which have all been taken out of their context (mainly from the so-called lectures for workers), the Dutch investigation points out that “it is methodologically and ethically irresponsible to take quotes out of their context; for Steiner’s works this is true [...] to an even higher degree”.<sup>9</sup> If nevertheless it is still claimed that these remarks might possibly be discriminatory, this must be understood primarily in relation to the legal situation in Holland. In this country, a statement can be classified as “discriminatory“ if a reader or listener feels discriminated against even by an isolated remark, and even if the person making the remark has no intention to discriminate and no discriminating objectively can be determined. It is then up to the person making the remark to disprove the “assumption” that a discriminatory tendency was intended. (See p. 311 of the German translation, p. 293 of the Dutch original).

This legal situation in Holland has led to much confusion and premature judgements about Rudolf Steiner in Germany. The refutation of the allegation of racism, which – also in the eyes of the Dutch commission – is not necessary for Steiner’s work as a whole, will still be given in our second study for the 12 incriminated remarks, even though under German law this is not necessary. The 12 remarks can only be properly understood in the context of the printed lecture texts and of Steiner’s teachings as a whole.

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9) Ibid. loc.cit. p. 314.

The allegations of supposed racism in Steiner's world view and in Anthroposophy are brought forth from a present day perspective, but are based on remarks made in the 1920s and earlier. The absurdity of these imputations is sharply illustrated by the fact that the investigations of Nazi experts working for the German Secret Service reached the exact opposite conclusion regarding Anthroposophy. They had a clearly appropriate answer to the question of whether Anthroposophy was "potentially racist" or "compatible with racism": they evaluated it as *extremely hostile to race (racial thinking)*, as it strove to liberate the human spirit from race. Professor of Theology Jakob Wilhelm Hauer wrote the following assessment for the German Secret Service in 1935:

"I consider the anthroposophical world view, which has in every respect an international and pacifist orientation, to be absolutely incompatible with National Socialism. The National Socialist world view is built on the concepts of blood, race and nation, and also on the idea of the totalitarian state. Precisely these two pillars of the National Socialist world view and the Third Reich are negated by the anthroposophical world view [...]. Every investigation and activity of Anthroposophy proceeds with necessity from the anthroposophical world view. For that reason, schools which are based on the anthroposophical world view and are run by anthroposophists pose a danger for true German education. [...]."<sup>10</sup>

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10) Jakob Wilhelm Hauer to the Security Service RFSS, Oberabschnitt Süd-West, Stuttgart, dated 7 February 1935. BAD R 4901-3285. Hauer was Professor of theology in Tübingen and had been an express opponent of Steiner since 1921. He quickly ingratiated himself with the Nazis and later

Or compare this other report from the Head Office of the Secret Service of the National Socialists from May 1936:

„[...] Anthroposophy separates the spirit from its connection with race and the nation, and condemns all that is racial and belonging to the nation to a lower sphere of primitivism, of instincts, of dark urges needing to be vanquished by the spirit, of primeval time. In this way it demonstrates that it is closely related to the main currents of the previous European cultural tradition, especially to the Enlightenment, to German Idealism, and to the Liberalism of the last century. In Anthroposophy, the spirit of the French Revolution, the humanitarian ideal of Freemasonry, out of which Theosophy arose as the mother organisation of Anthroposophy, has remained alive. [...]

These basic principles of the anthroposophical world view have cause it to be open in a disastrous way to all anti-nationalist, anti-national, supranational, pacifist and especially Jewish influences [...]"<sup>11</sup>

However distorted this definitive evaluation of Anthroposophy from the Nazi racist perspective may seem, it is certainly astoundingly

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put forward the absurd assertion that Steiner had influenced General von Moltke by occult means, which led to the German defeat in World War I. – See the meticulous historical publication by Uwe Werner: *Anthroposophen in der Zeit des Nationalsozialismus 1933-1945 (Anthroposophists during the time of National Socialism 1933-1945)*, Munich 1999 (Oldenbourg), p. 66 ff.

11) Report by the Head office of the German Secret Service in Berlin on “Anthroposophy” from May 1936, BAD Z/B I 904. See Werner’s publication mentioned in footnote 10, p. 383.

”clairvoyant“ in its understanding of the incompatibility of Anthroposophy with real racism.

### **3. The Aim of the Present Study**

A further aspect must be mentioned in this introduction. The following investigation does not aim to confirm Steiner’s ideas through its interpretation. These ideas may appear to be evident as a basis of a spiritual science or they can be seen as fruitful “working hypotheses”. Other scholars may reject them. In any case: it is not the intention of this investigation to defend the substance of Steiner’s statements about a spiritual world view or to justify details. Its sole aim is, through a serious analysis of the texts, to make clear what Steiner *actually* did say, what he clearly *wanted to say* and how the isolated statements discussed can be properly understood based on their context.

### **4. The Methodological Problem of Quotations:**

#### **Basic Argument and Isolated Statements**

Finally, one further comment needs to be made. Some critics of Steiner and Anthroposophy have at times suggested that Waldorf educators should finally dissociate themselves from Steiner and a number of his more extreme ideas and that today – more than 80 years after the founding of the first Waldorf school – they should

have the courage to get rid of certain dogmas and throw ideological ballast overboard. When they have accomplished that, such critics would then deign to engage in friendly discussions again, having in principle no serious objections to Waldorf schools.

It is immediately clear to anyone who knows anything about Waldorf education that such suggestions are based on superficial preconceptions. It is part and parcel of Waldorf education that one should not dogmatically cling to purely traditional habits. The methodological indications and suggestions made by Steiner must be re-examined on a daily basis. They must all be repeatedly tested in the daily teaching of ever-new generations of pupils. Waldorf education with its encompassing knowledge of man is anything but a fixed canon of pedagogical recipes to be applied in a ritual way. The co-operation and exchange of ideas with all productive schools of thought and approaches in general education today are essential for the existence and development of Waldorf education. If that were not the case, the public school system would hardly have taken over and integrated so many ideas from Waldorf education.

The well-meant suggestions to overcome dogmas and throw "ballast" overboard have, however, nothing to do with a request for openness and a constantly renewed attitude of modernity. These are inherent in Waldorf education anyway. These "friendly demands" contain a conscious or subconscious appeal to abandon the inner impulses of Rudolf Steiner's pedagogy – that is, its basic ideas.

That, however, would mean the loss of the Waldorf school's true identity.

That does not mean to say that Steiner's work cannot contain errors in some form. Steiner himself made an unambiguous statement on this topic:

"To prevent a possible misunderstanding, I want to say at the outset that spiritual observations are also not infallible. They can be mistaken, too, inaccurate, one-sided or wrong. Nobody is free from the danger of making mistakes in this field, however far he may have progressed in his development."<sup>12</sup>

But the central question in this study is not primarily the possibility of being mistaken or of dissociating oneself from dogmatism, but that of interpreting Steiner. The authors hold the view that Steiner's work possesses an inner consistency, out of which every single part of the work arises with necessity. Its basic intuition consists in leading modern man's thinking consciousness to self-knowledge and to a knowledge of the reality of the spiritual world. This intuition is developed in different biographical, historical and social contexts.

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12) Rudolf Steiner, *Aus der Akasha Chronik, (From the Akasha Chronicle)*, Complete Edition (GA) 11, Dornach 1955, p. 23. See also the works by the well known anthroposophical author Christoph Lindenberg, who has discussed Steiner's oeuvre from a historical-critical perspective. A similar line is taken by the *Jahrbuch für anthroposophische Kritik (Year Book for Anthroposophical Critique)*, edited since 1993 by L. Ravagli. Günter Röschert, Munich, another exponent of a scientifically critical Anthroposophy, has discussed the problem of dogmatism and authenticity in *Anthroposophie als Aufklärung (Anthroposophy as Enlightenment)*.

Separate parts of Steiner's work or single remarks by him must always be interpreted in relation to this basic intuition. The language and the concepts used by Steiner to develop his basic views and arguments belong in a particular historical context. In this context there also belong certain questions that Steiner discussed because his audience asked him to, or because a historical occasion seemed to call for it. The expressions used by Steiner and certain of his themes occasionally carry something of the flavour of the time; however, this flavour never influences the basic concepts of Anthroposophy. The young Steiner, in particular, used a very pronounced or even polemical tone in many of his publications, as was usual in the literature of the time.

Only if one distinguishes in this way between the intention and the form of the comments, or between the basic intuition and the form of presentation of Anthroposophy in relation to the specific contexts, can one appropriately interpret Steiner's life work and adapt it adequately to the present. Any interpretation that does not fulfil these hermeneutical demands must of necessity come to false conclusions, mistakes and misinterpretations. That is especially true of the topic under consideration.

Such an adequate understanding is not to be expected from those authors who see themselves as opponents of Anthroposophy. They tear out parts of an organic whole and present them for their own ends. They confuse Steiner's intention and his form of expression. They pin Steiner down to words and refuse to take into consideration

the contexts that give meaning to the words. For this reason, this study will hardly change the views of such opponents. A case in point is the aforementioned Peter Bierl, who has carefully avoided commenting on the corrections of his distortions and falsifications<sup>13</sup> that have been brought forth in a preparatory study to this book.<sup>14</sup>

In his time Steiner considered it futile to try to refute such opponents: interestingly in a context when he was not - as today - accused of anti-Semitism, but of the opposite; journalists from an anti-Semitic Berlin journal had described him as a “dyed-in-the-wool Jew, closely connected with Zionists”, which was naturally intended as an insult.

Steiner commented on the refutation of the views of such opponents:

”We have not refuted anything, as such opponents do not in any sense want to portray the truth, but want to have as little as pos-

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13) See the article by Bierl in the German *Tageszeitung* (*Daily Newspaper*), Berlin, 21 Feb 2001.

14) Lorenzo Ravagli, *Rudolf Steiner als aktiver Gegner des Antisemitismus*, (*Rudolf Steiner – an active opponent of anti-Semitism*) Stuttgart, 2000 (can be ordered through “Bund der Freien Waldorfschulen”). Bierl does not even refrain from falsifying sources by leaving out parts of the text, compare footnote 129. A similar example of this type of falsification, even in a scientific publication, is discussed in footnote 37.

Such falsifications of quotes are even more serious when they are presented to a large audience via the media. This was the case in the German public TV feature magazine REPORT Mainz. The program reproduced quotes from Rudolf Steiner in two broadcasts within one year (2000) in such a distorted way that they were presented to the viewers as the exact opposite to what Rudolf Steiner had expressed. See p. 62 and footnote 94

sible to do with the matter as such, and only attempt to slander in any way possible.”<sup>15</sup>

He added a remarkable condemnation of these opponents’ methods which is very revealing for the use of catchy but misleading phrases, including isolated quotes such as those that are commented on in this study:

”In such contexts one chooses slogans, with which one can influence people as much as possible who in some way listen to such slogans [...] in respect to such intentions that run counter to all impulses that strive to further human progress, we still are only at the beginning and one should really never, without becoming irresponsible, let one’s attention be diverted from all that which [...] opens up into the future as something radically evil in humanity. *The worst thing that can happen is to listen to mere slogans and empty phrases*, and to think that [...], the sound of the words expressing old concepts should still today in some way have something to do with human realities, if you yourself do not bring forth a new reality out of the sources of the spiritual.”<sup>16</sup>

## **Rudolf Steiner’s Alleged Anti-Semitism**

Van der Let’s basic assertion corresponds in an especially significant way to what, in a similar manner - more or less clearly or blatantly -

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15) Rudolf Steiner, GA 196, Dornach, 22.2.1920, p. 290.

16) Ibid. pp. 290 and 291.

is also put forward by like-minded critics of Steiner and Anthroposophy.

Van der Let describes Rudolf Steiner as having been, together with Jörg Lanz von Liebenfels and Richard Wagner, a precursor, spiritual forerunner and main ideologist of Nazi racism and a theorist of what Hitler and his accomplices put into practice in the Holocaust. That is almost inconceivably grotesque. This is not the place to discuss Liebenfels and Wagner, but as far as Steiner is concerned, the assertion is simply absurd. One merely needs to mention that in 1905, in the journal *Lucifer-Gnosis*, of which he was editor, Steiner described Liebenfels' racial ideology as a "raw monstrosity" and as a characteristic example of what a materialistic way of thinking leads to.<sup>17</sup> In the following, it will be shown how Van der Let's assertion, insofar as it concerns Rudolf Steiner, is a completely unjustifiable insinuation. There is no connection from Steiner to Hitler, just as little as there is one to Stalin or Pol Pot. But a spiritual path leads from Steiner to the great non-violent freedom fighters and men who realised Christianity in their deeds in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, to Mahatma Gandhi and Albert Schweitzer, to Martin Luther King, Nelson Mandela or also Vaclav Havel. This will be shown in detail in the following.

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17) Steiner's comments on an essay by Helene von Schewitsch, the former love of Ferdinand Lassalle, which appeared in Number 29, October 1905, 30, November 1905 and 31, December 1905. Steiner's analysis of Liebenfels' racism was published in number 32, that was only published in August 1906, due to the publisher's excessive work load. See GA 34, p. 501-504. Dornach 1987.

In his first independent publication, *Grundlinien einer Erkenntnistheorie der Goetheschen Weltanschauung* (*The Theory of Knowledge implicit in Goethe's World Conception*) in 1886, Steiner already expressed his view<sup>18</sup> that the dignity of man resides in his free morality based on self-determination; that it is inviolable and that all social and political life must be based on this free self-determination of man. In 1894, in his *Philosophie der Freiheit* (*Philosophy of Spiritual Activity*) he outlined a philosophical understanding of man which states that human freedom can only be realised by overcoming biological, social and collectivist dependencies.

”Man, however, frees himself from what is generic.[...] If a man has achieved this emancipation from all that is generic, and we are nevertheless still determined to explain everything about him in generic terms, then we have no organ of perception for that which is individual.”<sup>19</sup>

In Steiner's view, individual self-determination and tolerance are the constitutive factors of the social and political community:

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18) Rudolf Steiner, *Grundlinien einer Erkenntnistheorie der Goetheschen Weltanschauung*, First edition Vienna 1886, Dornach 1979. (*The Theory of Knowledge implicit in Goethe's World Conception*. Spring Valley, New York: Anthroposophic Press 1978).

19) Ibid. p. 166. Rudolf Steiner, *Die Philosophie der Freiheit*. (First German edition 1894, Dornach 1962), chapter 14. (London: Rudolf Steiner Press 1999).

”*Live and let live* is the basic maxim of the free human being”<sup>20</sup>.

This philosophical world view, based on freedom and tolerance, does not only relate to the individual human being, but also to social and political life in its totality. It forms the basis for what Steiner, after the turn of the century, developed as a world view by the name of “Anthroposophy”. In 1917, he told his audience:

“... nothing will bring humanity more into decadence, than if racial, nationalist- and blood ideals continue to hold sway. Through nothing will the true progress of humanity be hindered more than if the mummified declamations from earlier centuries about the ideals of the nations [...] continue to rule over us, whereas the real ideal must develop from that which cannot be found in the blood, but only in the purely spiritual world.”<sup>21</sup>

In 1901, Steiner sharply condemned Houston Stewart Chamberlain as an ideologist of anti-Semitism.<sup>22</sup> Astutely he realised and warned of the dangerous potential of Chamberlain’s work *The Foundations of the Nineteenth Century*, published in 1899-1901; the potential to provoke a ”racial struggle” in Europe. Chamberlain only gained broader influence after the First World War, but Steiner warned the

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20) Ibid., Chapter 9: In the 1918 edition, this is written as “*To live* in love towards our actions, and *to let live* in the understanding of the other person’s free will, that is the fundamental maxim of the free human being.”

21) Rudolf Steiner *Die spirituellen Hintergründe der äußeren Welt. Der Sturz der Geister der Finsternis, (The Fall of the Spirits of Darkness)*, 14 lectures, GA 177, Dornach, 29. September to 29. October 1917. Dornach 1985, pp. 205-206.( Anthroposophic Press 1995).

22) Rudolf Steiner, Complete Edition, (GA) 31, p. 419. The native Englishman Chamberlain (1855-1927) was son-in-law to Richard Wagner.

public about him in 1901 already. For Steiner, anti-Semitism, being hostile towards “knowledge and education”, was a special form of racism that he condemned as a “mockery” of “the belief in the ideal of man”.

Racism can be understood as an ideology that seeks to deduce the nature of the human personality from inherited characteristics. For racism, the individual self-determination of man, his freedom, is not decisive, but rather his determination by biological characteristics. These are correlated typologically to human groups and arranged according to a scale of values. This description of the concept of racism has the advantage over most common definitions that it avoids the self-contradiction that consists in the existence of “racial characteristics” as a basis for possible discrimination. The motives leading to the creation of a racist world view are manifold, but a discussion of them would go beyond the limits of the present study.

Anti-Semitism as we understand it today is a special form of racism, in which racial antipathy is directed against the Jewish people – with the intention of pushing back the Jewish influence in the economy, politics and culture. This form of anti-Semitism developed towards the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century out of an anti-Judaism that was directed against the Jewish religion and its representatives and had its specific motivation in the history of religion. Racial anti-Semitism is a form of the earlier religious anti-Judaism, taken over and secularised within the conceptual framework of the natural sciences.

For anyone knowledgeable in Anthroposophy, it is clear from the central quotations mentioned above from Steiner's basic works, the *Theory of Knowledge* [...] and the *Philosophy of Spiritual Activity*, that Steiner was without any doubt an opponent of anti-Semitism and consequently also of racism in general.<sup>23</sup> It is therefore completely inappropriate and objectively unfounded to officially dissociate oneself from allegedly racist remarks made by Steiner.

On the other hand, from the beginning of his literary career Steiner commented on the events of his time. With many of these statements, it is not always immediately clear if and how they are compatible with other comments of his. The diversity of comments is connected with Steiner's varying his viewpoint. This multi-perspective character of Steiner's world view may give interpreters reason to see contradictions in his views, especially with regard to such complicated questions as the status of the Jewish people in modern times.

If you want to avoid the danger of a distorted evaluation of Steiner from the outset – a danger especially for those who, for whatever reason, from the start look for something to criticise in him – you cannot only base your evaluation on the verbatim quotation in isolated instances, but must come to an understanding of the context

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23) Compare the detailed investigation by Ralf Sonnenberg *Rudolf Steiners Beurteilung von Judentum, Zionismus und Antisemitismus (Rudolf Steiner's Judgement of Judaism, Zionism and anti-Semitism)*, in: *Jahrbuch für anthroposophische Kritik 2000 (Year Book for Anthroposophical Critique 2000)*. In the following some parts of Sonnenberg's investigation will be augmented.

of the respective remark. One must be careful not to try to derive Steiner's opinion from one single quotation. Steiner's technique of presentation was to stress one aspect of a topic sharply at one time, while in another context again stressing other aspects of the same topic, without this necessarily being the expression of a contradiction.<sup>24</sup>

This methodological principle has been very precisely described by Ralf Sonnenberg:

"Some interpreters also don't recognise that the Steiner's lectures often display significant differences in quality and as a consequence do not always meet scientific requirements. Their content, in terms of didactics and style, is geared to the mental horizon and expectations of his respective audience. In addition, this content is usually in serious need of interpretation, either because of allusions which for today's reader are often obscure and untraceable, or else because it consists of invective and caricatured exaggerations of results of Steiner's spiritual science. But for some interpreters it makes no great difference whether they are dealing with a work like *Occult Science – an Outline*, highly sophisticated in terms of composition and content, or with oral answers to questions and lectures given to construction workers at the Goetheanum during a cigarette break from work. In the second case the conditions under

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24) Christoph Strawe in *Rundbrief - Dreigliederung des sozialen Organismus (Newsletter –The Threefold Structure of the Social Organism)* Nr 4, Dec. 2000, p. 6.

which the lectures were given, that is the relatively low standard of presentation and also the unreliability of the shorthand transcripts, suffice already to raise the justified question as to whether the content of such reports should be judged by the level of quality that can be expected of the publications of Steiner's literary estate".<sup>25</sup>

It is especially difficult to come to an appropriate understanding of Steiner's views of Judaism if one includes the complex history of the rise and diffusion of Zionism. This concept affected all Jews deeply and split them into camps with conflicting opinions on the subject.

Non-Jewish publicists also commented on Zionism, as a phenomenon of the time of general interest, and were naturally drawn into the conflict when they took a stand. If one takes certain authors' concrete standpoints on Zionism into consideration, they will shed a revealing light on the acute evaluations or allegations of anti-Semitism today. This special aspect, however, is only to be dealt with later, after the main thrust of Rudolf Steiner's thinking on this subject has been shown more clearly. In order to gain a completely lucid understanding of Steiner's views on anti-Semitism, his various statements on the subject will now be considered in the order that he made them.

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25) Ralf Sonnenberg, *Ibid.* p. 119.

## The Incompatibility of Steiner’s “Ethical Individualism” with Anti-Semitism

As early as 1881, we find Steiner sharply attacking the anti-Semitism of his time. In letters to his Jewish friend Rudolf Ronsperger, Steiner characterises Eugen Dühring’s *Course of Philosophy* as the “worst possible embodiment of philosophical decline” he even calls Dühring’s views “barbarian” and “hostile to culture”. For Steiner, Dühring’s *Writings on the Jews*<sup>26</sup>, wallowing in anti-Semitism, result from “the strictest consequences of his narrow-minded egotistical philosophy”. In Dühring, Steiner condemned one of the most prominent German anti-Semites of his time. Dühring tried to substantiate anti-Semitism philosophically, as well as justify it biologically and historically. For Dühring, “the Jew” was not only “uncreative”, but also one of the “lowest creations and greatest failures of Nature” and he was of the opinion that the “Jewish question”, (in 1881, not to forget!) could only be solved through a common European “cleansing action”, “by a separation of the Jews from all peoples, by revoking their emancipation, by special legislation, deportations and the foundation

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26) The works referred to are *Die Judenfrage als Rassen-, Sitten- und Kulturfrage (The Jewish Question as a Racial, Moral and Cultural Question)* by Eugen Dühring, published in 1881 in Berlin and his *Die Überschätzung Lessings und dessen Anwaltschaft für die Juden (The Overestimation of Lessing and his Advocacy for the Jews)*, published the same year in Karlsruhe.

of a Jewish state, where they would then exterminate each other, if left to their own devices.”<sup>27</sup>

In a letter to Ronsperger, on 26 August 1881, Steiner again writes about Dühring, and calls his philosophy “barbarian nonsense” and “rubbish”.<sup>28</sup>

In the 1890s, Steiner vehemently opposed the “outrageous excesses of the anti-Semites” and denounced the “raging anti-Semites” as enemies of the human rights. Against the rancorous anti-Semitic propaganda he set as his ideal:

”I count it among most beautiful fruits of human friendship when every trace of mistrust between a Jew and a non-Jew [...] can be extinguished [...]. The only thing that should be valued is mutual exchange between individuals. It is quite unimportant if a person is a Jew or a Teuton [...] That is so simple, that one is almost stupid to say it. How stupid must one be to say the opposite?”<sup>29</sup>

As a member of the so-called “Liberal Camp”, Steiner’s standpoint was that the only solution to the then hotly debated “Jewish question” was to give complete legal, social and political equality to the Jews.

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27) Quoted by Bronder, *Bevor Hitler kam*, Hannover 1964, p. 380. (*Before Hitler Came – An Historical Study*, 1975)

28) *Briefe I (Letters I)*, GA 38, Dornach 1985, p. 44-45.

It is completely absurd to deduce, as Julia Iwersen does, that Steiner was an anti-Semite because he used the term “Jewish question”.<sup>30</sup> This term was used by everyone who participated in the discussion of the status of the Jewish people in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and had nothing of the terrible connotation it later acquired as a result of the “final solution” (“Endlösung”) under Hitler. Iwersen’s essay is an alarming example of the carelessness with which critical judgements are sometimes presented to the literary community today, with the expectation of being taken seriously. She does not even refrain from distorting Steiner quotations through omissions. Iwersen seems to have forgotten what she must have read in the book which contains the founding idea of the modern state of Israel: *Der Judenstaat (A State for the Jews)* by Theodor Herzl (1896). Its subtitle reads: *An attempt to achieve a modern solution of the Jewish question*. Herzl writes: “The Jewish question exists. It would be foolish to deny it.”

On 22. July 1893, Steiner wrote from Weimar to Pauline Specht, the mother of the Jewish family with which he had lived and whose children he had tutored between 1884 and 1890. In his letter on the parliamentary elections, he deplored “the dilapidated state of public debate” and the increasing “coarseness and lack of understanding of

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29) Rudolf Steiner, *Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Kultur- und Zeitgeschichte 1897-1901 (Collected Essays on Cultural History and Current Events)*, GA 31, Dornach 1989, p. 198-199.

30) See: Julia Iwersen, *Rudolf Steiner: Anthroposophie und Antisemitismus. Zu einer wenig bekannten Spielart des christlichen Antisemitismus. – Babylon. Beiträge zur jüdischen Gegenwart (Rudolf Steiner: Anthroposophy and Anti-Semitism. On a Little Known Version of Christian anti-Semitism. Babylon, Contributions to Jewish Current Affairs)*, No. 16/17, Verlag Neue Kritik, Frankfurt 1996.

the masses”, which were shown by the popularity of anti-Semitic agitators, Hermann Ahlwardt and Paul and Bernhard Förster:

”The parliamentary elections brought some excitement to the otherwise monotonous and calm life in Weimar. We admittedly do not have an Ahlwardt or a Förster here, but the election campaign has not exactly generated a multitude of intelligent comments.”<sup>31</sup> In general one has to say, having observed this whole affair in the Holy Roman Empire from within: through this last election an increase of coarseness and lack of understanding among the masses has become manifest that I find truly terrifying. That a man who – apart from everything else – is boundlessly foolish, who towers above all our Luegers<sup>32</sup> in “Lügen – Genie” (“Lying – Genius”: a pun in German) has won two seats in Parliament and innumerable supporters, can only be taken as a sign of the dilapidated state of politics in this country that one cannot deplore deeply enough.”<sup>33</sup>

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- 31) *Briefe II (Letters II)*, Ausgabe 1958, p. 136-137. Hermann Ahlwardt was an anti-Semitic propagandist in Leipzig and published a book in 1890 “The Desperate Struggle of the Aryan Peoples against Jewry”, in which he put forward a programme to “solve the Jewish question” that anticipated much of what the Nazis later realised (see Mosse, “*Die völkische Revolution*” (“*The Nationalist Revolution*”), Frankfurt 1991, p. 152 f.) Paul and Bernhard Förster were German anti-Semites; Bernhard Förster was married to Elisabeth Nietzsche, the sister and trustee of the estate of Friedrich Nietzsche. Bernhard Förster was held to be “the leader of anti-Semitic agitation in Germany” (according to the London TIMES).
- 32) Karl Lueger was a radically anti-Semitic Austrian politician, later mayor of Vienna<sup>5</sup>, who was greatly admired, among others, by Hitler.
- 33) The “boundlessly foolish man” is the anti-Semitic agitator Otto Boeckel, editor of the anti-Semitic *Reichsherold (National Herold)* and leader of the

In the *Magazin für Litteratur (Magazine for Literature)*, whose publisher he was, Steiner wrote in September 1900:

”For me, a Jewish question has never existed. My own way of thinking also developed in such a way that when a part of the national student body in Austria became anti-Semitic, it appeared to me to be a mockery of all cultural achievements of our time. I have never been able to judge a person in any other way than on the basis of his individual personal character as it was revealed to me. It was always completely uninteresting to me if someone was a Jew or not. And I can say: I see it in the same way today. I have never been able to see anti-Semitism as anything except a view that indicates in those who hold it an inferiority of spirit, a lack of ability to make ethical judgements and an insipidness [...], that is a blow in the face for every person with a normal way of thinking”.<sup>34</sup>

Here, Steiner calls anti-Semitism “a mockery of all cultural achievements”, an indication of “spiritual inferiority”, a sign of “insipidness” and the opposite of “the normal way of thinking”. But that is not his only criticism, nor is it his sharpest condemnation of anti-Semitism.

In a series of essays that he wrote in 1901 for the Berlin *Society to Repulse Anti-Semitism (Verein zur Abwehr des Antisemitismus)*, he

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“German Reform Party”, which by a fusion with the “Anti-Semitic People’s Party” gained 16 seats in the Parliamentary elections in June 1893. The Nazis later saw themselves as the successors of Boeckel’s mass anti-Semitism. (See Mosse, *ibid.*, p. 258f.).

argued against the Germanic myth of the German racists and their “nonsensical anti-Semitic chatter”<sup>35</sup>, in their Aryan self-conceit he saw an “insulting presumption”.<sup>36</sup> He compared the special legislation against Jews in European countries with “statutes for slavery”.<sup>37</sup> He described the racial antipathies rampant at that time as expressions of “musty instincts”<sup>38</sup> and declared it to be the duty of every sensible person to unambiguously take a stand in the struggle against anti-Semitism.<sup>39</sup> The *Mitteilungen aus dem Verein zur Abwehr des Antisemitismus* (*Newsletter of the Society to Repulse Anti-Semitism*), which published Steiner's essays, was, according to George L. Mosse, “the most prominent Jewish newspaper in the struggle against anti-Semitism”.<sup>40</sup>

Steiner’s clear statements against anti-Semitism and racism, which run through his whole life’s work, cannot be dismissed as casual, non-committal comments or assertions pretending to an attitude he did not really have: they arise from the philosophical foundation of Anthroposophy, “ethical individualism”, as Steiner had conceived it already in the 1880s. This ethical individualism holds the essence of

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34) *Ahasver*, GA 31, p. 378-79. Review of the novel with the same name by Robert Jaffé.

35) *Adolf Bartels, der Literarhistoriker* (*Adolf Bartels, Historian of Literature*), GA 31, p. 383.

36) *Ein Heine-Hasser* (*A Detester of Heine*), GA 31, p. 391.

37) *Der Wissenschaftsbeweis der Antisemiten* (*The Scientific Proof of the Anti-Semites*), GA 31, p. 394-395. The interpretation by Iwersen of this essay stands out as especially treacherous, in admittedly mentioning Steiner’s criticism of anti-Semitism that it should be unscientific, but remains completely silent about Steiner’s clear rejection of anti-Semitism. Iwersen, loc. cit. p. 154.

38) *Verschämter Antisemitismus* (*Shamefaced Anti-Semitism*), GA 31, p. 398-99.

39) loc.cit. GA 31, p. 412-413.

man to be his self-determining spiritual individuality, whose freedom consists specifically in his emancipation from those forms of thinking and living that have the tendency to see man determined by the peculiarities of his race and his nation. That has been indicated above already when Steiner's fundamental work, the *Philosophy of Spiritual Activity*, was mentioned.

### **Anti-Semitism as a “Danger to Jews and Non-Jews Alike”, a Cultural Illness and a Mockery of all Idealism**

Steiner's comments were prophetic at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, when he described anti-Semitism as a sign of cultural and political decadence and warned that it was dangerous. He said that anti-Semitism poisoned the political culture, it was not only a danger to Jews, but to all people<sup>41</sup> because it paved the way for “musty feelings” to gain power over the thinking and politics of the time. These are the same musty feelings and instincts which were articulated in the nationalist and racist movements and were drawn together by the Nazis, who began their political struggle against Anthroposophy in 1919 already. Dietrich Eckart first sounded the attack in his smear-sheet *Auf gut deutsch (Speaking Plain German)*, calling Steiner a “Jewish conjuring illusionist”. (Dietrich Eckart in *Auf gut deutsch*, Munich 1919, p. 322-327. See also further below). In 1921 Hitler himself spoke up in *Der völkische Beobachter (The*

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40) George L. Mosse, *ibid.*, p. 212

41) *loc. cit.* GA 31, p. 412-413.

*Nationalist Observer*). He denounced Anthroposophy as a “Jewish method of destroying the normal healthy sanity of nations.”<sup>42</sup> But the *Völkische Beobachter* only continued a campaign which had been started in 1919 by the biggest and most active anti-Semitic organisation before the rise of the NSDAP (Nazi party), the *Deutsch-Völkischer Schutz- und Trutzbund* (*German-Nationalist Union for Defence and Defiance*). (See Uwe Lohalm, *Völkischer Radikalismus. Die Geschichte des Deutsch-Völkischen Schutz- und Trutzbundes 1919-1923* [*Nationalist Radicalism. The History of the German-Nationalist Union for Defence and Defiance*], Hamburg 1970.) In 1920 the editor of an anti-Semitic Berlin monthly journal called Steiner – as the latter reported himself – a “dyed-in-the-wool Jew with close connections to the Zionists”.<sup>43</sup> Steiner was also subjected to other similar abuses, such as when he was attacked because of his “un-Aryan blood” or because he was a “Galician Jew”.<sup>44</sup>

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42) Adolf Hitler in: *Völkischer Beobachter*, 15 March 1921, Vol. 35, Vol. 35, 22nd Issue, p. 1.

43) See footnote 15.

44) Dr. med. H.I.Oberdörffer, whose attacks on “un-Aryan” Anthroposophy were dealt with by Friedrich Doldinger in 1920. Oberdörffer’s book “Das Heilsystem der arischen Entwicklungslehre” (“The Healing System of the Aryan Doctrine of Development”) was a coarsely materialistic propaganda work for the Mazdaznan movement and its crude sexual theory of a “blasphemy” of true occultism. Oberdörffer had claimed in lectures given in Freiburg in 1920 that Anthroposophy was an “un-Aryan endeavour”. “Only the Aryan race, which had the purest blood” was destined to achieve inner perfection. Oberdörffer regarded Steiner as a Galician Jew, as he said, according to Doldinger’s report: “Dr. Rudolf Steiner from Galicia or some other sinister place has un-Aryan blood and can therefore only produce blurred thoughts”. In 1919 already the nationalist anti-Semite Karl Rohm had maligned Steiner in his extremely racist “Leuchtturm” (Lighthouse) as a “Galician Jew” and as a Jewish sexual magician. See Friedrich Doldinger “Ein Vermaterialisierungsphänomen” (“A Phenomenon of Materialisation”)

German nationalistic, anti-Semitic militia troops did not even refrain from making an assassination attempt on Steiner. On 15. May 1922, he barely escaped an attack in the Munich Hotel “Vier Jahreszeiten” (“Four Seasons”), the main headquarters of the Thule Society.<sup>45</sup> Steiner had no illusions about the intentions of Hitler and Ludendorff. After their attempted coup in Munich in November 1923 he commented to Anna Samweber:

“If these "gentlemen" take over the government in Germany, I will not be able to set my foot on German soil anymore”<sup>46</sup>

In the series of essays mentioned above, that Steiner wrote in 1901 for the *Newsletter of the Society to Repulse anti-Semitism (Mitteilungen aus dem Verein zur Abwehr des Antisemitismus)*, in which his friend the Jewish poet Ludwig Jacobowski, also wrote, Steiner continually took a stand against that “insipid” ideology. In his obituary for Ludwig Jacobowski in 1901, he wrote:

“Old reactionary powers thought that their time had come again. Slogans and sinister instincts started to have an influence on the broader masses in a way that for a long time one had not thought them capable of. Jacobowski’s attention was especially drawn to one of these sinister instincts, anti-Semitism. He felt deeply hurt in

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in *Dreigliederung (Threefold Social Order)*, No. 22, Vol. 2, 1920, 48th week.

45) See Uwe Werner, *Anthroposophen in der Zeit des Nationalsozialismus (Anthroposophists during the Time of National Socialism)*, Munich 1999, p. 8.

his most personal feelings. Not because he felt bound to Jewry by these feelings. That was not at all the case. Rather Jacobowski belonged to those who in their inner development had long outgrown Jewry. But he also belonged to those who in a tragic way had to experience the doubts, born of blind prejudice, with which many people disparaged such an outgrowing.”<sup>47</sup>

In November 1901, Steiner wrote in an essay that discussed the “shamefaced anti-Semitism” of the contemporary philosopher Paulsen:

“Anti-Semitism does not exactly have a great many original thoughts at its disposal, it does not even have very many witty catchwords and slogans. You must always listen to the same stale platitudes, when the adherents of this “view of life” express the musty sentiments enshrined in their breast.”<sup>48</sup>

In the course of the essay, Steiner also discusses the political-demagogical effect that the anti-Semitic agitator of pan-Germanism, Georg von Schönerer, had in Austria. In him and his adherents Steiner sees:

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46) Uwe Werner, loc. cit. p. 8.

47) GA 33, Biographien und biographische Skizzen. *Ludwig Jacobowski. Ein Lebens- und Charakterbild des Dichters*, (Biographies and Biographical Sketches. *Ludwig Jacobowski. A Portrayal of the Life and Character of the Poet*) 1901, pp. 190-191.

48) *Verschämter Antisemitismus (Shamefaced Anti-Semitism)*, GA 31, pp. 398-99.

”... strict logic eliminated [...] from the canon of faculties that should rule the inner life of man [...] Through anti-Semitism, logic has been dethroned.”<sup>49</sup>

According to Steiner, Schönerer’s adherents conceal their growing anti-Semitism with empty phrases. In anti-Semitism he sees a symptom of a spiritual breakdown. On a daily basis in Vienna, he says he was able to study in anti-Semites the corruption of thinking by dulled feelings. Political Liberalism, of which Steiner declared himself an advocate, made it impossible “to arbitrarily put limits [...] on humanity.”<sup>50</sup>

Later in the essay, he rejects the anti-Semitic stereotype that Jews are unable to assimilate:

“Anyone who views the present time with open eyes knows that it is incorrect to say that the solidarity among Jews is greater than their solidarity with the strivings of modern culture. If it has looked that way during the last years, this has been caused to a high degree by anti-Semitism itself. Anyone who has seen, as I have shuddered to see, what anti-Semitism has induced in the souls of noble Jews, must come to this conclusion.”<sup>51</sup>

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49) Ibid. GA 31, pp. 403-404.

50) Ibid. GA 31, p. 406.

51) Ibid. GA 31, p. 409.

We see that Steiner did not put the blame for anti-Semitism on the Jews, as has sometimes been insinuated.<sup>52</sup> To Steiner, Zionism is a result of anti-Semitism, and not the other way around. That is the view that he also expressed in his essay on *The Longing of the Jews for Palestine (Sehnsucht der Juden nach Palästina)* in 1897.

Steiner in 1901 sees the predominance of sullen instincts in political life and the overwhelming of Liberalism by strong anti-Semitic emotions as caused by a lack of belief in ideas. In anti-Semitism, he sees not only a symptom of individual spiritual breakdown, but also a symptom of a collective pathology, a cultural disease. Anyone who believes in the ideas of freedom and human rights must uphold his belief, especially when the historical or political development runs against these ideas. He must say to himself:

“Anti-Semitism is a mockery of all belief in ideas. It is a mockery especially of the idea that humanity stands higher than any specialised form (tribe, race, nation), in which this humanity expresses itself.”<sup>53</sup>

To Steiner, anti-Semitism is devoid of ideas and nothing but an expression of dark racial antipathies. Paulsen capitulates to nationalist instincts, instead of “criticising them”, which he should

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52) Someone who has done that is Julia Iwersen in the above-mentioned essay in No 16/17 of *Babylon. Beiträge zur jüdischen Gegenwart (Babylon. Contributions to Jewish Current Affairs)*. Verlag Neue Kritik, Frankfurt 1996. See footnote 30.

53) *Verschämter Antisemitismus (Unacknowledged anti-Semitism)*, GA 31, loc. cit. p. 412.

have done if he had really been convinced of his own liberal ideas. But Steiner considers vagueness and the lack of an identifiable standpoint on this question to be damaging and demands clear, unequivocal statements against anti-Semitism.

“Nowhere is it more necessary than in this field, that one document one’s belief in ideas through a decisive, unequivocal standpoint.”<sup>54</sup>

But that is not enough.

“Anti-Semitism is not only a danger for Jews, it is also a danger for non-Jews. It arises out of a way of thinking that does not seriously strive for sound, straightforward judgements. Anti-Semitism promotes this way of thinking. And anyone who thinks philosophically should not just observe that passively. The belief in ideas will only return to prevalence if we oppose the contrary unbelief in all areas as energetically as possible.”<sup>55</sup>

Anti-Semitism (and with it, of course, racism in general) is a symptom of spiritual decline, of moral depravity; it is a symptom of a cultural illness that not only is a danger to Jews, but to all people. Therefore, it is every person’s duty to oppose it as energetically as possible.

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54) Ibid. GA 31, p. 412.

55) Ibid. GA 31, pp. 412-413.

Steiner's essay ends with an appeal and a call to resist the cultural decline of which anti-Semitism, to him, is a symptom.

“With no one who participates in the public discussion should you be in doubt as to how to understand his opinions on anti-Semitism: that is what this cultural illness requires of us today.”<sup>56</sup>

## **Steiner's Close Relationship to Jewry in his Personal, Everyday Life**

Not only did Steiner decisively and from the beginning profess his uncompromising rejection of anti-Semitism on a theoretical level; he also practised it consistently in his everyday life. As a young man, he lived for many years with a Jewish family as the tutor of their handicapped son, and was warm-heartedly integrated.<sup>57</sup> In his circle of friends, whether in Weimar or during his Berlin years, he always had close friends of Jewish origin. One of those who participated in the Berlin group of artists, “Die Kommenden” (“Those of the Future”), in which Steiner also gave lectures around the turn of the century, was the young Stefan Zweig. In his autobiography<sup>58</sup> which

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56) *Zweierlei Maß*, (*Measuring by Different Standards*), GA 31, p. 414.

57) (From 1884 to 1890, before he moved to Weimar). See *Rudolf Steiner als Hauslehrer und Erzieher, Wien 1884-1890 (Rudolf Steiner as Tutor and Educator, Vienna 1884-1890)* in: *Beiträge zur Rudolf Steiner Gesamtausgabe (Contributions to the Collected Works of Steiner)*, Nr. 112/113, 1994, Dornach. – The essay discusses the temporary annoyance between the father of the family and Steiner that was caused by Steiner's review of Hamerling's *Homunculus*, on p. 37 f.

58) Stefan Zweig, *The World of Yesterday*, University of Nebraska Press 1964.

he wrote shortly before his voluntary death in exile in South America in 1942, he writes with great positiveness and even admiration of his meeting with Steiner at that time. The portrayal that this highly sensitive poet of Jewish origin gives of Steiner indicates that he did not note even the slightest hint of anti-Semitism in him.

Steiner was also a close friend of many Jewish personalities, among them the Zionists Ernst Müller and Hugo Bergman. From 1920 on, Bergman established the Hebrew University in Jerusalem and became its rector. He founded the peace association “Brith Shalom”, to which later Gershom Sholem and Martin Buber belonged. Bergman, whose opinion of Steiner’s Anthroposophy, encompassed many facets, campaigned for a realisation of Steiner’s idea of the Threefold Social Order<sup>59</sup> in Palestine, as he held a solution to the “Arabian question” only to be possible through an overcoming of the principle of the nation-state.<sup>60</sup> This problem has remained acute until today.

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59) The “Threefold Social Order” was Steiner’s impulse for the fundamental reform of the modern state and society. One element in the emancipation of “cultural life” from the state, which would allow different religions and nations to live together in tolerance in one state. See Rudolf Steiner *Die Kernpunkte der sozialen Frage in den Lebensnotwendigkeiten der Gegenwart und Zukunft* (*The Basic Elements of the Social Question According to the Necessities of Life in the Present and the Future*), Dornach, Complete Works (GA) No. 23.

60) See Hans-Jürgen Bracker: *Humanistischer Zionismus* (*Humanistic Zionism*), in: *Info3*, 6/2000, *Kontemporär*, Frankfurt, p. 7.f. See also: Ralf Sonnenberg, *Zionismus, Dreigliederungsimpuls und die Zukunft des Judentums* (*Zionism, the Impulse of Social Threefolding and the Future of Jewry*). *Die Drei*, Frankfurt 01/2001, pp. 33-43 with the accompanying references.

Many people of Jewish origin later became members of the Anthroposophical Society. Important anthroposophical authors (like Carl Unger, Adolf Arenson and Hermann von Baravalle) as well as numerous close co-workers of Steiner (physicians, teachers, artists and others) were Jews. This accumulation of Jewish followers of Steiner was also noticed by the anti-Semites. In his periodical *Auf gut deutsch (Speaking Plain German)*, Munich, 11. July 1919, Dietrich Eckart quoted the journal *Der Leuchtturm (The Lighthouse)* of Karl Rohm, one of Steiner's most rabid opponents, with relish:

“Now I come to a special topic, Jewry in the world of “Steiner”-ing [...] there has been no dearth of opinions that adamantly claim that Steiner is a Jew [...] his appearance and his whole way of acting and teaching indicated that he was a Jew, and also the remarkable fact that in his society it was notably Jews who were his close, most intimate and loyal followers and who joined in great numbers, speaks for this claim [...] As long as the Steiner society belonged to Annie Besant's Adyar Society and called itself “Theosophical Society”, it was named in theosophical circles, to distinguish it from other theosophical societies, simply the “Jewish society”.<sup>61</sup>

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61) Karl Rohm continues after the quoted passage: “Item: we don't know if, genealogically speaking, Steiner is a “Christian” or a “Jew”; all we know is that he looks like a Jew, and that we have the impression [...] that “Steiner's personal work reveals fundamentally Jewish cabalistic magic.” This impression, this scent sensed by our soul is decisive for our judgement of Steiner and his teachings. This impressions caused us to reject Dr. Steiner.” – Rohm promoted his *Leuchtturm* in a publisher's advertisement in 1921 with the following text: “The “Lighthouse”-keeper pays special attention to “Steiner”-ing. The publisher sends the “Lighthouse” only to his friends; *Jews* and people the publisher doesn't like *don't get the “Lighthouse”*, not even if they send money [...] *People of German-Aryan race, German-nationalist sentiment and Christian belief are welcome as readers.* [...] The publishing

## The Dreyfus Affair

An important event which took place in Steiner's time and which drew a lot of public attention should also be discussed: the Dreyfus affair in France, in which in 1894 a Jewish French army officer was accused of having betrayed military secrets. Like others, Steiner also took a passionate public stand in favour of Dreyfus, who was rehabilitated in 1898/99,<sup>62</sup> as the accusations demonstrably had been based on falsifications.

Steiner's discussion of the Dreyfus affair referred mainly to Zola.

Steiner has been criticised for not having explicitly mentioned the anti-Semitic aspects of the case, as they have been shown by a number of historians.<sup>63</sup> We can accept this criticism insofar as it shows that Steiner's judgement was inadequate and unhistorical, seen from the perspective and the mood of today.<sup>64</sup> For at the time these

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house especially promotes a *German-nationalist* attitude and spirit and publishes brochures dealing with these topics": in Max Seiling's pamphlet *Die anthroposophische Bewegung und ihr Prophet (The anthroposophical movement and its prophet)*, Publishing House Karl Rohm, Lorch 1921.

- 62) Dreyfus was granted amnesty in 1899, but only fully rehabilitated in 1906.
- 63) See the three essays by Steiner in the *Magazin für Litteratur (Magazine for Literature): Die Instinkte der Franzosen (The Instincts of the French)*, 11 December 1897, *Emile Zola an die Jugend (Emile Zola Addresses the Young Generation)*, 19. February 1898, and *Zola's Oath and the Truth About Dreyfus*, 5. March 1898, in GA 31, *ibid.* p. 221.
- 64) An example of this criticism is the not very qualified essay by Julia Iwersen in Nr 16/17 of the journal *Babylon*, Frankfurt 1996. See our analysis in *Rudolf Steiner als aktiver Gegner des Antisemitismus (Rudolf Steiner – an active opponent of anti-Semitism)*, Stuttgart 2000. Can be ordered from the Association of Free Waldorf Schools in Stuttgart (Bund der Freien Waldorfschulen).

aspects were not even acknowledged by the French Jews. Laqueur writes on their behaviour:

“The hesitance of French Jews to take collective action during the Dreyfus trial showed that they wanted to believe that the affair had no specifically Jewish aspect.”<sup>65</sup>

The French historian François Caron writes on the allegedly anti-Semitic character of the Dreyfus affair:

“The opponents of Dreyfus avoided this topic in their discussions, the themes of Dreyfusianism were created out of an original ‘republican mysticism’”.<sup>66</sup>

Caron writes about Maurice Barrès, who refused to give his signed support for a campaign in favour of Dreyfus, that he justified his refusal with the comment “that he followed the ‘national instinct as his focus’. This sentence, was the ultimate expression of anti-Dreyfusianism.”<sup>67</sup>

In the Dreyfus affair, Steiner saw a political and diplomatic intrigue and in his comments<sup>68</sup> he stressed that *clear judgement* and the *love of truth* were being clouded by the appeal to *nationalistic instincts*. As in his discussion of Paulsen in the essay “Shamefaced anti-

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65) Laqueur, *A History of Zionism*, London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson 1972, p. 35.

66) François Caron, *Frankreich im Zeitalter des Imperialismus 1851-1918 (France in the Age of Imperialism)*, Stuttgart 1991, p. 469.

67) Ibid. p. 470.

68) See footnote 63.

Semitism”, we see that the concept of “nationalistic instinct” for him also included the *anti-Semitic* “instinct”. By not discussing the contention of Lazare, who in a pamphlet published in 1896 had depicted Dreyfus as a victim of his Jewish faith, the bourgeois press showed that it was not prepared to take the primitive slogans of the anti-Semites seriously. Any discussion of anti-Semitism would have lent it a respectability it did not deserve.

Hannah Arendt, who has investigated the role of anti-Semitism in the Third Republic thoroughly, points to two factors that contributed to its development: the – as she writes – “parasitic” role of Jewish financial advisors in the Panama scandal (1892), which affected almost all public institutions, and a Catholic conspiracy, instigated by the Jesuit Order.<sup>69</sup> The restraint of the French Jews with respect to the specifically French anti-Semitism was, in Arendt’s view, as well as in Laqueur’s, founded on the conviction that it was a temporary anachronistic phenomenon.

“They held political anti-Semitism [...] to be a residue from the Middle Ages, and therefore no longer effectual in contemporary politics.”<sup>70</sup>

She emphasises that it “was never clarified”, “if the officers of the General Staff arranged for Bordereau’s forgery (the document that led to the conviction of Dreyfus), with the sole purpose of finally

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69) Hannah Arendt, *Elemente und Ursprünge totaler Herrschaft (The Origins of Totalitarianism)*, pp. 230, 237 f., quoted from the 6th edition, Munich 1998.

70) Ibid. p. 267.

being able to compromise a Jew as a traitor of the mother country”<sup>71</sup>, or if it was not a case of miscarriage of justice after all. She also points out that in August 1899, after the trial of appeal in Rennes, the German Social Democrat Wilhelm Liebknecht, in contrast to Steiner, still believed in Dreyfus’ guilt, “as he could not imagine that a member of the upper classes could be convicted unjustifiably.”<sup>72</sup> Also, it would not have been very appropriate for the family of Alfred Dreyfus to describe him as a victim of anti-Semitism, as the family’s attitude was itself – anti-Semite! “Les Dreyfus de 1894 – mais ils étaient antisémites”.<sup>73</sup>

## **Steiner’s Discussion of Zionism**

How did Steiner view Zionism? To begin with, it must be noted that the emancipatory and liberal tendencies of the 19<sup>th</sup> and increasingly in the 20<sup>th</sup> century in all of Europe made it, at least in principle, ever more easy for Jewish citizens to become assimilated. This invitation from the enlightened European bourgeoisie was answered by the Haskala, the Jewish Enlightenment, which also facilitated emancipation and assimilation.

Nevertheless, deeply rooted prejudices from the past lived on, and repeated violent pogroms against the Jewish section of the

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71) Ibid. p. 243.

72) Ibid. p. 244.

73) Hannah Arendt quotes this remark by André Focault made in 1938 on p. 240 of her book.

population had been taking place, especially in the Russian Empire, but also in Rumania since the 1880s. Thus at the same time a longing for a protected homeland arose among the Jews who were victimised. In particular Theodor Herzl, a Jewish Viennese journalist, proclaimed the goal of founding a state of their own for the Jews in Palestine. Nourished by the very real hardship caused by these pogroms, but also by religious motives, the idea of a Jewish state met with increasing support. (The term “Zionism” comes from the Hebrew word “Zion”, referring to the highest, southwest hill in the old Jerusalem, the still controversial Temple Mount. The name is used in a figurative sense for Jerusalem, as well as for the community of orthodox Jews. The Zionists aspired to found a national Jewish state in Palestine). But a large proportion of the Jewish bourgeoisie, especially those who were emancipated and whose bonds to orthodoxy had loosened, decisively rejected Zionism. Most of the Western- and Middle-European Jews were not willing to leave their well-appreciated environment. One only has to think of the many Jews who during the First World War volunteered enthusiastically for military service in their respective nations.

This deeply felt double experience is classically expressed in a book by Jakob Wassermann (1873-1934), a writer very much respected in his time. In it, he professes what is important for him: *My Life as a German and a Jew (Mein Weg als Deutscher und Jude)* (published in 1921). Many German Jews did not take the horrible anti-Jewish diatribes of an Adolf Hitler in his programmatic work *My Struggle (Mein Kampf)* seriously, if they knew about them at all. They were

mostly seen as the obscure rantings of an inferior minority. Only the ever more acute and tangible wave of hatred in the Third Reich brought many Jews to a distressful awakening. And only the horrors of the previously unimaginable Holocaust finally instilled, in almost all surviving Jews, a positive attitude towards Zionism. Even such an important poet as Paul Celan (1920-1970), who had grown up in the German-speaking formerly Austro-Hungarian Bukovina and bitterly experienced the atrocities of Nazi rule, failed in his attempt to settle in Palestine at the end of his life. “Germany” had become an indelible horror experience for him, but he could only express his poetry in the German language. This was the conflict that destroyed him.

The Jewish writer Elias Canetti<sup>74</sup> (1905-1994) also tells us in his impressive memoirs of a stay in Bulgaria in 1927, where he had spent a part of his childhood. On several occasions he was astonished and even indignant about the rapturous state which some enthusiasts sought to evoke in their listeners in order to motivate them to emigrate to Palestine. He asked himself why they did such a thing, as they were respected and acknowledged citizens in their homeland (Bulgaria), where they could practice their profession and lived comfortably.

How strange the basic idea of Zionism appeared to assimilated Jews at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> and the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century can be

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74) Elias Canetti, *Die Fackel im Ohr, Lebensgeschichte, 1921–1931 (The Torch in My Ear, Biography, 1921 - 1931)*, Fischer paperback 5404, 1982 p. 86 ff.

seen in thoughts that Stefan Zweig wrote in his memoirs mentioned above. After his emigration, he had a number of conversations with Sigmund Freud in England shortly before the latter's death (1938), in which both expressed their profound difficulty in understanding the latest development in the destiny of the Jewish people. He writes:

”What was most tragic in this Jewish tragedy of the 20<sup>th</sup> century was that those who suffered it could no longer see any meaning in it and no guilt. All those who had been expelled during the Middle Ages, all their ancestors, at least they had known what they suffered for: for their Faith, their Law [...] They lived and suffered in the proud delusion that they, as the chosen people, were intended by the creator of the world and of man to fulfil a special destiny and a special mission [...] When they were driven from country to country, they still had a last home, their home in God, from which no earthly power [...] could drive them. [...] But the Jews of the 20<sup>th</sup> century had not been a community for a long time. They had no common faith, they felt their Jewish identity to be more of a burden than anything to be proud of and they were not conscious of any mission [...] To become part of and integrate into the surrounding peoples, to dissolve into general humanity was their ever more impatient striving, to gain peace from all persecutions, a pause in their eternal flight. In this way, one Jew no longer understood the another, melted as they were into the other peoples, the French, the Germans, the English, the Russians, just no longer Jews [...] Now for the first time in centuries, a community that they no longer experienced was forced upon them,

the community that had returned again and again since Egypt, the community of expulsion.[...]"<sup>75</sup>

All this must be taken into consideration if one wants to come to an appropriate evaluation of the opinions expressed *before* the Holocaust by many Jews, as also by others who saw themselves as friends of the Jews. This is also the case for Rudolf Steiner, for whom all one-sided national forms of thinking were foreign to his endorsement of ideals for all of humanity. He was a strict advocate of the conviction that Jewish creativity, like any other creativity, was an integral part of the respective society and respective community in which the individual Jew lived. He also unreservedly supported the thought of a continuing assimilation of the Jews. If he had had even the slightest critical reservation, he would have had to speak out against the integration and assimilation of Jewry, which he never did. Steiner's view stood in stark contrast to the racism of National Socialism, which fiercely rejected any form of assimilation, arguing that the so-called Aryan blood must not be polluted and that "The Jew" should be radically expelled and even eliminated.

### **Steiner's Essay on Hamerling's "Homunculus"**

Steiner's decisive support for emancipation and assimilation must be remembered when considering a passage in his essay on Robert Hamerling's *Homunculus, A Modern Epic in 10 Cantos*

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75) Stefan Zweig, loc. cit. p. 494 ff.

(*Homunkulus, Modernes Epos in 10 Gesängen*) (1888), which Steiner wrote for the Viennese journal *The German Weekly* (*Deutsche Wochenschrift*):

“It cannot be denied that Jewry still today presents itself as a self-contained entity and as such has often intervened in the development of our present conditions in a way that was anything but favourable to Western cultural ideas. But Jewry as such has outlived itself and has no justification within the modern life of nations. The fact that it nevertheless has been preserved is a mistake of world history which could not fail to have consequences.”<sup>76</sup>

The tone of these remarks was not untypical for the Steiner of that time, who was then 27 years old. In the same year he had depicted the rule of the pope in his time as obsolete and unjustified, because it wanted to force forms of believing from the “darkest Middle Ages” on mankind (see p. 101).

Steiner’s remarks are contained in an essay that aspires to defend Hamerling from being “adopted” by the anti-Semites. These remarks appear to be very disconcerting at first, when taken out of context. The review also met with the clear disapproval of the Jewish master of the house, Ladislaus Specht, in whose family Steiner lived as a tutor at the time. This is quite understandable. The quoted words can give the impression that he had fundamental reservations about

Jewry. But that is definitely too short-sighted an interpretation. Only a more comprehensive look at the context in which the quoted sentences stand shows that the formulation expresses the exact opposite.<sup>77</sup> Steiner' obviously believed so strongly that the time for complete Jewish emancipation had come that he himself did not regard the formulation as an attack on the Jewish existence as such.

The misunderstanding that Steiner himself tells us about in his autobiography *My Life* arose because Specht was not able to properly evaluate what actually was a polemical remark by Steiner in the light of his own basic attitude to life. He took the comment personally that Steiner had written from the perspective of philosophy and the history of ideas. The purely human side, the complete recognition of his Jewish fellow men was totally self-evident for Steiner. The warm personal understanding between the Specht family and Steiner was in no way marred by this misunderstanding.<sup>78</sup>

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76) Rudolf Steiner, *Robert Hamerling: Homunkulus (Robert Hamerling: Homunculus)*, in: *Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Literatur 1884–1902 (Collected Essays on Literature 1884-1902)*, GA 32, 2nd ed. pp. 145-155.

77) This formulation by Rudolf Steiner has often been misunderstood in the literature discussing it. The explanation that Ravagli gave in a pre-study to the present work, (*Rudolf Steiner als aktiver Gegner des Antisemitismus. Rudolf Steiner as an Active Opponent of Anti-Semitism.*) has been criticised in an article in the journal *Erziehungskunst* 12/2000 p. 1370 (Thomas Voss and Markus Schulze) as being inadequate. It should be noted that the pre-study only aimed at preventing a rigid one-sided interpretation of Steiner by pointing out his manifold and differentiated comments against anti-Semitism. Christoph Lindenberg, in his excellent biography on Rudolf Steiner (Stuttgart 1997), also did not delve deeply enough on this issue, when he jumps to the conclusion (p. 120) that the young Steiner committed a faux pas here.

78) See Christoph Lindenberg, *Rudolf Steiner. Eine Biographie (Rudolf Steiner, a Biography)*, Vol. I., Stuttgart 1997, pp. 119-120.

The whole incident is a concrete example of what is described in subchapter 4 in the introduction to this study. We especially see what is meant by the sometimes pronounced or even polemical tone of the young Steiner.

We must also consider another very important criterion in assessing Steiner's writings that warrants a fundamental statement here. There is possibly no other topic besides that of Judaism and Jewry where it is so important to take into consideration the difference in time when an event takes place and when it is evaluated. In concrete terms: the world situation has changed so radically between the time when Steiner wrote his review of "Homunculus" at the end of the 1880s and the time of the Third Reich and especially the Holocaust, that one needs to be extremely cautious today when looking at things in retrospect. For example, it is only fair, and should go without saying, to assume that Steiner, if he were to comment on these issues today, would not express himself in the same way or with the same words as in the 1880s.

The following episode can serve to illustrate this problem. The above mentioned Jewish writer Jakob Wassermann, who was highly regarded especially in the 1920s, wrote a letter to a German philosopher in February 1923. He later published it in his book *Lebensdienst (Serving Life)*<sup>79</sup>. The philosopher, who Wassermann

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79) Jakob Wassermann, *Lebensdienst. Gesammelte Studien, Erfahrungen und Reden aus drei Jahrzehnten (Serving Life. Collected Studies, Experiences and Speeches during Three Decades)*, Leipzig 1928.

does not mention by name, had written to Wassermann to thank him for his work (which includes the novel *Kaspar Hauser oder die Trägheit des Herzens*; *Caspar Hauser: The Inertia of the Heart*). But he had also asked him to use his great influence to induce the Jews living in Germany to emigrate to Palestine. In this request, a continuing prejudice articulated itself: there was a specifically Christian type of anti-Semitism, which saw in the Jews a “people who had murdered God”; there existed a feeling of envy in relation to Jews that was wide-spread but difficult to pin down. It arose because the Jews with their highly developed talents could rise to leading positions in all cultural and political fields; and there also existed a subliminal resentment against the affluence of Jews in influential economic positions.

This subliminal, and sometimes open aversion against people of Jewish origin completely ignored the fact that many of the reservations had their roots in the ghetto situation into which the Jews had been forced through many centuries, which prevented them from integrating into society, thereby causing them to be perceived as Jews in the first place.

With great bitterness Wassermann rejected the demand of this unknown philosopher, also on behalf of his friend Walther Rathenau (1867-1922; at the end of his life Minister of Foreign Affairs of the German Empire), who had been murdered the year before by nationalist and anti-Jewish fanatics. He reproached the personality in

question for obviously not having read his (Wassermann's) writings closely enough:

“[...] otherwise you should know that I have absolutely nothing whatsoever to do with Zionism [...]. On this count, I must disappoint you completely. And also Walther Rathenau would have had to disappoint you [...] as he - to the extent that the ideas and goals of Zionism were not of a purely practical-humanitarian nature - had as little sympathy for them as I do. Just as I, he saw himself as a German, and just as I he felt rejected by the Germans, misunderstood and unrewarded for all his dedication and readiness for sacrifice. We do not need to talk about his death; it is a part of German history [...]

As to what you write [...] about it being time to prepare for the return of the Jews to the country of their fathers [...] an astonishing demand indeed [...] and because you also - I can't read it any other way - more or less openly propose the same to me, I first want to tell you that my ancestors demonstrably have lived in the Franconian province of Germany for at least 500 years, and that I would like to investigate how many who boast to be native Germans, Saxons, Pommeranians, Rheinlanders, and French emigrants to Brandenburg can say the same of their families. That the Jews have not succeeded in incorporating themselves deeper into the body of the nation is not the fault of the Jews [...]<sup>80</sup>

This context helps us to understand what Steiner meant with his remark that Jewry had long outlived itself, and that it was a mistake

of world history that it had been preserved. These words strongly express Steiner's sincerely positive appreciation of Jewry. They also contain the same bitterness that was expressed by Wassermann about that fact that the assimilation which was desired by many Jews, especially the culturally active ones, still had not progressed further, due to a purely emotional aversion in the German-speaking countries. Steiner opposes the fixation of contemporary thinking on national and racist categories and strives to promote the liberation of the individual Jew from the confinement of the collective, into which one again wishes to force him, in disregard of all emancipation and assimilation.

Later, in 1924 – around the time that Wassermann was also writing on the subject – Steiner spoke again, similarly to 1888, in one of the lectures to construction workers of the Goetheanum in an extemporised speech (the lecture will be more closely discussed later in this study):

“And so you can say: since everything that the Jews have done can could now be done in a conscious way by all men, for example, the Jews could do nothing better than *to integrate into the rest of humanity, to intermingle with the rest of humanity, so that Jewry as a people* would simply cease to exist. That is something which could be an ideal.”<sup>81</sup>[authors' italics]

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80) Ibid. p. 161f.

81) Rudolf Steiner, GA 353, p. 202, Lecture of 8th May, 1924. - The terms "Aufgehen" or "Untergehen" (integration, perishing) were common ways of describing the process of assimilation at the end of the 19th century and were also used by Jewish and Zionist authors. For Steiner's comment on

These words, rightly understood, express a deep recognition of what until then had emanated from Judaism in a cultural sense. Steiner's speaking in the above-mentioned "Homunculus" review of unfavourable interventions of the Jewish religion and way of thinking with regard to Western cultural ideas does not contradict this recognition. The one is just as true as the other: the efforts to restore a nationality long since lost demonstrated – in Steiner's view – a negative side; Jewish striving for emancipation and Jewish liberalism bear witness to the side which is open to Western cultural ideas. Now the rest of humanity has also become as advanced as the Jews, who have fulfilled their task for world history precisely by overcoming the principle of nationality.

After advocating the integration and assimilation of the Jews in Europe, Steiner continued in the quoted lecture:

“This still is opposed by many Jewish habits – and *above all by the hatred of other people*. That is exactly what must be overcome”  
[author's italics].<sup>82</sup>

These sentences show that Steiner saw Anti-Semitism and the hatred that it incited against the Jews as the basic hindrance for the peaceful

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Orschansky see p. 75, on Theodor Herzl *Der Judenstaat (A State for the Jews)*, Vienna, 1896, p. 28. Someone who advocated the physical annihilation of the Jews at that time – like Eugen Dühring did in 1881 already – did not speak of “Aufgehen” or “Untergehen”, but of “Ausrottung” (“extermination”) (see p.29).

82) Ibid. p. 202.

coexistence of Jews and non-Jews and that he held it necessary to overcome this hatred.<sup>83</sup>

Steiner's essay of 1888 on Hamerling's *Homunculus* not only contains the passages in which he speaks against a Jewish nationalism, as it later appeared in Zionism, but it also contains a clear rejection of anti-Semitism and the "racial struggle". He writes literally:

"But the Jews need Europe and Europe needs the Jews".<sup>84</sup>

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83) Iwersen's superficial method of investigation is demonstrated by the way she shortens this text when quoting it (see footnote 30, and Iwersen p. 155). She leaves out the quoted sentences, as Steiner's condemnation of the hatred against Jews does not fit in with her reckless interpretation of Steiner, which does not even shrink from the preposterous contention that Steiner declared the Jews to be responsible for the outbreak of the First World War. In reality, Steiner in the lecture in question sees the pandemic of nationalism and chauvinism in the European states as the main cause of the First World War. In this context he criticises political Zionism, which is also a form of nationalism. This view of Zionism as a form of nationalism is in no way unusual and can be found in the standard manuals of history, for example (in German) in "Der Große Ploetz, which even speaks of an "exceptional form" of nationalism: "Even though political Zionism is a nationalism like those which have given rise to it, it has a unique character, as it sees the Jews who are spread over all of the earth as a people in a secular sense, that are to be brought together in the area of their future national existence" (Der Große Ploetz, Freiburg, 1986, p. 1086). It is regrettable to see how Iwersen's superficiality, whether deliberate or unintended, when quoting and misunderstanding, has already been shortened to simplistic slogans by Micha Brumlik. What Iwersen through her "art of interpretation" has trumpeted into the world as untruths, has been taken over by Brumlik as a "fact" without further investigation, when he writes in the foreword to the new edition of his book on Gnosis, referring to and based on Iwersen: "He (Steiner) also put the blame for the First World War on the Jews." (See Micha Brumlik, *Die Gnostiker (The Gnostics)*, Berlin 2000, Foreword to the 3rd edition). – Micha Brumlik, by the way, sits intermittently on the patronate committee of "Aktion Kinder des Holocaust" (AkdH) ("Project Children of the Holocaust") run by one of the most obstinate slanderers of Anthroposophy, Samuel Althof.

84) GA 32, loc. cit. p. 148.

To Hamerling he attributes the attitude of a “sage”, who takes a stance of superior objectivity in relation to both the “Jews as well as the anti-Semites”<sup>85</sup>. He accuses Hamerling’s critics of not having the right to immediately accuse “everyone who does not expressly stress that he sides with the Jews as being against them”<sup>86</sup>. According to Steiner, the critics had drawn Hamerling’s work into the “party struggle”, in its most obnoxious form, that of the “racial struggle”.<sup>87</sup> By attributing anti-Semitism to Hamerling, they had falsely attributed “a standpoint to him, that he, because of his spiritual loftiness, cannot assume”<sup>88</sup>. And about the anti-Semites, who wanted to include the poet in their camp, he says that, apart from their “talent for ranting and raving”, they had nothing more characteristic to offer [...] “than a complete lack of any thought whatsoever”.<sup>89</sup>

Steiner did not advocate the separation, but the integration and emancipation of the Jews in Europe. It would be completely absurd to insinuate that with the “absorption (Aufgehen) of Jewry into the rest of humanity” he was referring to a physical extermination.<sup>90</sup> After all, there were Jewish authors at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century who wrote down sentences which are almost identical with the ones just quoted. One extreme representative of this school of thought is the socialist Moses Hess, born in 1812 in Bonn, who – after a

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85) Ibid. p. 148.

86) Ibid. p. 148.

87) Ibid. p. 152.

88) Ibid. pp. 152-153.

89) Ibid. p. 153.

90) See footnote 81

spiritual transformation that is mysterious even to Laqueur, the authority on Zionism<sup>91</sup> – became a forerunner of Zionism in Germany with his book *Rom und Jerusalem – Die letzte Nationalitätenfrage (The Revival of Israel - Rome and Jerusalem, the last nationality question)* from 1862. Laqueur writes on Hess in his *History of Zionism*:

“... like almost all his contemporaries, Hess turned his back on religion; the Mosaic religion (as he wrote in his diary) was dead, its historical role was finished and could no longer be revived. [...]

In his first book (*The Sacred History of Mankind*) he said that the people chosen by their God must disappear for ever, [...]”<sup>92</sup>

No one would come on the idea of investigating Hess for a suspected anti-Semitism because of his unreserved declaration of his belief in the assimilation of the Jews. And just as little would one accuse the Russian Zionist (Leo Pinsker) of anti-Semitism, who in 1882 in his book *Autoemanzipation (Autoemancipation)* wrote that in the Jews, the world could observe a people, who resembled a living dead.<sup>93</sup>

Steiner advocated when speaking of the absorption of the Jews in their respective countries, *an enlightened Jewish standpoint*, not an anti-Semitic one, as he has recently been accused of doing, for

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91) Laqueur, loc. cit. pp. 49, 53.

92) Laqueur, loc. cit. p. 48.

93) Laqueur, loc. cit. pp. 71, 72.

example by the public TV-programme ARD REPORT Mainz.<sup>94</sup> It is important to consider that emancipation could also mean integration and assimilation to the Jews living in the ghetto in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century, and that many Jews viewed the assimilation in their respective home countries and cultures as an ideal to strive for, as they saw the emancipation also as an emancipation from their own religious and spiritual tradition. For this reason, Moses Hess in no way belongs to “the forgotten Jews”. His importance for the history of Jewry, for Socialism and for Zionism is still appreciated today.

An example for this appreciation is Göran Rosenberg’s book *The lost country (Det förlorade landet)* from 1998<sup>95</sup>. Rosenberg points out the dimension of religious and cultural history in the problem, which was also relevant for Steiner’s views on Jewry that he expressed in his essays on Hamerling’s *Homunculus* and *The Longing of the Jews for Palestine*.

In 1837 the Hegelian and Spinozist Moses Hess argued for a synthesis of reason and faith, of politics and ethics, as had been foreseen by Spinoza. Judaism was just as much a thing of the past

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94) The TV-in-depth news programme REPORT-Mainz twice (on 28.2.2000 and 9.4.2001) used a falsified Steiner quotation in a manner which is embarrassing for a German public TV channel which is subsidised by the state. With this quotation, the authors insinuated that Steiner sympathised with nationalistic anti-Semitism, because they left out the part where Steiner acknowledged positively the avantgarde role of the Jewish advocates of assimilation. Nationalistic anti-Semitism worked for a separation of the Jews and the reversal of assimilation.

95) Göran Rosenberg, *Det förlorade landet, en personlig historia (The Lost Country, a Personal History)*. Albert Bonniers Förlag, Stockholm 1996. Not published in English. Published in German as *Das verlorene Land*, Jüdischer Verlag, Frankfurt 1998. Also published in French and Dutch.

as was Christianity. For a young Jewish intellectual, who within a decade had made his way from the disputes over interpretations in the Talmud school to the barricades of the social revolution, the world stood open and full of promises. He still investigated Jewry, but only in order to overcome its limitations, to demonstrate how unnecessary it was. [...] This was how a Jew could write who was convinced that Jewry could be overcome, and absorbed into something quite different.<sup>96</sup>

Rosenberg writes about the time following the "edict of tolerance" of the Holy Roman (Austrian) Emperor Joseph, from 1771 until the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century:

In the course of a few decades, the Jews in countries like Germany and France had not only left the ghetto, but also to a great extent Judaism itself. Out of the Jewish masses which until shortly before had been so impoverished, an intellectual, bourgeois middle class rapidly liberated itself and it soon did not see any essential difference between Judaism as explicated by Mendelssohn and Christianity in its declarations of enlightenment and tolerance. Both could be viewed as collections of similar ethical principles to which everyone could reasonably subscribe. [...] the ethical and religious essence of Judaism was better expressed in the universalism and tolerance of the developing modern society than in the ethically and ethnically closed forms of life in the ghetto. The characteristics peculiar to Judaism had to give way to the universal efforts in support of human and civil rights, just as some

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96) Rosenberg p. 95 in original, Swedish edition, p. 152, German edition.

saw the spreading of ideas such as tolerance and equality as an expression of a specific Jewish mission.”<sup>97</sup>

Steiner is completely in accordance with this enlightened perspective that was also professed by Jews, when he says that “Jewry” has “outlived itself”. That this comment from 1888 was not all he had to say about Jewry is sufficiently documented by the present study.

In the passage following the quoted sentences on p. 53 from the Homunculus essay, Steiner continues:

“We do not mean here the forms of the Jewish religion alone, we especially mean the spirit of Judaism, the Jewish way of thinking. An impartial observer would now have thought that the best judges of the poetic form that Hamerling has given to the fact we have just touched on would be Jews themselves. Jews who now feel at home in the spirit of the western cultural process should best be able to recognise the faults of an ethical ideal which has been transplanted from grey antiquity into modern times and is here quite useless. The Jews must be the first to recognise that any isolated ambitions of theirs must be absorbed by the spirit of the modern times.”<sup>98</sup>

Obviously the "Jewish way of thinking" means here for Steiner Jewish religion, but not this alone; it also means the ethical ideals

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97) Ibid. Rosenberg, loc. cit. pp. 70-73 in the German edition, pp. 66-68 in the original Swedish edition.

that this way of thinking has transplanted “from grey antiquity” into modern times. Condensed to a formula, this concept of “Jewish thinking” aims at a criticism of (abstract) monotheism and the Jewish canon of ethical laws. Steiner does not mean in this passage a Jewish way of thinking that is Jewish because of some form of determination by race, but he defines Jewish thinking substantially in accordance with the Haskala (Jewish Enlightenment) as advocated by Moses Mendelssohn and the Reformed Jews of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Steiner could just as well have written “Kantian” thinking or “Catholic” thinking, because, from the perspective of his radically enlightened standpoint, all three schools of thought have the same character insofar as they give up their innate emancipatory elements in favour of normative or collectivist moral ideals.

Steiner’s standpoint before the turn of the century was that of Enlightenment, as was the standpoint of many European Jews as well. This dimension of cultural history must be taken into account when judging his views. One could just as well accuse Steiner’s criticism of Christianity of having given up the Christian spiritual traditions and call him an “anti-Christian”. Bierl and other leftwing pamphleteers of course have no interest in doing that, as Christianity is not important for them. If you take all religion to be mythical, you must seek an interpretation of this mythology that is compatible with enlightened rationality.

You have to ask yourself – as Steiner did in regard to Christianity and the Jewish religion – why humanity needs a Law revealed by God if it can give its moral law to itself. If the “*primary foundation of the world*” has “*completely*” “*poured itself out into the world*”, “*in order to allow everything to depend on Man’s will*”, as Steiner writes in the *Theory of Knowledge* [...] in 1886<sup>99</sup>, then that is something that holds also for the “Jewish” or the “Muslim” foundation of the world. That means that the earlier forms of understanding God are, from Steiner’s point of view, obsolete stages in cultural history of the consciousness of God. Steiner’s standpoint itself does not lack a spiritual perspective, on the contrary, it is open for such a perspective, as can be seen in his later development.

In his Hamerling essay Steiner saw in *Homunculus* a “representative of modern man”, who had as his most outstanding characteristic a complete lack of individuality. It is therefore not surprising that he preceded it with a contrast: a song of praise for the free individuality. In contemporary society, he saw a dangerous mechanising tendency penetrating into all fields of life. He characterised it as hostile to the individual and soulless. This diagnosis can be read as a criticism of superficial rationalism and the optimistic belief in (materialistic) progress.

In the increase of spiritual and social coldness that was connected with this development Steiner obviously perceived the counterpart to

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99) Ibid. p. 125.

the “stale feelings” and “instincts” that he saw striving for power in anti-Semitism. In 1888, he writes in his essay on *Homunculus*:

“That source of ever fresh life, which forever allows us to create the new out of our inner being, so that our feelings and our spirit appear to possess a certain intrinsic depth that is never fully exhausted, is in the process of disappearing completely for modern man. A pronounced individuality is not something which is foreseeable; because not matter how many ways it has manifested itself to us, it impossible to create an image of it from which we could predict the sum of its future activities. Every new action always receives a new impulse out of the depths of our being, which shows us new aspects of the individuality. That is what distinguishes the individuality from a mechanism, which is only the result of the combined effects of its components. If we know these, then we also know the boundaries within which its activity is enclosed. The life of modern man is now becoming ever more machine-like. Education, forms of society, professional life, everything is developing in such a way that it eradicates in man what one would like to call individual life. He is becoming more and more a product of the social conditions which form him. This soulless, un-individual man, exaggerated to a caricature, is Hamerling’s Homunculus.”

Hamerling’s Homunculus figure thus is also the prototype of the racist or extreme nationalist, who is characterised by his complete lack of understanding for the individual essence that lives in every human – albeit in varying degrees of consciousness. For Steiner, however, upholding spiritually anachronistic ethical ideals is an

expression of “retardation”, leading to “decadence”: what once was meaningful and justified “falls from its heights” and begins to work against the continuing forces of emancipation. It becomes conservative and reactionary. Thereby it works in an “undermining, decomposing” way on the social order.<sup>100</sup> By sticking to the old, it destroys this order, which strives to renew itself. Thus, all reactionary spiritual movements can be seen as a “decomposing ferment” of the social order. In reality, it is not only revolutionary currents which work in an undermining way, because they aspire to realise new ethical ideals and new social forms, but also the conservative and reactionary ones, as they endanger the peaceful transformation through their resistance to the new.

## **The Longing of the Jews for Palestine**

This was Steiner’s basic approach when, in 1897, he commented very critically on Zionism and its leaders in his essay *The Longing of the Jews for Palestine (Die Sehnsucht der Juden nach Palästina)* in the *Magazine for Literature (Magazin für Litteratur)*.

“Much worse than the anti-Semites are Mr. Herzl and Mr. Nordau, the heartless leaders of all the Jews who are tired of Europe. They turn an unpleasant childishness into a movement of world historic dimensions, they give a harmless skirmish out as

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100) On the concept of “Zersetzen” (decomposition)” see p. 83 ff.

horrible artillery fire. They are seducers and tempters of their people.”<sup>101</sup>

He came to a similar conclusion in this essay as most of the Jewish critics of Herzl and Nordau: that Zionism was “dangerous”. At this time, anti-Semitism had lost political influence and importance. It still existed, but it was limited to small, political sects, at odds with each other.

In the question of which was worse, Zionism or anti-Semitism, Steiner - with his decisive support for a positive assimilation, which did not simply allow the Jewish contribution to be swept away or disappear, but included it as a productive cultural factor for the different peoples – stood for an individualistic humanism, beyond “for” and “against”. To him, this concern seemed endangered by the Zionism of Herzl and his sympathisers, which declared assimilation to have failed.

Someone not familiar with the context and concrete situation of the time may be taken aback by some of the formulations in the essay on Palestine. But when Steiner, with reference to the first Zionist Congress (1897) in Basle, spoke of the “impotence of anti-Semitism” and described it as an “unpleasant childishness”, he expressed a generally held conviction and repeated arguments also used by Jewish authors.

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101) Rudolf Steiner: *Die Sehnsucht der Juden nach Palästina, Magazin für Litteratur (The Longing of the Jews for Palestine. Magazine for Literature)*, No. 38, Vol. 66, published in GA 31, Dornach 1989, p. 196 f.

In Steiner's comments one can even recognise a direct reference to the opening speech by Max Nordau during the first Zionist Congress in Basle. In his essay on Palestine published shortly afterwards, Steiner speaks of

“... the best of the *anti-Semites, who are like children*, that want to have something that they can blame for the grievance that they suffer from.”<sup>102</sup>

During his speech, Nordau had said that “the anti-Semitic accusations” were not a

“... criticism of actually observed shortcomings, but resulted from the psychological law, which says that *children, savages and wicked fools* make beings or things, for which they feel aversion, responsible for their sufferings.”<sup>103</sup>

So for Steiner, “the best among the anti-Semites” belong to the first of Nordau's categories, the “children”.<sup>104</sup> One can continue Steiner's thought implicit in this comment, that the worse and worst among the anti-Semites belong to Nordau's “savages and wicked fools”.

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102) See footnote 101.

103) Max Nordau: *Zionistische Schriften (Zionist Publications)*, Berlin 1923, p. 54.

104) One could naturally object that there are no “best” among the anti-Semites, only the “worst”. However, anyone who, like Nordau, sees the working of uncomprehended projective mechanisms in anti-Semitism, will admit that this analytical explanation has the power to emasculate anti-Semitism by destroying this mechanism. If you did not think that anti-Semites were

This accords with Steiner's opinion expressed elsewhere, which maintains that anti-Semitism, apart from its "talent" for ranting and raving, is characterised by a complete lack of thoughts.

Thus when Steiner describes Zionism as worse than anti-Semitism, that does not constitute a contradiction to or reduction of his express rejection of anti-Semitism since 1881. As before, his criticism was directed against the enemies of Liberalism and against the "reactionaries", amongst whom he counted the anti-Semites. In an essay<sup>105</sup> on Zola's *Letter to the Young Generation*, written only some months before the essay on Palestine, Steiner sees in Zola's appeal the ideals of Liberalism (the ideals of freedom and equality) expressed in "sentences of monumental magnitude".

According to Steiner, the worst people were not even those called the "young generation". The greatest confusion could be found in those who in 1897 were in their thirties, and who expressed their sympathies for reactionary concepts and supported the ambitious cliques of "junkers" (Prussian landed aristocracy), who viewed the liberal thoughts of the 19<sup>th</sup> century as "children's diseases", finding that "abstract freedom" contradicted the "necessities of the state". Steiner here refers to Maximilian Harden, quoting him in the following. With the "cliques of "junkers" he is referring to Prussian "junkers", belonging to the Pan-German Association (founded in 1891), the German nationalist anti-Semitic propagandist Georg von

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capable of learning and improving, you could just as well give up all efforts to change them.

105) See footnote 63.

Schönerer and his followers (p. 38), but also the French anti-Semites (one can recall Steiner's equating Dühring's anti-Semitism with reactionary philosophy and politics in the letter to Ronsperger).

When Steiner condemned Zionism, he was also aiming at anti-Semitism. To him Zionism – in spite of its utopian character – stood out as a relapse into the time before emancipation, that distracted people from their self-realisation *as humans* by reducing them to their national or generic characteristics. And Zionism, in turn, needed anti-Semitism as a counterpart. Herzl himself stressed that repeatedly. And not only that, Zionism even needed a certain exaggeration of the dangers of anti-Semitism. Rosenberg writes:

“Herzl’s Zionism required a crisis-laden exaggeration. He needed a dramatisation of the Jewish problem. The promise of a country like all other countries was not enough to let the masses flow in. The countries in which they lived had to become uninhabitable. Herzl’s Zionism lived in symbiosis with anti-Semitism and European nationalism.”<sup>106</sup>

Zionism encountered a public mood that did not correspond to this need. Walter Laqueur, the historian of Zionism, writes about this time:

“But the spirit of the age was still basically optimistic, and it was commonly assumed that the appeal of anti-Semitism was bound to

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106) Rosenberg, loc.cit. p. 108 in German edition, pp. 102-103 in original Swedish edition.

be restricted to the backward sections of society, in particular to those who had suffered from the consequences of industrialisation. The reaction against Enlightenment and liberalism, the new cult of violence, and anti-humanism, were thought to be transient cultural maladies [...] The anti-Semites, divided into several factions, lost much of their political influence after 1895, though they continued to exist as small sects bitterly fighting against each other. [...]

Nor was there any reason why the German and Austrian Jews should regard their own position with any special concern. In Russia and Rumania the situation was incomparably worse; from 1881 onwards eastern Europe was plagued by a series of pogroms. Even in France, which had a smaller Jewish community than Germany, their position was much more precarious. The French anti-Semitic movement predated Marr, Stöcker and Dühring; it was more articulate and its influence more widespread. It was, in fact, the pioneer of modern anti-Jewish ideology; the German and the Russian anti-Semites frequently imported their ideas from Paris.”<sup>107</sup>

Zionism also faced an assimilation of Jews that was already well advanced, at least in Central Europe. In the process of assimilation Laqueur sees a “natural process” and not simply a result of feelings of inferiority or “Jewish self-hatred” that had their roots in anti-Semitism.<sup>108</sup> Assimilation was not restricted to German Jews. It

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107) Laqueur, loc. cit. p. 32.

108) Ibid. p. 34. The argument that portrays all strivings for emancipation and assimilation – but also self-criticism within Jewry – as an expression of a specific Jewish self-hatred, not only displays racist traits itself, but would, applied to the criticism of Christianity by “Christians” or of Islam by

started later in other parts of Europe, but went further than in Germany. This was the case in England and Italy. Even in Eastern Europe, before the pogroms of the 1880s, there were advocates of assimilation, like the leading Jewish commentator in Russia, I. Orschansky, who demanded "the complete absorption (*Aufgehen*) of the Jews into the Russian nation".<sup>109</sup> Laqueur writes in retrospect on the 19<sup>th</sup> century, summarising:

"Assimilation was not a conscious act; it was the inevitable fate of a people without a homeland, which had been for a long time in a state of cultural decay and which to a great extent had lost its rational consciousness."<sup>110</sup>

Finally, he also points out to the inherent *anti-racist* impulse in the ideal of assimilation:

"But only very few Jews accepted the argument of the racist anti-Semites that they could never be assimilated and had therefore to be ejected from the body politic of the host people. No one anticipated a relapse into barbarism, and most Jews continued their struggle for full civil rights as patriotic citizens of their respective countries of birth. A retreat from assimilation seemed altogether unthinkable [...]"<sup>111</sup>

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"Muslims", necessitate the explanation of all ideological criticism or self criticism through a corresponding self-hatred. Compare remarks by Hannah Arendt on the Jewish "rebels" Marx und Börne, loc. cit. p. 164.

109) Ibid. p. 36.

110) Ibid. pp. 38-39.

111) Ibid. p. 39.

This is exactly what also seemed unthinkable to Steiner. Beyond that, he also rejected Zionism as the idea of a *Jewish* national state, as such an ideal threatened to draw European Jewry into imperialistic, and nationalistic, and possibly even racist entanglements.

Similarly to Steiner and Laqueur, Rosenberg (1998) also sees in Herzl's Zionism a reflection of European nationalism and imperialism.

“The step from the idea that Jews were humans like everybody else to the idea that the Jews were a separate nation like everybody else was extremely hazardous [...] The idea of a Jewish homeland presupposed a historical period when countries and nations actually could be created, recreated, born and destroyed with the help of gunboats, rulers and compasses. Consequently, it was an idea that closely followed the military strategist's way of regarding nations, borders and territories that was typical for colonialism and imperialism.”<sup>112</sup>

The chief rabbi of Vienna, Moritz Güdemann, argued against the programmatic book *Der Judenstaat* (*A State for the Jews*) published in 1896. In a pamphlet he described Herzl's idea as “a cuckoo's egg (that is, a “dangerous present”; translator's note) for national Jewry” and declared that the Jews were not a nation; that the only thing they had in common was their belief in God, and that Zionism was

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112) Göran Rosenberg, loc. cit. pp. 97, 104 in the German edition, pp. 90, 98 in the original, Swedish edition.

incompatible with the teachings of Judaism.<sup>113</sup> Güdemann, in order to illustrate the danger of nationalism, countered Herzl's suggested solution with the slogan coined by the revered Austrian writer Franz Grillparzer: "from humanity through nationality to bestiality", (with which the latter wanted to warn of the dangers of German nationalism) and argued that the Jews should take up the mission of the diaspora and fight against anti-Semitism in the respective countries in which it appeared.

Other Jews expressed their rejection of Zionism much more radically than Steiner. Gabriel Riesser, for example, a Liberal Jewish politician, voiced his opinion in the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century that a Jew who preferred a non-existing state and a non-existing nation (Israel) to Germany should be taken into police custody, not because his opinions were dangerous, but because he was evidently insane. Instead he expressed his dedication to his German homeland in the spirit of assimilation:

"Anyone who disputes my claim to my German homeland, disputes my right to my thoughts and feelings, to the language that I speak, to the air that I breathe, and for that reason I must protect myself against him as I would against an assassin."<sup>114</sup>

When Raphael Loewenfels wrote in 1893, the foundation year of the *Central Association of German Citizens of the Jewish Faith*

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113) Moritz Güdemann: *Nationaljudentum (National Judaism)*, Leipzig and Vienna, 1897, p. 42.

(*Centralverein deutscher Staatsbürger jüdischen Glaubens*) that “no educated Jew would be willing to leave his beloved fatherland for a country where in time immemorial his forefathers had lived”, he did not, according to Laqueur, express “the view of one person”, he “expressed the convictions of a great many Jews”.<sup>115</sup>

When Herzl, the well-known feuilletonist of the Viennese *New Free Press* (*Neue Freie Presse*) drafted his ideas for *Der Judenstaat* in 1895, a friend believed that his mind had become unhinged as a result of overwork and that he was in need of rest and medical treatment. Laqueur writes about the reaction of most of the Jews at the time to Herzl’s book:

“What scandalised most of Herzl’s contemporaries in his pamphlet was his flat assertion that assimilation had not worked. How could an assimilated Jew make such a patently absurd claim?”<sup>116</sup>

Herzl himself expressed his pessimistic conviction in the following words:

“We have everywhere honestly tried to be absorbed (“unterzugehen”) into the peoples in which we live and only preserve the faith of our fathers. We have not been allowed to do it.”<sup>117</sup>

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114) J. Feiner: *Gabriel Riessers Leben und Wirken* (*The Life and Work of Gabriel Riesser*), Leipzig 1911, p. 19.

115) Laqueur, loc. cit. p. 31.

116) Laqueur, loc. cit. p. 86.

As can be seen, Herzl uses almost the same words as Steiner to describe the ideal that the Jews had tried to achieve up to then. But he declares the project of assimilation to have failed and comes to the opposite opinion of Steiner's, who continues to uphold this ideal. One can criticise Steiner for that. But one must then also criticise the greater part of his Jewish contemporaries, who also rejected Herzl's view. Herzl writes:

“The peoples with which Jews live are all without exception shame-faced or brazen-faced anti-Semites”,<sup>118</sup>

And Laqueur comments as follows:

“Such statements sounded exaggerated, alarmist, almost hysterical in 1896, and when Herzl derided the belief in the unlimited perfectibility of man as so much sentimental drivel he was, of course, attacked as an obscurantist.”<sup>119</sup>

That man has an unlimited potential for moral and spiritual improvement, however, was the view of the author of *Die Philosophie der Freiheit* (*The Philosophy of Spritual Activity* [= “Freedom”]), for whom there existed neither limits to knowledge nor for moral improvement. As long as he did not lose faith in this ability for improvement, in the increase of freedom and the growth of knowledge through reason, he continued to champion its realisation.

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117) Theodor Herzl, *Der Judenstaat* (*A State for the Jews*), Vienna 1896, p. 11.

118) Herzl, loc. cit. p. 11.

119) Laqueur, *A History of Zionism*, loc. cit. p. 91.

To Steiner, Herzl's denial of progress had to present itself as reactionary and even nihilistic. That is why he saw in Herzl and the like-minded Nordau "seducers" and "tempters" of their people.<sup>120</sup>

Also the cultural Zionist Achad Haam, who was to play an important role in Zionism after the turn of the century, criticised Herzl by asking the question of what was specifically Jewish about Herzl's state. Laqueur writes on the reaction of the Russian and Polish Zionists:

"To the East European Zionists, who in the cultural rebirth saw the essential core of their doctrine, Herzl's pamphlet naturally was anathema,"<sup>121</sup>

On the attitude of the Middle and Western European Jews, who identified themselves with Liberal and Socialist world views, Laqueur writes that many of them thought

that national differences were losing their importance everywhere in the world, and that the Jews, precisely because they had no national home, would become the vanguard of this movement to create a world encompassing culture and way of life. Steinschneider, an outstanding representative of the science of Judaism during the 19<sup>th</sup> century, took the view, in the face of the growing Zionist movement, that the only remained task was to

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120) See footnote 101.

121) Laqueur, *A History of Zionism (Geschichte des Zionismus)*, loc. cit. p. 113 (in German edition)

separate oneself from the remnants of Judaism in an honourable way.<sup>122</sup>

We cannot here recount the whole history of Jewish anti-Zionism, but one more personality would be mentioned. The President of the *Anglo-Jewish Association*, Lucien Wolf, in 1902 expressed the opinion also held by other Anglo-Jewish organisations and their members, that Zionism was damaging and endangered what had been achieved through emancipation, in the following way:

“Dr. Herzl and his like-minded followers are traitors to the history of the Jews, which they understand and interpret falsely.”<sup>123</sup>

According to Wolf, the Zionists not only provoked anti-Semitism, their plans were also doomed to failure; they had commercialised a spiritual idea and made a profit out of a prophecy. He continued: Herzl had with “brilliant shamelessness” given out his evasion of the task of the exile and his flight from the responsibility towards the countries of the Diaspora as the fulfilment of the old prophecies. In conclusion he said, referring to a contemporary critic of Herzl, that Zionism’s programme was the “most disdainful and ridiculous perversion of idealism”, and that Zionism was nothing but a “travesty of Judaism”.<sup>124</sup>

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122) Quoted by Laqueur, loc. cit. p. 33 (German edition).

123) Quoted by Laqueur, loc. cit. p. 420 (German edition).

124) Compare Laqueur, loc. cit. p. 420 (German edition)

Like Wolf, Steiner feared that Zionism could increase the existing anti-Semitism even more. Since Zionism, as has been shown above, also declared assimilation to have failed and invoked nationalistic ideals, it is quite understandable – even if it may not be easy to do so from today’s perspective – to see why in 1897 Steiner viewed Zionism as a greater danger to the Jewish existence in Europe than anti-Semitism, at a time when Zionism was beginning to have an increasing effect on public opinion. It also shows that it is a misconception to criticise him for having “underestimated” anti-Semitism or even “belittled its danger”; he had, after all, fought against it since 1881.<sup>125</sup>

Perhaps the most convincing confirmation of Steiner’s judgement on Zionism is contained in the recently discovered diaries of the Jewish scholar Victor Klemperer, written during the Nazi period. These diaries are an excellent and deeply moving document from the time of the persecution of the Jews. Even in the 1930s Klemperer, who was himself persecuted, placed Zionism on the same level as National Socialism as a whole.<sup>126</sup>

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125) This is what Julia Iwersen does in her essay, mentioned in footnote 30.

126) “For in Zion the Aryan will be just the same as the Jew is here. Par nobile fratrum! (Brothers in “nobility”!) To me the Zionists who want to continue the Jewish state of 77 A.D. (destruction of Jerusalem by Titus) are just as loathsome as the Nazis. In their “sniffing out” of blood connections, their “ancient culture”, their partially hypocritical, partially narrow-minded rolling back of world history they are quite comparable to the National Socialists. The joke that one wanted to erect a statue of Hitler in Haifa with the inscription “For Our General” (German: “*H*erführer”) has in reality a deeper and very unhumorous justification: because of the identical ideal, he is indeed their leader to this place (to Palestine) (German pun: “*H*erführer”). That is what is so fantastic about the National Socialists, that they live in a

This evaluation also shows that the standards of judgement *before* the Holocaust were different from those afterwards.<sup>127</sup>

In a lecture to the Goetheanum workers from 8 May 1924, Steiner once more summarised his rejection of Zionism, motivated by his basic anti-racist and anti-nationalist attitude:

“Therefore I found it questionable from the beginning, that the Jews [...] founded the Zionist movement. To establish a Jewish state is to act in a most dissolutely reactionary way [...] thereby sinning against everything that is necessary today in this field. [...] *Such a project is in no way timely anymore, because what is timely today is what every human can connect to without regard to race or nation or class and so on* [...] Today it is very necessary indeed, in relation to these things, to strictly emphasise, not what is based on race and not what is based on nation, but what is universally human!”<sup>128</sup>

## **The Letter to Marie Steiner in 1905**

Steiner also spoke of the decomposing or “dissolving” effect of reactionary spiritual currents, which has been touched on already

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community of ideals simultaneously with Soviet Russia and with Zion.”  
Victor Klemperer, “Diaries 1933 – 1934”, 3rd edition, 1999, p.111 f.

127) For the change in standards of judgement brought about through history, see also p. 55 ff.

128) GA 353, Lecture 8 May 1924, pp. 201, 202, 205.

while dealing with the Homunculus figure (see p. 68 f), in a letter to Marie Steiner in 1905<sup>129</sup>. In this letter he elaborated on the state of affairs in the study of medicine around the turn of the century and on the continuing Semitic influence on the cultural development before and after Christ. The letter contains a remarkable analysis of the

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129) See the valuable interpretation attempt by Michael Klussmann: *Das „Zeretzungsferment – eine missverstandene Äußerung zum Judentum (The “decomposing ferment” – a misunderstood remark on Judaism)*, in: *Das Goetheanum* Nr. 35, 1996. The essay analyses the positive and negative connotations of the expression “decomposition”, describes the dialectic relationship between assimilation and separation that can be found in the history of Jewry and tries to liberate the remark by Rudolf Steiner in a letter to Marie Steiner from the projections of anti-Semitic agitation. See also the essay by Stefan Leber in *Erziehungskunst (The Art of Teaching)*, periodical, Stuttgart) Nr. 7/8, 2000, pp. 849-855, that demonstrates a falsification of a quotation by Bierl. Detlef Hardorp points out another quote falsification by Bierl: Alfred Baeumler was the director of the “Science” department of the “Bureau for the Supervision of the Total Cultural and Philosophical Education of NSDAP”, or, for short: “Rosenberg Office”. In 1937 he wrote a report on Waldorf education. Bierl only quotes the first half of it and thereby falsifies it so that it says the opposite of what Baeumler means. He writes on p. 151 of his agitatorial work (see footnote 3) “The Nazi educator [Alfred Baeumler] praised the “Knowledge of Man” that constitutes the foundation of Waldorf education and stressed the racism as an essential correspondence between the National Socialist and Rudolf Steiner’s understanding of man”. What Bierl leaves out is the central word “seems” in the part he paraphrases, as well as Baeumler’s conclusion.

In his report, Baeumler had written that Steiner – like Goethe – takes his starting point from the nature of man: “Insofar as race constitutes a reality of nature, already in their starting points there seems to be an important common ground between the way National Socialism and Rudolf Steiner understand man.” (quoted according to A. Leschinsky, *Waldorfschulen im Nationalsozialismus, Neue Sammlung (Waldorf Schools under National Socialism, New Collection)*, Vol 23, May/June 1983, p. 280). What Bierl leaves out is the continuation by Baeumler: “But if you would try to introduce the concept of race in our [National Socialist] sense into this biological foundation [as understood by Steiner] it would blow the knowledge of man of Rudolf Steiner to pieces” (ibid.) By leaving out the second sentence, Bierl commits a forgery. In a second report on Waldorf education in 1938, Baeumler wrote: “According to the basic preconditions of Anthroposophy, the [pedagogical] goal can only be humanistic, not racist-nationalistic.” (Quoted according to Uwe Werner: *Anthroposophen in der Zeit des Nationalsozialismus (Anthroposophists during the Time of National Socialism)*, Oldenbourg, München 1999, p. 403).

history of human consciousness, and it would be short-sighted to only perceive anti-Semitic catch-words therein. Steiner sees it as centrally important that medical studies become permeated by a theosophical spirit. What he is referring to is the predominance of materialistic thinking in medicine during his time, which was a hindrance for the development of a real understanding of health and illness. In connection with this he writes:

“We actually already have the impact of the new element in our culture, but it has not yet come to its full development. The totality is to be understood as the inter-linking of two spiritual vortices that overlap each other in Christ. [...]

We are not yet completely Christian, and the Semitic impulses from previous times are still present, but they act as a decomposing ferment. It is no coincidence that the men who through their sharp and clear, but completely materialistic thinking have had the greatest influence in recent times on the masses in Europe, Marx and Lassalle, were Jews.<sup>130</sup> [...] In our time there exist two forms of thought, one newly arising, still embryonic one: represented by Haeckel in zoology; this form must be made fertile

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130) Before classifying the remarks as anti-Semitic, one should consider the judgement by Marx of Judaism, which he published in his essay on “The Jewish Question”, as well as his judgement of Lassalle. Marx identified the spirit of Judaism with the spirit of haggling and derived the political opinion of Lassalle from his race. See Karl Marx: *Zur Judenfrage (The Jewish Question)*, Berlin 1919, published and introduced by Stefan Grossmann, originally published in the German-French year books of Ruge in 1844. See also Léon Poliakov: *Der arische Mythos. Zu den Quellen von Rassismus und Nationalismus (The Aryan Myth. On the Sources of Racism and Nationalism)*, Vienna 1977, p. 281 f.

by Schiller-Goethe – then Fechner in psychology; theosophy must make this form fertile[...]

Everything else is withering, decomposing: the purely analytical way of thinking in zoology, botany and medicine; Wundt and his followers in psychology: [...]

All our *theology, jurisprudence, education, are filled with decomposing substances*. The decomposition has already become a pedagogical poison for children in the kindergartens. And the decomposition is shown most clearly by the fact that these kindergartens on the other hand have become a necessary part of the deadening life of our large cities. [...] Yet still there is nothing worse than when our pedagogical methodology takes possession of the mind and disposition of the child who is not yet of school age. Unnoticed, *a training of the intellect* is introduced to a being that should only grow up under the influence of intuitive perception. And the most terrible thing is that our “pedagogues” are of the opinion that exactly this training of the intellect is perception. In the most horrible way this artificial preparation of the intellect is called visual instruction.”<sup>131</sup>[author’s italics]

Here Steiner describes the negative side of the modern cultural development, which with its development of rationality and the ego consciousness has led to a repression of the traditional spiritual consciousness. The enlightened intellect, to which the modern ego owes its emancipation, becomes a victim of materialism, if it does

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131) GA 262, Dornach 1967, Letter of 28 April 1905, p. 61 f.

not acquire a knowledge of its own spiritual nature. Materialism makes man more and more similar to an animal, leading to the social Darwinist ideology of the survival of the fittest. The competitive struggle between nations, classes and races is a logical consequence of the denial of the spirit.

The basic thought on which Steiner bases his presentation in the letter is the “decomposing activity” resulting from a one-sided development of the “intellect”, that can be found in almost all cultural phenomena; for this reason it is also present in individual Jewish thinkers, whereby the "Jewishness" of their thinking not is based on any “racial determination”, but in the reproduction of an abstract thinking in terms of natural scientific laws, that here is applied to social phenomena. In prominent socialists, who want to establish the rule of materialism in the social field, Steiner sees a rationalist hostility towards individual knowledge and against the social emancipation of the individual. It is no coincidence that those thinkers who had had an “intellectually decomposing” influence on the masses belonged to that spiritual stream upheld Kant’s denial in principle of a knowledge of the spirit, and his ethics based on moral precepts.

Materialistic socialism is a continuation of Kant’s philosophy, as it declares individual knowledge of God to be impossible and subordinates man to the dictation of an external entity, in this case the economic conditions of society. It is the materialistic perversion of normative ethics, as it declares man to be the slave of matter, and

because it denies his individuality by reducing him to a member of a "class". The message, arousing sultry emotions, of the rule of the collective and the extermination of the expropriators through the proletarian revolution has just as decomposing an effect on the social order as racism and anti-Semitism. Instead of supportive and fruitful ideas, that appoint man to become a creator of social conditions as an autonomous individual, de-individualised class hatred and resentful envy are set in their place.<sup>132</sup>

In the thinking of Kant on "duty", Steiner - who saw humanity destined to develop individualism - saw an "ideal from grey antiquity": the ideal of obedience to the revealed Law and modesty in faith. This ideal he also saw continuing to exercise influence on some elements of contemporary Jewry.

In his letter, Steiner does not want to insinuate that materialism is something "typically Jewish". His intention is to say that abstract monotheism and normative ethics are quite compatible with materialism, that abstract monotheism is a form of materialism. That is something which Steiner had also criticised in Christian theology. In the thinking of Marx and Lassalle, he had also seen that materialism represented which is compatible with abstract monotheism. His letter to Marie Steiner, in which he says that it is not a coincidence that Marx and Lassalle were Jews, must be interpreted in the perspective of his criticism of religions based on

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132) This criticism of Socialism only sheds light on one aspect of the problem and needs to be complemented by Steiner's positive interpretation of the basic impulse of Socialism, the striving for global solidarity.

revelation. To him, the thinking of Marx and Lassalle stood out as “Jewish” insofar as elements of this “Jewish thinking” itself strove for a convergence with contemporary materialism during the 18th and 19<sup>th</sup> century, not least of all Herzl's Zionism. It is not without reason that a well-known topos of cultural history sees in Marxism and its concept of history - that regards the final goal of history to be the classless society - a secularised Messianic doctrine of salvation. Rosenberg also takes up this topos, when he writes about the “assimilationists” of the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century:

"Those who had put their hope in the more messianic promises of Enlightenment were now forced into taking on the role as the most relentless missionaries of the doctrines of the modern political movements. [...] the Jewish question consciously or unconsciously continued to influence their lives and their work [...] Karl Marx [...] tried with demonstrable brutality to write himself free from the Jewish problem, but at the same time it was not difficult to trace Jewish concepts (the classless society and the withering away of the state) in the Messianic promises of Marxism. In a similarly loud-voiced way Ferdinand Lassalle dissociated himself from what was Jewish, but repeatedly returned to it. In letters to Engels, Marx referred to his opponent as the “Jewish ‘nigger’” Lassalle and ascribed “typical Jewish” character traits to him. [...]. There was no quick way out of the magical Jewish circle of [Ludwig] Börne.”<sup>133</sup>

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133) Rosenberg, loc. cit. pp. 78-79 in German edition, pp. 72-73 in original Swedish edition.

Similarly to the way in which Steiner, in the letter here discussed, saw the materialism of the 19<sup>th</sup> century as a metamorphosis of Jewish thinking, characterised by an ethics based on law and obedience, he also interpreted this materialism as a metamorphosis of Christian scholasticism. Consequently, he was looking at something that Christian and Jewish thinking had in common, when he described historical materialism or the consistent negation of otherworldliness as something that was not coincidentally professed by Jews. This consistent orientation to this world he could indeed describe as “decomposing”, as it in fact “dissolved” the religious and social traditions. That Steiner held this decomposition to be necessary should be just as clear as the fact that he tried to set positive ideas against the mere criticism and the mere dissolution of the traditions.

Hannah Arendt, whom one can hardly accuse of “shamefaced” anti-Semitism, described, in spite of the misuse of the metaphor by National Socialist propaganda, the moral and political catastrophe of the French Third Republic as a “*process of decomposition*” (“*Zersetzung*”) in which “Jews” were prominently involved:

“The lies of the anti-Semites, who lied about the secondary role of the Jews, and claimed that their later parasitical behaviour was actually the primary cause of the general disintegration, only furthered and accelerated the process of decomposition [...] A symptom of the decomposition process is also the emergence of that typically modern chauvinist national sentiment, that always acquits its own people of all responsibility at the expense of all

other peoples. The Jews took part in this game, in which real processes of decay are mirrored, insofar as they in turn, without hesitation, denied the Jewish parasitism and played the role of persecuted innocents [...]"<sup>134</sup>

The unorthodox Zionist Jacob Klatzkin shows that reflections about “Jewish intelligence” were not limited to anti-Semites or to Jews who had internalised anti-Semitic stereotypes. In his book *Crisis and Decision in Judaism (Krisis und Entscheidung im Judentum)*, published in 1921, he among other things discusses the question of the nature of the Jewish spirit. Klatzkin does not try to derive the characteristics of the “Jewish intellectual” from his race. Instead he develops a concept of the cultural history of the Jewish spirit, similar to Steiner's, and derives one characteristic of this spirit from the world historical tension between exile and divine promise, universalism and particularism. Laqueur describes him thus:

“Klatzkin drew a sharp portrait of the “typical” Jewish intellectual, who appeared to be almost completely assimilated, yet found it difficult to be accepted by the host people, because he came from a spiritual aristocracy with specific characteristics, that were not possible to assimilate. He was intellectually highly developed, rich in creative and destructive predisposition, dynamic and too active in his striving to become assimilated, thereby finally becoming an annoyance. His strengths were mockery and irony, an infertile intellectualism. He acted as mediator between different national cultures, but much too often touched only on the surface of things

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134) Arendt, loc. cit. p. 231.

and had no sensitivity for the deeper roots of the folk spirit. He tried to mix things that not were possible to combine, he was at home everywhere and nowhere. He tried to reinterpret the German spirit, discovering tolerance, justice and even Messianism therein, until he finally was half German and half Jewish. These intellectuals had a strong inclination to radicalism, to negation and to dissolution. As intellectual proletarians, they never found peace, as they had lost the connection to their own historical roots. Being without roots, they saw themselves forced to endeavour to change the world and preach the overthrow of the existing order.”<sup>135</sup>

Steiner knew himself to be in alliance with the (real) spirit of our time, to which he ascribed the mission of calling forth a common consciousness of mutual solidarity in all of humanity, because – as he formulated this thought in 1910:

“... the destiny of mankind in the near future will bring men together in far greater measure than has hitherto been the case in order to fulfil a mission common to all mankind.”<sup>136</sup>

As a precondition of modern man's finding a new home in the spiritual world, Steiner described his *homelessness* and *uprootedness*, the loss of all social and religious traditions. For Steiner, the feeling of a life in *exile* had emigrated into the general European culture, the loss of the relationship to what he called the “spiritual world” was the condition for a modern form of Religio.

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135) Laqueur, loc. cit. pp. 410-411. (German edition)

136) Rudolf Steiner, *The Mission of Folk Souls*, Lecture held 7 June 1910, GA 121, London: Rudolf Steiner Press 1970, p. 23.

The European population was on the way to becoming a spiritual proletariat, the traditional feudal and theocratic order was rapidly dissolving. In the rise of racism during the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Steiner saw a symptom of spiritual decadence, as the preaching of racial differences and the assertion of a radical influence on human morality intended to prevent the emancipation of the individual in man. The emancipated, but at the same time uprooted individuals were to be tied again, through nationalism and racism, to the archaic forces of their peoples and their races. Long before Horkheimer and Adorno, Steiner discussed this “dialectic of Enlightenment”.

In opposition to his time, the time of imperialism and racism, he saw the world mission of the representatives of Occidental Western civilisation in a renewal and deepening of spiritual life, was to lead to the eradication of all inequality and discrimination. The spiritual movement of Anthroposophy that he founded was intended to contribute to the fulfilment of this task.

## **The Role of Jewish Physicians**

Following Klatzkin's and Laqueur's reflections on Jewish intelligence, we now intend to deal with a remark of Steiner's from 1924 which some authors have taken as an indication of Steiner's "resentment against Jews".<sup>137</sup> In a lecture to the workers at the

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137) See Julia Iwersen, loc. cit., p. 157 (footnote 30) and, with a Pavlovian reflex, Brumlik, loc. cit., Preface (footnote 81).

Goetheanum<sup>138</sup> Steiner elaborates on the significance of the medieval Jewish physicians for the development of medicine and on the lasting effect of their influence up until the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The whole passage is a positive appreciation of Jewry in the Middle Ages, and it is baffling that anyone could understand it in the opposite sense.

Even more, one could accuse Steiner of discriminating against the "Christians" or the "Arabs", which would of course be just as silly as the other interpretation. Steiner indicates that the Occidental "Christians" were "quite incapable" of "continuing the old medicine, because they "could no longer see the spiritual in the healing herbs." But the Jewish physicians who immigrated from the Orient had the ability to see this spiritual element in nature; it was to them that "the Arabs" also owed their medicinal achievements. Everywhere in nature, namely, "the Jews" saw "Jehova".

The Jewish physicians of the Middle Ages, therefore, owed their ability to preserve and to further develop the old medicine to their attitude to nature, to which their religion had led them. They had not, however (according to Steiner) seen the spiritual element in nature pluralistically (in the sense of polytheism), but monistically (in a monotheistic way). For this reason medicine itself had taken on a monotheistic (monistic) character. Steiner rediscovers this character trait in the non-individual medication of modern medicine, whose

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138) *Die Geschichte der Menschheit und die Weltanschauungen der Kulturvölker* (*The History of Mankind and the World Views of the Cultured Peoples*), GA 353, lecture of May 8th, 1924, p. 200-201.

ideal is standardised medication for standardised diagnoses. (He explains this idea in an illustrative way which is easily understandable for the workers). Through this development an "abstract spirit, an abstract divine service for Jehova had entered" into medicine. With a benevolently neutral attitude one can see what Steiner wanted to say here. The "abstract Jehova spirit" is the last thinned-out manifestation of a (monotheistic-monistic) principle of unity, that, having become emancipated, now shows itself in a field completely different from the one where it originally appeared: in the science of medicine. Steiner points out that also at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, many Jews practised as physicians, in fact even a disproportionately large number compared with the percentage of Jews in the general population. He connects this with the inclination to abstract thinking, which he ascribes to the Jewish intelligence of his time. Literally he says:

"... they still feel very much attracted to medicine, because it corresponds to their abstract thinking. This abstract Jehova medicine is really adapted to their whole way of thinking, it corresponds to them."

Steiner's remarks about the history of medicine and the role of people of Jewish origin therein at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century are neither anti-Semitic nor irrelevant: they merely state a historical fact. This can best be shown with a number of quotations from a recent publication. In the four-volume work *Deutsch-jüdische Geschichte in der Neuzeit* (*German-Jewish history in Modern*

*Times*)<sup>139</sup>, whose publication was hailed by the intellectual German newspaper *Die Zeit* as a "historic event", Steven M. Loewenstein<sup>140</sup> writes in the chapter "The Jewish Contribution to German Culture":

"Jews and persons of partially Jewish origin played an important role in medicine, biology and chemistry during the whole second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century [...]. In the decade immediately preceding the First World War, there was a drastic increase in the number of important Jewish personalities in the field of natural science [...]"<sup>141</sup>

The cultural blossoming of the Weimar Republic was to a large extent brought about by the work of Jewish intellectuals, who had previously also been making outstanding contributions in the time of the German Empire."<sup>142</sup>

One could also mention the many Jewish followers of Steiner, from Adolf Arenson to Carl Unger, from Shmuel Hugo Bergmann to Ludwig Thieben, Karl König, Hans Büchenbacher and Walter Johannes Stein. All of these personalities contributed to the "cultural blossoming" of the Weimar Republic through their work for Anthroposophy.

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139) *Deutsch-Jüdische Geschichte in der Neuzeit*, edited for the Leo-Baeck-Institute by Michael A. Meyer, Adolph S. Ochs, professor of Jewish history at "Hebrew Union College - Jewish Institute of Religion" in Cincinnati, with contribution of Michael Brenner, professor for Jewish history and culture at Ludwig-Maximilians-University Munich, Munich 2000.

140) Steven M. Loewenstein is Levine Professor of Jewish History at the University of Judaism in Los Angeles.

141) *Deutsch-jüdische Geschichte der Neuzeit*, p. 305.

"Freudian psychology, which was so closely connected with Vienna Jews, combined loyalty to the scientific rationalist method with the tenet that human motives, far from being rational, were strongly determined by subconscious desires [...]. The psychoanalytical movement in Vienna consisted to a large extent of Jews - among them not only Freud, but also Alfred Adler [...]. Also many members of the Vienna circle of Logical Positivists were Jews, as well as leading Austro-Marxist intellectuals such as Otto Bauer and Max Adler."<sup>143</sup>

In Germany and Austria, says Loewenstein, a "disproportionately large number of Jews were among the leaders in research in the fields of physics, chemistry, biology and psychology." these personalities were "drawn to the medicine-related sciences, doubtlessly due, partially, to the long tradition of Jewish physicians." In the field of medicine they were especially prominent in the research of new specialities such as microbiology and dermatology.<sup>144</sup>

Loewenstein writes about the "Jewish intellectuals" that they usually tended rather to "the theoretical, rationalist and progressive or radical side of any spectrum [pertaining to the philosophy of life]...", rather than to the conservative Christian side.<sup>145</sup> Loewenstein speaks literally of the "iconoclastic [anti-traditionalist, advocating the

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142) loc. cit., p. 307.

143) loc. cit., p. 308-309.

144) loc. cit., p. 323

breaking of images: author's note] nature of so many "of these "immense" contributions."<sup>146</sup>

Loewenstein chooses an approach based on social history and psychology to explain the character of "Jewish intelligence" which he describes - the tendency towards rationality and enlightenment which is to be found in many cultural contributions by Jews in the modern world - when he points out the "special connection of modernisation and secularisation for Jews" and the "consequences of marginalisation (occupying a position at the perimeter of society) for cultural creativity."

"The choice of standpoints for Jewish students", writes Loewenstein, "was usually limited to the middle or left of the middle of the cultural and political spectrum. [...] Being suspicious of too great a Christian influence on society, they allied themselves with progressive opponents of the unity of Church and State. The necessity of turning their backs on their own traditional culture in order to get a European education, combined with the fear of a Christian domination which might ostracise them, therefore made educated Jews more secular and more progressive than their non-Jewish fellows."<sup>147</sup>

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145) loc. cit., p. 329-330.

146) loc. cit., p. 329-330.

147) loc. cit., p. 330.

Loewenstein elaborates on the determining influence of the peripheral social position ("marginality") on the Jewish intelligentsia:

"They had given up the Jewish tradition and could not return to it any more, and at the same time they could not simply become self-satisfied members of the social majority [this is of course true for all representatives of the avantgarde, also the non-Jewish ones, among others for Steiner, L.R.] [...] Because of this double feeling of being excluded, Jewish intellectuals had the tendency to regard the traditions both of Judaism and of the majority culture as artificial hindrances on mankind's path towards progress. This led them to make cultural innovations in fields in which traditional hindrances were insignificant. the theory of marginality [if "marginality" is understood to be a "mental predisposition", author's note] would therefore explain why the "typical character of the non-Jewish Jew" [...] is to be found among the great innovators and the great iconoclasts of human civilisation."<sup>148</sup>

When Steiner draws attention to the disproportionately large number of Jewish physicians in scientifically oriented medicine, he is only stating a historical fact. His characterisation of classical medicine as a secularised form of the Jewish medicine of the late Middle Ages and early modern times is also based on historical facts. When he elaborates on the metamorphosis of the monistic principle, which reappears in the predilection of modern medicine for standardised

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148) loc. cit., p. 330-331.

diagnoses and methods, then this form of monism has little more than the name in common with the original religious monotheism of Judaism. To construe an anti-Semitic prejudice out of Steiner's excursion into the history of science, as Julia Iwersen does, reveals nothing less than remarkable ignorance.

### **Steiner's Criticism of Monotheism and Religion Based on Revelation**

As far as the monotheism was concerned, which reform Judaism had declared to be the central content of the Jewish religion, Steiner could just as well have criticised Catholicism or contemporary Christianity, which he actually did in other contexts. Before the turn of the century he advocated the radical standpoint of Enlightenment, that the spiritual and cultural development of the Occident had overcome all forms of traditional religion. He refused to acknowledge the authority of any spiritual tradition which did not legitimise itself through epistemological activity based on experience, but sought instead to justify itself through the mere fact of its historical existence or through revelation.

In his *Einleitungen zu Goethes Naturwissenschaftliche Schriften* (*Introductions to Goethe's Scientific Writings*) Steiner had already clearly stated his radical criticism of all religions based on revelation.

In the second volume, published in 1887, he writes in a chapter on *Goethe's Form of Knowledge (Goethes Erkenntnisart)*:

“It is only worthy of man that he himself searches for truth and that he is led neither by experience nor by revelation.

Once that has been widely realised, the religions based on revelation will have come to an end.

Man will then no longer want God to reveal himself or to give his blessing. He will gain knowledge through his own thinking and found his happiness on his own strength. It does not concern us whether a higher power leads us to a good or bad fate; we ourselves have to determine the path that we wish to take. The most magnificent idea of God will always be the one which assumes that God, after creating man, withdrew totally from the world and left him completely to himself.”<sup>149</sup>

In his essay *Papacy and Liberalism (Papsttum und Liberalismus)*, which he wrote in the same year as the essay on Homunculus, he accuses Pius IX of wanting to force the forms of belief of the “dark Middle Ages” on modern humanity, and champions the principle of Liberalism against this Catholicism:

“The barometer of progress in the evolution of humanity is indeed the understanding of the ideal of freedom that is prevalent, and the practical realisation of this understanding. It is our conviction that

the present age has taken a step forward in this understanding which is just as significant as the step which was initiated by the teaching of Christ: "Let there be no difference between Jews and Greeks, between barbarians and Scythians; but may you all be brothers in Christ."

Just as at that time the equality of all men before God and each other was acknowledged, in the course of the last century the conviction has ever more taken hold of mankind that it cannot be our task to subordinate ourselves under the commandments of an external authority, and that everything that we believe in, that the guiding principle of our actions, should only be derived from the light of reason in our own soul.

To only hold that as true to which our own thinking necessitates us, and to only live under such social and political forms as we have given ourselves, that is the great principle of our time."<sup>150</sup>

Steiner professes the Liberal standpoint, that religion - no matter whether it is Christian, Jewish or Muslim - should have no influence on the political activity of a state, because the time of overt or covert theocracies has finally come to an end with the rise of the Liberal principle of liberalism.

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149) Steiner, *Einleitungen in Goethes Naturwissenschaftliche Schriften* (*Introductions to Goethe's Scientific Writings*), GA 1, p. 125.

150) GA 31, p. 134 f.

## Steiner's Appreciation of Judaism

Steiner saw positive and negative aspects in Judaism and described them as such. In Nordau's and Herzl's struggle for a "Jewish state" he saw a specifically Jewish form of European nationalism and condemned it as he condemned every form of nationalism, because he recognised its negative side: the suppression and deprivation of the rights of minorities. He rejected not only abstract monotheism, no matter of whether it was of Christian or Jewish origin, but also normative ethics. But besides that he also drew attention to the positive spiritual essence of the Jewish religion and Judaism. In their "mobility and internationalism", in their cosmopolitan orientation, he saw a spiritual affinity between Germans and Jews - exactly those characteristics which the anti-Semites of his time deplored.<sup>151</sup>

Steiner's discussion of Jewish mysticism in 1902 and 1924 shows<sup>152</sup> that he was able to distinguish between and judge different levels of the tradition both in the Jewish religion as well as in other world religions.

His *Christentum als mystische Tatsache (Christianity as Mystical Fact)* contains a positive appreciation of Judaism. Jesus is comprehended there as a unique initiate who emerges from the Jewish mysteries, intending to create a mystery religion for the

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151) GA 31, p. 395.

152) See Rudolf Steiner, *Christianity as Mystical Fact and the Mysteries of Antiquity*, GA 8, 1902, and GA 353, 1988, p. 210 ff.

people, and who wanted to democratise or popularise the theocratic principle of initiation.

Steiner's profound appreciation of the Jewish tradition can be seen in his discussion of a multitude of persons and topics in the course of two and a half decades (1902-1925). These include the Biblical first parents and their sons, Noah, Abraham, Moses, David, Salomon, Hiob, the Prophets, the Apokrypha and many others. Steiner's approach, in his differentiated dealing with the Old Testament, is one of spiritual realism: he sees in this monument one of the most significant traditions of pre-Christian mystery knowledge. This also bears witness to Steiner's deep respect for the Jewish religion and his intellectual commitment to the spirit of Judaism.<sup>153</sup>

After the lecture to Goetheanum workers on 8. May 1924, in which he decisively rejected Zionism, he held another lecture to the same audience on 10. May 1924<sup>154</sup> in which he spoke about the Jewish Sephirot tree, acknowledging this central concept of the cabalistic tradition in an appreciative portrayal. In the lecture, Steiner explicated the core of wisdom contained in the teaching about the Sephirot which encompasses all of humanity, and indicated a convergence of the mystical teaching about God in the Cabbala with the anthroposophical understanding of Christ. Steiner's expositions demonstrate that he was capable of differentiated judgements with respect to "Jewish thinking", and that one only can arrive at a final

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153) The works of Lic. Emil Bock on the Old Testament constitute a synoptic depiction based on Steiner's comprehension.

154) GA 353, p. 210 ff.

judgement of his relationship to Judaism if one frees oneself from the fixation on isolated remarks and takes the complexity of his discourse into consideration.<sup>155</sup>

## The Historical Mission of Judaism

To Judaism he ascribed a “historical mission”, whose scope, however, he only described after the turn of the century, when he had started to develop a new understanding for positive religion and the religious traditions after a profound personal spiritual revolution. This understanding he expounded in a public lecture on Moses that he gave in Berlin in 1910<sup>156</sup>. Here he indicated the central importance of Judaism for the spiritual constitution of the modern epoch of the Occident, and ascribed a mission to Moses and his people that continues to have effect up to the present and that *still had not come to an end* [author's italics]. Steiner said in 1910:

“What we regard today as the most important element in cultural life, received its first impulse through Moses [...]”<sup>157</sup>

“What later humanity owes to Moses is the power to develop reason and intellect, and to think intellectually about the world in the state of complete wakefulness connected with his ego-

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155) See the detailed exposition by David Schweizer, *Der kosmische Christus im Judentum (The Cosmic Christ in Judaism)*, in: *Info3, Kontemporär*, 6/2000, p. 12 f. See the site of Info3 at <http://www.info3.de>

156) GA 60, Dornach 1959, lecture held 9 March 1911, p. 410 f.

157) *Ibid.* p. 426.

consciousness, to arrive at an intellectual understanding of the world.”<sup>158</sup>

“Moses stands as the founder of the new, intellectualised way of perceiving the world that has still not by any means come to an end, and whose task it is once again to teach man to bring practical life into harmony with the natural phenomena, as Moses did in his time.”<sup>159</sup>

In 1910, he pointed to the positive consequences of that emancipation of the intellect that he ascribed to the Jewish people and to Moses, its prophet. Through the development of monotheism and the establishment of a society ruled by Law, the Jewish people had emancipated humanity from the spiritual powers that prevented the human ego from becoming conscious of itself.

Steiner also spoke in a similar way in 1910 in lectures in Christiania (Oslo) on the spiritual significance of the “Semitic” people. It is especially this exposition which shows that one does not do Steiner justice if one fails to take the multi-perspective character of his thinking into consideration. Here, he contrasts the “pluralistic” world view to the “monistic” and describes it as the merit of the “Semitic” peoples to have developed the monistic or monotheistic world view.

“... the current of monotheism also had to be represented, so that the urge, the impulse towards monotheism devolved upon a single

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158) Ibid. p. 426.

people, the Semitic people. [...] The task of the other nations was to 'analyse' ultimate Reality and so to furnish particular aspects of it with plentiful content, to fill themselves with rich material for those representations which can apprehend phenomena with sympathetic understanding. The task of the Semitic people was to eschew all pluralism and to devote itself to synthesis, to the doctrine of one substance. Hence the power of speculation, the power of synthetic thought, which is illustrated by Cabbalism, is unsurpassed precisely because it stems from this impulse. Everything that could possibly be distilled from the unitary principle by the synthesising activity of the 'I', has been distilled by the Semitic spirit in the course of thousands of years. This is the significance of the Semitic influence in the world and illustrates the polarity between pluralism and monism. *Monism is not possible without pluralism. Pluralism is not possible without monism. We must recognise the necessity for both.* [author's italics]"<sup>160</sup>

In St Paul, Steiner saw the man who overcame obedience to external Law and liberated the human individuality.<sup>161</sup> For this reason, the

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159) Ibid. p. 434.

160) GA 121, loc. cit. lecture given on the evening of 12. June 1910, pp. 115-116.

161) Quite apart from the complex history of the discussion of the antithesis between Law and Freedom, which cannot be gone into here, we may assert that this view of Steiner's corresponded in no little degree to the way Jewish thinkers saw their own Jewishness at the beginning of the 20th century. One example is Leo Baeck's "ethical monotheism". In the *Lehren des Judentums nach den Quellen (The Teachings of Judaism According to the Sources)* which the "Federation of German Jews" published in 1928 ff., Leo Baeck wrote about "Morality as a Basic Demand of Judaism": "In Judaism the necessity of morality is a basic principle, part of the foundation of the religion. Here morality is not an addition to religion, it is part of its essence. Without morality, there could be no belief in the significance of life or what goes beyond life. The new element which Israel's faith has brought to the world stems from this certain ethical character, which is peculiar to Judaism [...] Beside the one moral God there cannot be other gods, because the one

spirit and history of Judaism contained the seeds both for the rigid ethics based on external Law and for ethical individualism, which overcomes the rule of Law through the love for the moral ideas found by the ethical individual itself. Therefore, Steiner could also say that his *Philosophy of Spiritual Activity* was built on a “Pauline foundation”.

In Steiner’s view, some members of the Jewry of his time still held on to a stage of moral development that had been consigned to the past by the history of mankind: in the affirmation of Kant's philosophy by Moses Mendelssohn and his followers during the 19<sup>th</sup> century, he saw an adherence to a spiritual universal principle that admittedly had led humanity to institute the rule of external Law and through this Law to achieve consciousness of the Ego, but he also held that humanity should now overcome the Law and pass on from “monism” to “pluralism” in the name of total emancipation of the self.

Now, or more specifically, since 1879 - incidentally also the year of the foundation of the first anti-Semitic propaganda organisation by Wilhelm Marr - this adherence to the Law was anti-progressive,

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morality does not allow others beside it [...] The more we strive to be truly moral humans, the nearer we are to God, the nearer he is to us. *We can always find him when our whole heart turns to His Commandment* [author's italics] [...] Freedom is also a moral task which God has laid into Man's life, so that it may be fulfilled. The will to do good is the will to achieve freedom and also the will to live. [...] The purpose of history is that the Good gain its existence more and more. Only in the Good does the former have its own existence and duration; only that lives on which strives to live through the moral deed. In this certainty lies the faith of Judaism in the future." (Reprint Darmstadt 1999, p.13-15).

because the era of the final liberation of the human individuality had begun, the era of individual self determination. Steiner saw the liberal and democratic movements as the vehicles of human progress, as they articulated the need of individual man to give himself his own laws.

In contemporary Catholicism and Protestantism Steiner also saw the re-establishment of the rule of Law, that had allied itself with the postulation of limits to knowledge and the obligation to believe certain dogmas. For this reason, Steiner got involved in the "Arbeiterbildungsschule" (School for the Education of Workers) in Berlin, he advocated his movement for social and political emancipation among workers, the impulse of the threefold order of the social organism, and for the workers who built the Goetheanum he elucidated the meaning and importance of the spirit, their own spirit, for the understanding of reality and the shaping of society.

### **“Racial Ideals Lead Mankind Into Decadence”**

One cannot understand Steiner's life work and his basic intention in its real depth if one does not consider how he understood himself. This is especially the case for his criticism of racism. One aspect of the way he understood his own striving was that he saw the nationalism and racism of his time as an assault of “Spirits of Darkness” against the impulse of the Spirit of the Present Era, which strove “to base the human being on his individuality”.

“And thus we see, that especially during the 19<sup>th</sup> century an insistence on tribal, national and racial connections starts to develop, and one speaks of this insistence as something idealistic, while in reality it is the beginning of an expression of a decadence [...] of mankind [...]. A man who today speaks of the ideal of races and nations and of tribal affiliation speaks of decadent impulses of mankind [...] Because through nothing will mankind be brought more into decadence than if the ideals of race, nation and blood continue to hold sway.”<sup>162</sup>

Accordingly, all racism and nationalism contains for Steiner an extremely reactionary tendency.

The problem of minorities implicit in the concept of the nation-state has not been solved to this day. This is shown not only by the history of the state of Israel since its foundation, but also by the many political and military conflicts on all continents up to the present. Steiner advocated the abolition of the concept of the nation-state in favour of strengthening rights of freedom for the individual. Taking Austria-Hungary as an example, he also advocated the existence of multi-ethnic states, so long as they were committed to the ideals of Liberalism and democracy. It is quite reasonable to ask what course the history of Europe in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century might have taken if the leaders in the world of science, politics and culture had decided to defy racism and anti-Semitism as decisively as Rudolf Steiner demanded and practised himself.

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162) GA 177, see footnote 21, pp. 204, 205.