

were *kiddush* and *kaddish*. Unfamiliar with the culture and confused by the similarity in sound of these two terms, he had used the wrong one. The director ordered to him to correct the error, and no doubt he did, though I fear it made little or no difference to the vast majority of spectators in that part of the country, who simply read the moment as an exotic ritual of some sort accompanied by equally exotic music.

Jewish evolutionary perspectives on Judaism, antisemitism, and race science in late nineteenth-century England: a comparative study of Lucien Wolf and Joseph Jacobs

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Introduction

Within the enormous body of scholarly literature that exists on the subject of European Jewish emancipation, race, and antisemitism in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries are a number of studies that specifically explore Jewish scientific engagement in the debates. A particularly interesting example is Amos Morris-Reich's *The Quest for Jewish Assimilation in Modern Science* (2008), which considers some Jewish pioneers of the social sciences, including the American Franz Boas, the German Georg Simmel, and the Frenchman Emile Durkheim, and which argues that their common goal was to portray assimilation as a positive process and one that was not only possible but inevitable. According to Morris-Reich, the scientific works of Simmel and Boas, in particular, led to the conclusion that Jewish similarities stemmed from their common humanity and that any differences were socially mediated or constructed, rather than intrinsic or racial. As a result, their theories suggested that Jewish differences were inconsequential for the purposes of assimilation into European or American society.¹ Historically speaking, anthropological or sociological approaches to questions of Jewish race and religion garnered little interest among Jewish scholars in nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Britain. But, as this article will attempt to show, to the extent that they occurred the background was again much concerned with the possibilities of assimilation and integration, and with the issues of what exactly constituted Jewish difference and the extent to which it mattered.

One important moment in this story is represented by the meeting

¹ Amos Morris-Reich, *The Quest for Assimilation in Modern Social Science* (New York: Routledge, 2008), 125–8.

of the Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain in London on 24 February 1885, chaired by its president the eugenicist Francis Galton, where papers on the topic of the nature of the relationship between Jewish race and religious history were read and debated by Jewish participants. The two speakers that evening were the Oxford University sub-librarian Adolf Neubauer² and Joseph Jacobs, a student of Galton who became a well-known folklorist, literary critic, historian, and editor of the *Jewish Encyclopedia*.³ The audience was composed of leading members of the Anglo-Jewish establishment, including the Chief Rabbi Hermann Adler, the educational philanthropist F. D. Mocatta, and the journalist and historian Lucien Wolf, and the event received extensive coverage, including summaries of the papers and the discussions and editorial comments, in *The Jewish Chronicle*.⁴ Wolf's contribution to the debate was especially significant since he had written an essay in a prominent British magazine a year previously in which he had addressed precisely the same topic.⁵ In all probability, the evening was organized to address the issues raised by Wolf and also by the eminent French biblical scholar Ernest Renan, who had given a lecture two years before entitled "Judaism as Race and Religion".⁶ That evening's scholarly debate between Neubauer

2 In his paper, Neubauer denied any historical support for the claim of Jewish racial purity since biblical times and attempted to cast doubt on any anthropological evidence to the contrary; Adolf Neubauer, "Notes on the Race-Types of the Jews", *Journal of the Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland* 15 (1886): 16–23. On the night, Neubauer could not be present and his paper was read by the director of the institute, F. W. Rudler.

3 In his paper, Jacobs took the position that both the historical and the anthropological evidence demonstrated that the Jewish race had indeed remained pure since biblical times; Joseph Jacobs, "On the Racial Characteristics of Modern Jews", *Journal of the Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland* 15 (1886): 23–62.

4 *Jewish Chronicle*, 27 Feb. 1885, 11–12.

5 Lucien Wolf, "What is Judaism? A Question of To-day", *Fortnightly Review* 36 (1884): 237–56.

6 Ernest Renan, *Le Judaïsme comme race et comme religion, conférence faite au Cercle Saint-Simon, le 27 Janvier, 1883* (Paris: Calmann Lévy, 1883). Certainly, both Jacobs and Neubauer were critical of key aspects of Renan's views. Jacobs referred to Renan eleven times in his paper that sought to demonstrate, *contra* Renan, that the historical evidence supported a claim for Jewish racial purity, and he accused the French scholar of a number of mistranslations and mistakes in his researches. Neubauer, who shared Renan's conclusions concerning the historical intermixture of Jews with non-Jews, was nevertheless dismissive of the idea of different "types" of Jews, as proposed by Renan, but made no explicit reference to him; in this, Neubauer might simply have been tactful, since they had collaborated in publishing "Les rabbins français du commencement du XI^e siècle", *L'Histoire littéraire de la France* (1877) and he would have been well aware of Renan's work. (Wolf made no mention of Renan in his essay; as we shall see, he was more concerned to counter the views of

and Jacobs is certainly interesting, as is the fact that a good number of Anglo-Jewish scholars took the subject seriously enough to attend.⁷ But it is the views of Wolf and Jacobs, who were close friends and members of an avant-garde scholarly society known as the Wanderers,⁸ that are of greatest interest for the present purpose, for they shared two concerns that differentiated them from all the other contemporary Anglo-Jewish discussants of race science. Firstly, both presented Judaism as a case study for the investigation of the role of religion in human evolution, thereby humanizing and universalizing the Jew at the same time. Secondly, both men believed that by viewing Jewish religion through the prism of evolutionary theory they could, like the social scientists in Morris-Reich's study, construe Jewish difference in such a way as to counter the threat to assimilation posed by racial antisemitism. Let us begin with Wolf.

Goldwin Smith.) Over time, Renan's "Judaism as Race and Religion" had a significant influence on how the study of Jewish race was approached by many scholars, espousing as it did a view of Jewish history that saw significant admixture with non-Jewish populations through intermarriage and conversion, especially in the case of the Khazar kingdom. Despite the reality of Renan's antisemitism, his essay undermined the racial foundations of much contemporary antisemitism by challenging the idea of Jewish racial purity since biblical times, and thus the existence of a Jewish race as such in modern times; thus, it is a useful reminder that racial antisemitism was only one kind of articulation of antisemitism, a subject to which I shall return. In any case, Renan's essay appears to have made little impact on wider Anglo-Jewry at the time. The *Jewish Chronicle* reported the occasion of his lecture, as it often did for international scholars, and even included a short excerpt concerning Jewish proselytization, but the editor seemed nonchalant about the main substance of the piece and the essay was not referred to again for many years; *Jewish Chronicle*, 27 April 1883, 2, 5.

7 Some decades passed before the subject was raised again in such a public fashion, this time by the Anglo-Jewish botanist Redcliffe N. Salaman (1874–1955), who gave as his presidential address to the Jewish Historical Society of England a paper entitled "Racial Origins of Jewish Types" (1918).

8 For a comprehensive account of the Wanderers in the context of Anglo-Jewish scholarship on Judaism, see Daniel R. Langton, "Wandering Jews in England's Green and Pleasant Land: Wissenschaft des Judentums in an Anglo-Jewish Context", in *Wissenschaft des Judentums in Europe: Comparative and Transnational Perspectives*, eds. Christian Wiese and Mirjam Thulin (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2015), forthcoming.

Lucien Wolf

Background

Lucien Wolf (1857–1930) was born in London but educated at the Athénée Royale in Brussels and in Paris.⁹ He became a celebrated journalist, diplomat, and communal authority, acting as a committee member of the conjoint committee of the Anglo-Jewish Association and the British Board of Deputies, the two representative bodies of Anglo-Jewry. Wolf was the founder-president of the Jewish Historical Society of England (JHSE) and co-authored with Joseph Jacobs *Bibliotheca Anglo-Judaica: A Bibliographical Guide to Anglo-Jewish History* (1888); as a historian his most important contributions were in the area of Anglo-Jewish history after the expulsion of 1290.¹⁰ He also became well-known as an expert in the area of antisemitism. In this context, his key publications included a lengthy article on antisemitism for the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*¹¹ and *The Myth of the Jewish Menace in World Affairs* (1920).

Jewish legalism and the Jewish race

As already noted, Wolf's contribution to the debate at the Anthropological Institute in 1885 was limited to a few comments made during the session that followed the papers read by Jacobs and Neubauer. On the one hand, he complained that Jacobs had “practically denied” the reality of Jewish “physiological characteristics” despite asserting the purity of the Jewish race. On the other hand, he criticized Neubauer for having denied the purity of the Jewish race and having emphasized instead the historical intermixture of Jews with other groups, despite having failed to reconcile his own admission that mixed marriages were generally sterile and the

9 Obituary, *Jewish Chronicle*, 29 Aug. 1930, 11–12; “Wolf, Lucien”, in *Jewish Encyclopedia*, eds. Isidore Singer and Cyrus Adler, vol. 12 (New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1901–6), 549; Cecil Roth, “Lucien Wolf: A Memoir”, in *Essays in Jewish History by Lucien Wolf*, ed. Cecil Roth (London: Jewish Historical Society of England, 1934), 1–34; Mark Levene, “Wolf, Lucien”, in *Dictionary of National Biography* (London: Oxford University Press, 2004).

10 Wolf was the president of the JHSE in 1893–5, 1910, and 1926–7. His scholarly contributions included his *Menasseh Ben Israel's Mission to Oliver Cromwell* (1901) and *Notes on the Diplomatic History of the Jewish Question* (1919) and on the history of the conversos, such as *Report on the “Marranos” or Crypto-Jews of Portugal* (1926). He also wrote a centennial biography, *Sir Moses Montefiore* (1884).

11 Lucien Wolf, “Anti-Semitism”, in *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 11th ed. (New York: Encyclopaedia Britannica, 1910), 134–46.

reality of “the remarkable multiplying power of the Jews”.¹² Both men's positions ran counter to Wolf's own well-known views on the subject. Only a year before, as noted earlier, he had published “What is Judaism? A Question of To-day” in the *Fortnightly Review*, one of the most popular and influential British magazines of the nineteenth century. Here, Wolf had firmly asserted the racial purity of modern Jews and had spent considerable time delineating their distinctive racial characteristics, many of which were then disputed by Neubauer and Jacobs in their papers. But the essay accomplished much more than that. In “What is Judaism?” Wolf had actually set himself the task of establishing Jewish legalism as a major mechanism for human evolutionary progress. Furthermore, this idea was presented as part of his analysis of the causes of antisemitism, which he believed stemmed from resentment of Jewish racial superiority. For Wolf, the nature of antisemitism

was far from unworthy [of] some measure of philosophic analysis . . . To my mind the primal cause of all agitations against the Jew is to be sought, not so much in the passions stimulated by theological differences, as in the irritating mystery of the persistence of Judaism, notwithstanding the assurances of Christianity that Judaism has long been moribund . . . But the Hebrews to-day constitute everywhere a social force . . . Is it extraordinary that this mystery should irritate men's minds, and that there should be violent outbursts against a domination which is not merely foreign but almost phantasmic?¹³

Wolf's essay was part of a lengthy and highly public debate with the antisemitic Oxford historian Goldwin Smith. It was written in response to Smith's biologically racist views as expressed in an article entitled “The Jewish Question” published in 1881 in another popular and influential magazine, *Nineteenth Century*. Wolf took as his starting point a quotation from Smith on the subject of Jewish legalism: “Judaism is material optimism, with a preference to a chosen race, while Christianity, whether Catholic or Protestant, is neither material nor in a temporal sense optimist . . . Judaism is Legalism, of which the Talmud is the most signal embodiment . . . In the competition for this world's goods it is pretty clear

12 Lucien Wolf, “Discussion”, *Journal of the Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland* 15 (1886): 59–60.

13 Wolf, “What is Judaism?”, 237. By “phantasmic”, Wolf meant to suggest that the “social force” and “domination” of modern Jews in Western society appeared incongruous to those who regarded the Jew as a member of a long-dead civilization of the ancient world.

that the legalist will be apt to have the advantage, and that at the same time his conduct will often appear not right to those whose highest monitor is not the law" (Wolf's italics).¹⁴

For Wolf, this claim was essentially correct, although, of course, Smith had assumed that the implications were negative and had failed to think through the implications. Wolf pointed out that according to Smith's logic, "the Jews must be the possessors of a system by which they are enabled to adapt themselves more completely to the conditions of life than would be possible were they adherents of Christianity"; that if legalism gave an advantage in the competition for resources, then "it must be that 'legalism' is peculiarly adapted to the conditions of the competition"; and that if, as a consequence of the nature of their "highest monitor", Christians fared less well than Jews in their mundane achievements, then "the reason must be that that monitor does not satisfy the requirements of natural law as completely as that of Judaism."¹⁵ As Wolf explained, his purpose in writing his essay was to confirm Smith's analysis that Judaism in its "legalism" was indeed "a system of material optimism" and to demonstrate that "the Jews, by their practical observance of this teaching, had acquired a special adaptability to the conditions of life and a peculiar capacity for making the most of them", bestowing on them the material advantage over other groups which Smith had observed.¹⁶ To put it simply, in considering the human evolutionary struggle for life, observance of the Jewish Law had profoundly shaped the Jewish race so that it was better suited to the environment and therefore at an evolutionary advantage. Where Wolf differed from Smith was in viewing this as a good thing.¹⁷ What advantages, precisely, did Wolf have in mind?

For Wolf, the advantages of Jews were synonymous with the Jewish character, which had been forged through long observance of the religious law. As such, he made no distinction between the Jewish race and the Jewish religion, for they were inextricably linked.¹⁸ The character of the

14 Goldwin Smith, "The Jewish Question", *Nineteenth Century* 10 (1881): 511–12. Smith's article was itself a response to a previous article Wolf had written that had been critical of Smith's views on Jews.

15 Wolf, "What is Judaism?", 238.

16 *Ibid.*, 239.

17 Wolf observed, *ibid.*, that Smith's "argument virtually says that Christianity is perfect, and that if it is not quite successful in satisfying natural law that is not its fault but the fault of natural law."

18 Wolf made no distinction precisely because he believed, *ibid.*, that "[t]he rigid observance during long centuries of a 'peculiar' legalism by a peculiarly exclusive people

Jewish race was unique in the following ways: first, their racial survival ("Other races have managed to protract their separation, but the Jews have, to all appearances, perpetuated theirs"); second, their comprehensive superiority in comparison with the surrounding nations ("It is too little known that the Jews are as a race really superior, physically, mentally, and morally, to the people among whom they dwell"); third, their racial purity ("The natural impulse to reject all further infusions of alien blood, as soon as the consciousness of superiority was reached, found every support in their national legends and traditions, and became accentuated by the hostility of their neighbours"); fourth, their development of a legal code that enshrined eugenic principles ("a perfect code of laws was constructed, providing for the unaided progression of the physical capacities of the race, and embodying every dictate of their higher civilization which might be calculated to maintain their superiority").¹⁹

After summarizing the findings of a variety of statisticians, medical doctors and anthropologists,²⁰ Wolf asserted that "the optimism of Judaism" as "expressed in 'legalism'" gave Jews a thirty or forty per cent advantage over those of other religions and creeds, and not only explained their survival over the ages but actually represented an important moment in the story of human evolution. The "wisdom and power" of Judaism had enabled it to "accomplish of itself a distinct step in the history of the human species."²¹ The real significance of Jewish superiority was a scientific one, since it "constitutes almost a stage in evolution, and certainly one in which the factors are no longer so indeterminate as in all the earlier [generations?]. For here, for the first time, we find the intelligence of man acting as a distinct factor in evolution, and achieving progress not by the natural gravitation of blind instinct, but by a discretionary adaptation

has necessarily resulted in the people becoming a manifestation of its laws. Its physical and historical character is the creation of these laws."

19 *Ibid.*, 240. Wolf was highly dependent on secondary literature and anecdotal evidence in support of his claims. For physical superiority, he cited the works of Johann Gottfried Hoffman (1837) and Christopher Bernouilli (1841), for moral superiority he referred to criminal statistics and the statistics of illegitimate births, for the "notorious intellectual superiority" he claimed, *ibid.*, 240–41, "every country show[s] an immense predominance of Jews" as figures of public education and professional public life.

20 Among others, Wolf cited Hoffman, Bernouilli (on biostatistics), George Frederick Kolb (on intensity of life), Daniel Chwolson (on the proportion of stupid individuals in a population), Dr. Richardson (on care of children), Mr. Reade (on kashrut and hygiene), Henry Behrend (on avoiding disease), and Alfred Carpenter (on the whole Jewish legal system and hygiene).

21 *Ibid.*, 241.

in the conditions for life; not by the accidents of external forces, but by the subjective comprehension of natural law.”²² The result of this self-conscious strategy, namely, “a race of men and women distinguished above their fellows for longevity, beauty, and mind”, was no different from the result of the exclusive breeding among the English aristocracy, which was also underlined by eugenic principles, albeit unconsciously.²³

Other Semitic races had survived the centuries, Wolf went on, and some, such as the Arab Muslims, were also monotheistic but their lack of progress and lack of cultural vitality led Wolf to conclude that, unlike the Jews, the followers of Mohammed “are among the rotting branches of the great tree of humanity.” The key difference lay in the peculiar nature of Jewish legalism such that “[a] fundamental principle of the Mosaic dispensation is that racial separatism is necessary for the perpetuation of its teaching.”²⁴ The externalities of Jewish religion might have changed over time, but the Mosaic Law had become more and more entrenched and to its influence alone could be traced “the formation of all those distinctive features in Jewish character which may now be said to have rendered Judaism a living force.”²⁵ In a fascinating variation on the idea of the Mission of Israel as a light to the nations, Wolf asserted that “Jewish separatism, or ‘tribalism’, as it is now called, was invented to enable the Jews to keep untainted for the benefit of mankind not only the teachings of Judaism but also their physical results as illustrations of their value.”²⁶

Reversing the traditionally negative view of legalism, Wolf presented Judaism’s laws as the key to understanding Jewish racial superiority. Many laws of the Bible and the Rabbis were, in Wolf’s view, highly conducive to reproductive well-being. For example, women were not mentioned in legal matters apart from “their role in the history of the race”, with common concerns including prohibitions against unchastity, adultery, inter-related marriage, and celibacy, all of which encouraged early marriage and healthy parentage. Likewise, there were laws relating to sexual separation between husband and wife with the result of ensuring optimal fecundity at times of perfect health.²⁷ According to Wolf, similar arguments could

22 Ibid.

23 Ibid.

24 Ibid., 242–3.

25 Ibid., 243.

26 Ibid.

27 Ibid., 243–6.

be made for the dietary²⁸ and hygiene laws²⁹ in relation to physiological health. And, morally, the Jewish legal concern for uncompromising justice paralleled the sexual, dietary, and hygiene laws with its profound insight into, and harmonization with, natural law; as a result, it trumped the Christian concern for mercy.³⁰ For Wolf, Jewish intellectual superiority and the “exceptional mental power displayed by modern Jews” stemmed from a culture of debate around the Law; as much as it was a by-product of the democratic nature of Judaism (since historical circumstances had disenfranchised the priesthood of their authority), such an attitude also ensured continuity, since the Law was deemed vitally relevant to each generation who reinterpreted it anew.³¹

Wolf finished his essay by denouncing the prevalent belief among Christians that Judaism was “a sterile and decaying ‘boulder of the primeval world’”, as a hostile delusion “grown out of the extravagant hopes of Christianity, and . . . nourished on its guilty fears.”³² Rather, modern Jewish society continued to be manifest as a vital social force. In contrast to Christianity, Judaism was animated by a “material optimism”, expressed through the very legalism so despised by Christians, which Wolf regarded as encapsulating Judaism’s rationalism. He suggested that “[t]his virtual assumption that the limits of human knowledge can extend no farther than those of the visible [rather than spiritual] world appears to me to be the central idea of Judaism.”³³ There was no impractical interest, for example, in the afterlife. Bearing in mind the Jewish Law’s pragmatic concern with life and longevity (“the divinity . . . of length of days”), Wolf could conclude that “[t]he substantial difference between Judaism and Christianity is, then, that the one desires to teach us how to live, the other how to die.”³⁴ In reality, Christians could not uphold such a life-denying ideal and this failure helped to explain the phenomenon of antisemitism, with which Wolf had begun his essay. The age-old persecution of the Jews

28 Ibid., 246–9.

29 Ibid., 249–51.

30 Wolf argued, *ibid.*, 251, “There can only be one form of justice, and if mercy does not accommodate itself to that form it is injustice. To pardon manifest iniquity is not mercy but injustice; on the other hand, to take a conscientiously appreciative and enlightened view of extenuating circumstances, and, when the occasions require, to rise superior to the mere letter of the law, is not mercy but justice.”

31 Ibid., 252.

32 Ibid., 253.

33 Ibid., 254.

34 Ibid., 255–6.

had nothing to do with theology or heresy but was, rather, “a despairing rebellion against the permanence and indestructibility of Judaism.”³⁵

Overview

In summary, Wolf regarded the underlying principles of the Jewish Law as fundamentally eugenic and saw the ascendancy of Jewish legalism as the moment when a new chapter in the history of human evolution began, as humans took control of their biological development in a deliberate, intelligent manner. As he saw it, the Law selected for certain traits and had profoundly shaped the historical significance of the Jewish people. The Mission of Israel was in effect a demonstration of religio-ethical progress by means of the creation of a model superior race. Against the antisemitic claims of those who opposed the social integration of Jews on a racist platform, Wolf offered a two-pronged defence. Firstly, he sought to establish the Jewish race as a paradigm of self-directed evolution to which the rest of (Western) humanity could aspire and, secondly, he offered an analysis of antisemitism that revealed it to be immoral and intellectually redundant. Antisemitism, he suggested, was best understood as Gentile resentment of Jewish vitality and physical continuity; the clear implication was that such entrenched hostility could only be countered by a radical reassessment and appreciation by Christianity of Jewish legalism and its contribution to humankind’s evolutionary history.

Joseph Jacobs

Background

Joseph Jacobs (1854–1916)³⁶ possessed impeccable qualifications for his

³⁵ Ibid., 256.

³⁶ Obituary, *Jewish Chronicle*, 11 Feb. 1916, 11. David J. Benjamin, “Joseph Jacobs”, *Australian Jewish Historical Society* 3, no. 2 (1949): 72–91; Anne Kershen, “Jacobs, Joseph (1854–1916)”, in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (2004); “Jacobs, Joseph”, in *Jewish Encyclopedia*, vol. 7 (1901–6), 45–6; Cecil Roth, “Jacobs, Joseph”, *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, edited by Michael Berenbaum and Fred Skolnik, vol. 11 (Jerusalem: Keter Publishing, 2007), 49; “Jacobs, Joseph”, in Serle, *Dictionary of Australian Biography*; John M. Efron, *Defenders of the Race: Jewish Doctors and Race Science in Fin-de-Siècle Europe* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1994), 58–90; Simon Rabinovitch, “Jews, Englishmen and Folklorists: The Scholarship of Joseph Jacobs and Moses Gaster”, in *The “Jew” in Late-Victorian and Edwardian Culture: Between the East End and East Africa*, eds. Nadia Valman and Eitan Bar-Yosef (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 113–30; Bentwich, “The Wanderers”, 55–6.

pioneering cross-disciplinary work in history, statistics, and race science. Born in Sydney, New South Wales, Jacobs had moved to England in 1872 intending to study law at Cambridge but took Moral Sciences; during his studies he lived with Wolf’s family. After graduation in 1876, Jacobs went on to Berlin, to both the University and Seminary, where he became a friend of Leopold Zunz and where he studied Jewish philosophy and ethnography under Moritz Lazarus³⁷ and literature and bibliography under Moritz Steinschneider. He published many scholarly and popular works on English literature, Hebrew literature, biblical archaeology, and European Jewish history and European folklore, but it was only towards the end of his life that he was appointed to an academic position, at the Jewish Theological Seminary (JTS) in New York, and his scholarship recognized with his appointment as a revising editor of the *Jewish Encyclopedia*.³⁸ His idiosyncratic Jewish religious views, highly influenced by modern philosophy and science, were articulated in a collection of

³⁷ As will be seen, Lazarus’s influence on Jacobs was especially pronounced. Several teachings that are reminiscent of Jacobs’s ideas can be found in Lazarus’s essay *Was heisst national? Ein Vortrag* (What does National mean? A Lecture; Berlin: Duemmlers, 1880), including the argument that while Jewish race or descent was real (“Our blood . . . remains Jewish even when it flows on the battleground for the German cause . . . [W]e are and remain Semites”) and was even something in which one could take pride (“the Semitic blood is among the finest that ever ran in human veins”), it was of little consequence in relation to emancipation and nationality since “[E]very European nationality testifies to this: no nationality of pure unmixed descent exists.” Another possible parallel can be seen in Lazarus’s assertion that “the religion of the Jews is the product of their own race.” Again, Lazarus demonstrates an interest in Jewish contributions to German intellectual life that is strikingly reminiscent of Jacobs’s interest in Jewish genius more generally; *ibid.*, 9, 21, 22, 25, 28. For an English translation see Marcel Stoetzler, *The State, the Nation, and the Jews: Liberalism and the Antisemitism Dispute in Bismarck’s Germany* (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 2008), 317–59.

³⁸ Jacobs was the secretary of the Society of Hebrew Literature, 1878–84. He published *Studies in Biblical Archaeology* in 1894, having co-authored with Wolf *Bibliotheca Anglo-Judaica: A Bibliographical Guide to Anglo-Jewish History* (1888). Jacobs wrote *The Jews of Angevin England* (1893) and *An Inquiry into the Sources of the History of the Jews in Spain* (1893), which involved his return from a visit to Spain with about 1700 manuscripts and saw him made a corresponding member of the Royal Spanish Academy. He was a founding member and, in 1898, the president of the JHSE. In 1900 his appointment to the *Jewish Encyclopedia* necessitated a move to New York; he contributed more than 400 entries and was responsible for its indebtedness to German scholarly sources. As a folklorist, he collated English and Celtic fairytales and wrote many studies on English literature more generally (he was a friend of George Eliot); his appointment at the JTS was as a teacher of English literature.

religious reflections called *Jewish Ideals and Other Essays* (1896).³⁹ For my purposes, however, it is as a student of anthropology at the Statistical Laboratory at University College London in the 1880s under Galton that he is of greatest interest. The paper he read in 1885 at the Anthropological Institute, entitled “On the Racial Characteristics of Modern Jews”, was included in a much expanded work, *Studies in Jewish Statistics: Social, Vital and Anthropometric* (1891), and it was this that made his reputation as the first proponent of Jewish race science.⁴⁰

Jacobs was one for whom Judaism and Jewish identity made no sense apart from evolutionary thought. He offered an evolutionary account of Jewish history that suggested branching developments within the Jewish religion, and he explored the issue of Jewish race and peoplehood from both anthropological and sociological perspectives as a means to confront the antisemitic stereotypes of his day. He compiled measurements of skull sizes, analysed nose shapes, and carefully tabulated various vital statistics, wealth distribution, and even genius per capita in his application of the eugenic science of Galton, his tutor. Despite this, Jacobs insisted that the overarching framework and context for his pursuit of the quantitative science was always a qualitative historical one, and it could therefore be argued that, as such, his work represents the first truly interdisciplinary answer to the question: what is a Jew?

Jewish religion

The first application of evolutionary thought by Jacobs was to the Jewish religion. In “The God of Israel: A History” (1879), which was his earliest and perhaps his most celebrated article, he set out a systematic critique

39 Joseph Jacobs, *Jewish Ideals and Other Essays* (New York: Macmillan, 1896). Geoffrey Cantor, *Quakers, Jews, and Science: Religious Responses to Modernity and the Sciences in Britain, 1650–1900* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 219–24, spends considerable time on Jacobs in his examination of the central role of science in the development of Jewish religion in the nineteenth century. In terms of religious persuasion, Jacobs is probably most closely associated with the US Conservative movement. Although his acceptance of the findings of biblical criticism went beyond some of his co-religionists, his views were not so radical or progressive as to prevent him (towards the end of his life) from teaching at the Conservative JTS (1906–13) or contributing to the Jewish Publication Society of America’s English translation of the Bible (1908) with Solomon Schechter, or editing the voice of US Conservative Judaism, *American Hebrew* (1913–16).

40 Jacobs, “On the Racial Characteristics”; Joseph Jacobs, *Studies in Jewish Statistics: Social, Vital and Anthropomorphic* (London: D. Nutt, 1891). Efron, *Defenders of the Race*, 58, accords him the dubious honour of being the first of the Jewish race scientists.

of both the traditional “supernaturalism”, which believed that God revealed Himself to the isolated Children of Israel, and of the proponents of the “Leyden naturalistic school”, which explained religion as the product of a few isolated individuals, the prophets, who possessed the necessary genius to conceptualize the deity. He admired the science of National Psychology espoused by Heymann Steinthal and Lazarus, which regarded gifted individuals as the voice of the national spirit, rather than isolated individuals as such, since all members of a nation embodied the developing national spirit, which was described in the national history.⁴¹ He explained: “in making the nation and not the individual our starting-point we introduce the idea of continuity into history [rather than disconnection], and with it the conception of development and growth of the national spirit.”⁴²

Jacobs claimed to be adapting this social approach when he set out to consider the origin and development of the Jewish idea of God. Crucial to his method was the phenomenon he called “the cross-fertilization of national ideas”, by which he meant the influence of non-Jewish ideas on Jewish thought and vice versa. This was a carefully chosen term, which drew on an understanding of certain biological features, as he explained: “This metaphor [of cross-fertilization] is here introduced as being more definite and suggestive than the vague term ‘influence’. By the biological analogy suggested there is implied (1) that the ideas cross-fertilised belong to nearly allied species of *Volksggeist* (the ideas of a Hottentot and of a Hindoo cannot cross-fertilise); (2) that the resultant idea is more fitted to survive in the struggle for spiritual existence.”⁴³

He asserted that from Abraham’s understanding of Jehovah to the culmination or “goal” of Jewish thought in the *Substantia* of Spinoza, one could trace the continual development of Jewish religious ideas, each stage of which could be attributed to non-Jewish influences.⁴⁴ While the

41 Joseph Jacobs, “The God of Israel: A History”, *Nineteenth Century* 6, no. 31 (1879): 24–6. Jacobs was no political Zionist, although he was a supporter of the romantic Zionism espoused by George Eliot. Israel Zangwill, “Address” (at the memorial meeting for Joseph Jacobs), *Jewish Historical Studies: Transactions of the Jewish Historical Society of England* 8 (1915–17): 141–2, recounts Jacobs’s aversion to Herzl’s Realpolitik and superficial view of the Jew as a race-Jew in his suggestion: “I know how to kill Zionism. Cut off Herzl’s beard!”

42 Jacobs, “God of Israel”, 25.

43 *Ibid.*, 25–6.

44 Among the non-Jewish influences, which Jacobs set out in a table to correlate with the different features of the Jewish conception of the deity, were those of Egypt, Canaan and Phoenicia, Assyria and Persia, Hellenism, Rome, Islam, Graeco-Arabic thought,

precise nature and direction of the cross-fertilization was complicated, there was nevertheless a clear Jewish development of the idea of God.

With [Spinoza] culminates the long series of changes in the God of Israel. From a family deity it had been raised into the Divine Father of All, the Creator of the universe, and under this form had cross-fertilised Graeco-Roman culture as Christianity. But “the whirligig of Time brings in his revenges”; Israel came in contact with Greek philosophy, and was in its turn cross-fertilised by Hellenism. Jehovah was gradually depersonalised, and the world was rendered independent of Him, till, under the influence of mysticism, He becomes an immanent principle of the universe, as the *Substantia* of Spinoza. From an *ab extra* Deity, the God of Israel had been changed by cross-fertilisation into a continuous energetic Principle.⁴⁵

Judaism had given birth to “two faiths” or “developments” of interest to understanding the evolution of religion, namely, Christianity and the Hellenic Hebraism of Spinoza. While Jewish religion “has always rejected Christianity, which is utterly alien to the Jewish *Volksgeist*”, Jacobs argued that it “could clearly, without loss of historic dignity, advance to the new faith [of Spinozism]”, although it was not clear that it would.⁴⁶ One impediment was Spinoza’s individualistic world view or philosophy, because Judaism had always been both a religion and a philosophy of history, that is, it had always viewed itself as the sum of its historical parts. The future of religion and thus of our conception of the deity, Jacobs mused, was “Cosmic Theism”, a version of Spinoza’s pantheism that could be harmonized with a historic sense of communion with the Jewish past.⁴⁷ Overall, the young Jacobs offered a particularly rich mix of ideas. With his biblical-critical approach and strong sense of religious evolutionary progress, Jacobs preempted his later friend and colleague, the liberal Jewish religious thinker, Claude Montefiore in his more famous Hibbert Lectures on “The Origin and Growth of Religion as Illustrated by the Religion of the Ancient Hebrews” (1893) and his enthusiasm for the idea of the evolving nature of Jewish theology in *Outlines of Liberal Judaism* (1912). The importance to Jacobs of a historic sense of communion with

Sufism, the Renaissance, and democracy. Jacobs, *ibid.*, 27, was particularly interested in the history of Judaism since the second century CE, since it was “practically unknown to the English reader, and has only lately received adequate attention in Germany.”

45 *Ibid.*, 55–6.

46 *Ibid.*, 56, 58.

47 *Ibid.*, 58.

the Jewish past and his pragmatism in understanding Judaism as the evolving religion of the Jewish people also appears to foreshadow the teaching of his close friend and colleague Solomon Schechter on Catholic Israel and on an evolving Jewish law shaped by the behaviour of the Jewish people.⁴⁸ Jacobs’s conviction of the relevance of Spinoza for a future Jewish theology of “Cosmic Theism” held much in common with the thought of the American Reform rabbi Isaac Mayer Wise, who had relied heavily on Spinoza for his own panentheistic and evolutionary conception of *The Cosmic God* (1876).

Jewish statistics

Jacobs began his lifelong obsession for quantifying all things Jewish with a series of articles in the *Jewish Chronicle* over the period 1882–5 that were later published in *Studies in Jewish Statistics*. He himself explained his interest in the subject as a response to reading the antisemitic literature of the day⁴⁹ and a consequence of his fruitless search for “trustworthy evidence” by which to counter it, although he soon “got interested in it apart from its polemical bearings”,⁵⁰ by which he meant that he recognized the significance of such work for the scientific study of race.

Jacobs’s *Studies in Jewish Statistics* was characterized by this twin interest in debunking antisemitic beliefs and in examining indicators of race hygiene (or lack of). The first article, on “Consanguineous Marriages”, involved a painstaking examination of the assumptions behind the statistics and sources of information relating to cousin marriages; adapting G. H. Darwin’s approach to calculating the proportion of such marriages within the general English population, Jacobs produced a figure of 7.5% for Anglo-Jewry, which compared with 2% for the general

48 According to Zangwill, “Address”, 132–3, Jacobs had written a letter to him towards the end of his life in which he had asserted that Schechter’s conception of a living historic tradition and the inspiration of Catholic Israel had solved the challenge to Jewish faith of the rejection of the Bible as a verbally inspired document. In fact, Schechter was less sanguine about the challenges of biblical criticism; see David J. Fine, “Solomon Schechter and the Ambivalence of Jewish Wissenschaft”, *Judaism* 46, no. 1 (1997): 3–25. Even so, Jacobs felt that a recognition of the central role of the Bible in the history of Judaism and the success of each generation in reinterpreting it for its own time was sufficient to ensure its centrality and a profound sense of its continuity within Jewish tradition; this position is implicit in Jacobs, “God of Israel”, repr. in Jacobs, *Jewish Ideals*, 24–60.

49 Jacobs, *Studies in Jewish Statistics*, 47. He claimed to doubt that there were English antisemites, as such, frequently referring to Continental anti-Jewish hostility.

50 *Ibid.*, preface.

population. He was also able to ascertain a relatively high figure (11.25%) for the number of English Jews who were the product of cousin marriages. While his study appeared merely to confirm the common perception that Jewish practice involved considerable intermarriage, Jacobs argued that it placed the phenomenon on a scientific footing for the first time. He also noted that the figures accurately correlated with the high number of deaf-mutes and lunatics found in Jewish care, which confirmed the concerns of those who saw consanguineous marriages as dangerous from a eugenic perspective. He added that “ugliness was reported to be marked in the off-spring”, although he admitted that this was a somewhat subjective characteristic.⁵¹ The second article was entitled “The Social Condition of the Jews of London” and was, Jacobs explained, designed to examine the idea “firmly rooted . . . in the popular mind” that because, historically speaking, “some Jews deal with money, all Jews are wealthy.” Beginning with a brief overview of relative wealth on a global scale, Jacobs suggested that “it is probable that [Jews] are the poorest of all that can claim to be civilized.” Deriving the information from a wide array of sources, both published and unpublished, Jacobs’s article subjected London Jewry’s financial arrangements to a particularly thorough analysis, including the large number of charitable bodies and individual philanthropic efforts among Jewry within the city: as he observed in his conclusion, “one of the chief reasons why Jews are so generally reputed to be rich is because they have so many poor.”⁵² Another article entitled “The Foreign Contingent” was an examination by nationality of immigrant Jews within London. It concluded that the high numbers generated by persecutions in Eastern Europe required anglicization, not least because of their poor hygiene, which meant that “London alone among all the cities of the world, has a larger infant mortality among its Jewish inhabitants than among the general population.”⁵³ In “Occupations”, Jacobs claimed that the work activities of a people threw open a window onto its character, and the topic was a vital one because it could be useful not only “polemically” against the “recent antisemitic movement” but also “as a guide to future improvement”. He pointed out that the great majority of Jews lived in cities which, along with other historical legacies, meant that only a small

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 1–9.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 10–17; i.e., Jews were regarded as wealthy because of their prominent charitable activities among their fellow Jews, despite the fact that this need for charity demonstrated that the Jewish community included many poor.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 18–21.

range of occupations had traditionally been open to Jews. He emphasized the religious-related nature of many Jewish trades (for example, relating to dietary requirements, printing, and bookbinding), and the impact of religious observance (for example, encouraging piece-work rather than time-work, which better afforded management of one’s time). Drawing on a wide range of sources, Jacobs was able to collate bureaucratic survey and census figures from around the world to present a convincing comparative study of Jewish occupations, which indicated gravitation towards commerce and away from agriculture, and which demonstrated a greater proportion of professionals and those “in-service”. While he was keen to highlight the tiny proportion of Jews who could be said to work as usurers, and to suggest that Jewish prosperity as a whole had decreased since the beginning of the century largely as a consequence of the industrialization of work, the main impression made by the article was that it had been the environment or “external forces”, rather than any innate tendencies, that had shaped Jewish activities, “keeping them in certain grooves.”⁵⁴ In “Professions”, Jacobs meticulously documented English examples of Jews in law, medicine, the clergy, literature, press, the army, politics, chess (“as a means of livelihood . . . [chess] can hardly be classed otherwise than among the professions”), and professors, of which the disproportionate participation of Jews was explained once again in terms of their environment, that is, the disproportional likelihood that any Jew lived in an urban rather than a rural location.⁵⁵

To these articles was added one written in 1891 with an even more obvious interest for race science, namely, “Vital Statistics”, which considered Jewish marriages and births for a range of nation states. Here Jacobs set out to discredit the claims made by various biostatisticians that Jews differed from other racial groups in the average duration of their generations, the fertility of their marriages and the fecundity of their wives, the physical and mental health of their children, and in the predominant sex of their children. This he sought to do, once again, by taking more seriously than did the scientists the role played by external factors, especially religion and environment. In terms of the alleged low frequency of marriage, Jacobs suggested that this was only apparent (he pointed out the disproportionately high number of Jewish children in the populace and suggested that any difference would disappear if only

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 22–32.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 42–8.

adults were taken into consideration), although he accepted that in some instances it did occur as the result of the memory of former religious restrictions on marriage. The average age of marriage, which was “the most important consideration concerning marriage, affecting . . . the physical, mental and social traits of a people”, could be explained largely by the religious teaching to marry young. Here, he pointed to a divergence in Palestinian and Babylonian Talmudic tradition, and he mused that the easier conditions of life in Babylon some 1500 years earlier, the presumed result of the widespread cultivation of the date palm, had facilitated good nutrition and earlier sexual maturation, such that “the prevalent Jewish custom of early marriage [today] is due in the last resort to the fertility of the palms of Babylon.” He was quick to point to the practice as deleterious insofar as it encouraged poverty and possibly damaged physical development, resulting in “the small height and girth of Jews”. As for mixed marriages, which “deserve notice on account of their social importance as well as of certain biostatical phenomena which their progeny present”, Jacobs confirmed the low rates cited in the scientific literature but did not think it a coincidence that where such marriages occurred in the largest numbers, such as in Berlin, “there should also be manifested the greatest intensity of antisemitic prejudice”. When it came to births, the apparently low birth rate could be explained, as in the case of the low frequency of marriage, by the relatively high percentage of children in the Jewish population who, obviously, warped any calculation based on births per capita. As for the high number of children per family, Jacobs tentatively suggested that this could be explained by the relatively high frequency of marriages between cousins, which he hazarded were more fertile than mixed marriages. The high proportion of male births, which Jacobs noted that Darwin had commented on in his *Descent of Man*, however exaggerated by poor statistics, nevertheless appeared to be “one of the few biostatical phenomena which seem to be distinctively racial.” However, it was only a slight difference, and previous scientific studies plausibly attributed such a phenomenon to early marriage and urban habitation and, perhaps (although he sounded less convinced), to the practice of *niddur*, or ritual feminine hygiene, that made still births, which tended to be male, less likely.⁵⁶

The point of the entire exercise of *Studies in Jewish Statistics* was to provide a scientifically factual basis for understanding the Jewish condition. In

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 49–59.

this he was successful: his analysis represented the most impressive set of studies in his day, based as it was on collation of information from an extremely wide range of disparate sources, scientific and historical, and rigorous self-examination with regard to his assumptions.⁵⁷ Jacobs’s enthusiastic application of race science to the Jewish Question was not simply the result of a concern to engage with antisemitic defamation, as his contemporary Zangwill and later commentators have suggested, although it was certainly that, too.⁵⁸ When one bears in mind his early training with Galton (from 1878) and takes into account later debates he had about the racial purity of the Jews, it seems that any interest in countering the shrill warnings of antisemites concerning the dysgenic character of Jewish immigrants was secondary to a much deeper concern to promote science proper, and a conviction that the Jewish race could serve as a unique case study for race scientists. Jacobs might have seen himself at first as a defender of the Jews but his vision was too grand to remain there. In time, he came to see himself as equipped to draw on both science and history to promote the scientific understanding of the Jews for the wider benefit of the scientific understanding of race itself. For Jacobs believed that the Jewish race constituted a natural experiment that provided a rare opportunity to explore the influence of nature and nurture on a human population. This became clearer in the debates he had on the topic of the purity of the Jewish race.

Racial characteristics

In his earliest work of race science proper, “On the Racial Characteristics of Modern Jews” (1886), which was based (as noted earlier) on the paper he read to the Royal Anthropological Institute in 1885 and reprinted in *Studies*

⁵⁷ As he himself noted in his preface, *Studies in Jewish Statistics* brought together his sociological statistical surveys and his scientific studies relating to race, containing “a larger quantity of statistical material than is available elsewhere.” It is not possible to list all Jacobs’s citations but a selection of key international sources included Loeb, Rohlf, Serour (on demography), official census statistics in Prussia and Bavaria (on the infertility of mixed marriages), Bergman and Goldstein (on longevity), the British Association for Anthropology (on height and girth), Lenhossék’s 15 skulls, Legoyt’s 5 skulls, Kopernicki’s 313 skulls, Stieda’s 34 skulls, Dybrowski’s 67 skulls, Blechmann’s 100 skulls, Prunder-Bey, Welcker, Davis, Weisbach, Dusseau, Mayer (on craniometry), Galton, Schimmer, Beddoe, Virchow (on hair, eyes, and complexion), Ottolenghi, Cohn, Carl (on colour blindness), Topinard, Weisbach, Blechmann, Galton (on the nose).

⁵⁸ Zangwill, “Address”, 131, 138.

in *Jewish Statistics*, Jacobs launched a nuanced defence of the reality of a pure Jewish race, even as he questioned many of the common assertions relating to the claim.⁵⁹ From the start, he set out his interdisciplinary method as one that brought together “all the data, scientific or historical, which bear upon the question of the purity of the Jewish race”, which included a wide range of authorities. For this, it was necessary to “scrutinise somewhat closely many Jewish qualities and habits that have hitherto been regarded as peculiarly the results of race”. Some of these, including Jewish moral, social, and intellectual qualities and “dispositions for certain habits and callings”, he dismissed as the result of “social causes” which should not be regarded as “primarily racial” in origin, in that they depended on certain historical circumstances and were not essential as such.⁶⁰ What he was more interested in was uncovering genuinely racial phenomena, which he defined as measurable physical properties, such as vital statistics and anthropometry.

Firstly, there appeared to be great potential in the infertility of mixed marriages between Jews and non-Jews, the greater longevity of Jews, and their alleged morbidity or liability to diseases. Having carefully checked the statistics, Jacobs accepted that the infertility of mixed marriage was indeed the result of a genuine phenomenon relating to racial difference. Jewish longevity was a different matter, however. He dismissed the influence of the dietary laws, suggesting that these were sensible but unremarkable practices for desert living.⁶¹ It appeared to him rather as another example of a social cause. He pointed out that Jews avoided dangerous careers and that alcoholism was rare in the community, which suggested certain religious practices as the primary explanatory factors. “The tranquilising effects of Jewish family life, the joyous tone and complete rest of the Sabbath and other festivals, the unworrying character of the Jewish religion, are all important in the difficult art of keeping alive. The greater care taken of Jewish women, who more rarely take to manual

59 Jacobs, “On the Racial Characteristics”, 24–5, began by defining “Jews” in terms of those who claimed to be Jewish by religion (e.g. Falashas, Karaites, Beni-Israel), which constituted 1.1% of the total world population of Jews, or by birth (e.g. Anussim), which constituted 0.2%, or by both religion and birth (Ashkenazim, Sephardim, and Samaritans), which constituted 98.9%. Such categorization allowed an analysis of resemblances and differences between the groups that would point to the influence of religion or race, respectively.

60 Ibid., 29.

61 Ibid. He also suggested that some of the dietary prohibitions related to the influence of the Canaanites’ totem worship on the ancient Hebrews.

labour, aids also in producing good results in the tables of mortality. I attribute much importance, too, to the strict regulation of the connubial relations current among Jews.”⁶² Likewise, social causes lay behind the so-called Jewish ailments such as haemorrhoids, diabetes, increased insanity, blindness, and deaf-mutism, all of which Jacobs asserted “can be traced in part to their life in towns.”⁶³ He concluded:

Thus throughout our review of Jewish biostatics we have failed to find any phenomenon which was uniformly present in all Jews that could not be referred to social causes. No doubt there is reciprocal influence between nurture and nature, and the Jewish organism may show some traces of the beneficial influence of Jewish training, as it certainly shows traces of the ill-effects of the environment in the bodily measurements to which we shall soon turn. But these influences are, in the first instance, social, not racial, and cannot therefore be adduced to show common origin. If we may restrict the word “Jewish” to properties due to the origin of Jews, and “Judaic” to whatever is due to their religion or customs, we may say that their biostatics is Judaic, not Jewish.⁶⁴

Jewish differences could thus be better explained by environment – in this case the customs of the Jewish religion – than by racial factors as such. Jacobs was confident that such differences would persist only for as long as the religious practices were followed and would “disappear, as in some respects they are disappearing, when the bonds of religion and tradition are relaxed.”⁶⁵ The power of “Judaic” rather than “Jewish” properties confirmed Jacobs’s conviction that the Jewish people were a “striking example of the influence which the social life of man has upon his physical qualities” and this, he suggested, made them a particularly interesting case study for “students of anthropology”.⁶⁶

With regard to anthropometric studies, Jacobs also promoted the social environment as the key factor for Jewish physical characteristics, with the exception of complexion. He began with height and girth, observing that Jews were the shortest and narrowest of Europeans, which he put down to poor nurture and possibly their residence in cities.⁶⁷ Jacobs compiled a meta-study of craniometrical findings and confirmed the common

62 Ibid.

63 Ibid., 32.

64 Ibid., 33.

65 Ibid.

66 Ibid., 23.

67 Ibid., 33–4.

claim that Jews had short, round (brachycephalic) heads rather than long (dolichocephalic) heads,⁶⁸ to which I shall return. In relation to hair, eyes, and complexion, he offered another meta-study (totalling 120,000 measurements) and showed that while Jews had darker hair and eyes than other nationalities, they included 21% blue eyes and 29% fair hair, and a surprisingly high number of red-heads (with Sephardim having three times as many red-haired as Ashkenazim).⁶⁹ A pronounced prevalence of colour blindness among Jews was “doubtless due to the greater poverty of Jews and their long confinement in towns”.⁷⁰ The notorious Jewish nose, “which is usually regarded as distinctive of the Jew and is also considered anthropomorphically important”, was admitted (with a statistically significant proportion of curved noses) but a preponderance of thin-lipped rather than thick-lipped Jewish subjects came as a surprise.⁷¹ Finally, there was the question of a Jewish expression, for which Jacobs presented his and Galton’s findings, based on a technique whereby many photographs of individual faces were superimposed to produce a composite of the Jewish face, *per se*. He found the “peculiar expression known as Jewish” to be the result of the combination of full lips, heavy eyelids, and large irides, in addition to the “droop of the nose”, which was more distinctive in the “flexibility of the *alae* or wings of the nostrils . . . rather than its curvature”. The “peculiar intensity of the Jewish gaze” was probably due to “long residence in ghetti and the accompanying social isolation” and he suggested that it disappeared among those Jews who spent their lives among Gentiles.⁷²

Jacobs’s key concern in amassing such information had to do with demonstrating the purity of the Jewish race, as already noted. In contrast to Neubauer and others, he was convinced that the Jewish race was pure. The two chief arguments used to demonstrate intermixture included the historical accounts of proselytism and the biological phenomenon of red hair. In a long overview of Jewish history he argued that proselytism to Judaism had been increasingly rare over time and had had a minimal effect. Accounts in the Hebrew Bible were irrelevant from an anthropological perspective, since “[t]he distinction between Jews and other Semites [that is, other tribes with whom the Israelites intermarried] was religious, not

68 *Ibid.*, 34–5.

69 *Ibid.*, 35–7.

70 *Ibid.*, 37.

71 *Ibid.*, 37–8.

72 *Ibid.*, 38–9.

racial.”⁷³ He pointed out that Gentile proselytes to Judaism had been the chief target for the Apostle Paul and that the historical “triumph of Christianity meant . . . this rapidly growing class were drawn off from Judaism to the new sect before they had been fully incorporated with the older body.”⁷⁴ In any case, the “comparative infertility” of intermarriage between Jews and non-Jews needed to be borne in mind and he calculated that, even were one to assume a 10% intermarriage rate, within six generations or 200 years the proportion of Gentile blood would have been reduced to 2%. When one also took into account that in medieval times such progeny would probably have married within the Jewish community, he concluded that “it is hardly likely that the Gentile blood would persist throughout the ages”. Furthermore, Jacobs was struck by how the children of mixed marriages tended to resemble the Jewish side, which suggested “the superior prepotency of Jewish blood” or a kind of dominance of Jewish racial characteristics over Gentile.⁷⁵ In relation to red hair, Jacobs dismissed any claim that variation from the Jewish type should be interpreted as disproving purity of race; he argued that the Jewish type represented an average and that “the variations, though they may be due to intermixture, may also be merely normal divergences from the standard.”⁷⁶ Red hair, Jacobs admitted, was the most difficult to understand in terms of divergence from the dark norm since it was “exceptionally prevalent” among Jews, but he noted that in biological terms “erythrism” was a kind of albinism and a matter of natural variance of certain pigments; he concluded that it was not due to intermixture but was the probable result of defective nutrition (since it occurred mostly among Jews of Africa and the East).⁷⁷

Jacobs could also put forward a number of positive arguments for purity of the Jewish race. The first was the purity of the Cohanim, who were not permitted by Jewish law to marry proselytes. Jacobs estimated their present-day numbers to be around five per cent of the general Jewish population. As he put it, “[T]he fact that they do not differ perceptibly from other Jews may serve as an argument either for the general purity of the race, or, on the other hand, for the mixed origin of the Cohens, which would be very difficult to prove to any large extent.”⁷⁸

73 *Ibid.*, 40–41.

74 *Ibid.*, 42.

75 *Ibid.*, 44–5.

76 *Ibid.*, 46.

77 *Ibid.*, 27.

78 *Ibid.*, 48–50.

Jacobs acknowledged that Cohanim were permitted to marry the daughters of proselytes but, if one accepted from a historical perspective that the Law had kept this group isolated from Gentiles to an extraordinary extent, then their lack of difference from the wider Jewish population was strongly suggestive of its purity. A second example related to “the comparatively small variation of type among Jewesses as compared with Jews.” Here, Jacobs offered anecdotal arguments that Jewish women looked more similar and more typically Jewish than did even Jewish men. Drawing on Darwin’s theory of sexual selection, he maintained that “[i]t is a universal law of animal life that, owing to sexual selection and other causes, the males of a species vary considerably more than the females. And, conversely, where we find the females varying less than the males we may conjecture that we have a case of true species.”⁷⁹ Likewise, the statistical observation that Jewish girls, from St Petersburg to Southern Asia, began menstruation earlier than girls of other groups suggested a well-entrenched racial characteristic.⁸⁰ Thirdly, Jacobs emphasized the historical social “repulsion” between Jews and Gentiles, arguing that ancient and medieval prohibitions on intermarriage and hostile European folklore had generated a feeling of “contempt and terror” of Jews among Gentiles, resulting in a genuinely consistent, widespread, long-term isolation, at least until the nineteenth century. In the conclusion to the paper, Jacobs stated that “I am inclined to support the long-standing belief in the substantial purity of the Jewish race, and to hold that the vast majority of contemporary Jews are the lineal descendants of the Diaspora of the Roman Empire.”⁸¹

Despite this, his stance as a champion of Jewish racial purity appeared somewhat ambivalent. Against what was, in the main, a historical defence of the purity of Jewish descent must be set Jacobs’s dismissal of many of the frequently cited markers for Jewish race, his concern to emphasize the impact of the social environment on Jewish biostatics (including the “Judaic” characteristics resulting from Jewish religion and custom in particular), and his reluctance to consider more than a few characteristics as unambiguously racial.⁸² On the one hand he wanted to show how

79 Ibid., 50.

80 Ibid., 51.

81 Ibid., 52. This directly contradicts John Glad, *Jewish Eugenics* (Washington, DC: Wooden Shore Publishers, 2011), 44, who asserts that Jacobs did not regard modern Jews as closely related to ancient Jews.

82 For this paper, he argued that the anthropological evidence for the Jews as a distinct race included infertility of intermarriage, Jewish nostrility, and possibly early menstruation.

limited was the anthropological evidence for a Jewish race, while on the other hand he appeared determined to demonstrate the purity of that race, drawing most heavily from historical analysis.

Alongside the physical statistics and historical arguments, Jacobs wrote one article that same year, 1886, as a kind of psychological accompaniment. “The Comparative Distribution of Jewish Ability” was in effect a study of the distribution of Jewish genius and comes as no surprise bearing in mind his studies under Galton, who had famously written on the topic in *Hereditary Genius* in 1869. The article reflected Jacobs’s penchant for survey work in its analysis of the statistical frequency of the names of prominent Jews (aged fifty or older) per capita in various extant dictionaries and encyclopaedias (a method which was designed to minimize the author’s own biases).⁸³ The basic result was that the Jewish intellect proved to be disproportionately high, assuming as he did an indelible racial aspect for convert and faithful Jew alike. Using Galton’s study of English genius as a benchmark, and adopting his methodology and categorizations, Jacobs reported 4 “illustrious” Jews (Benjamin Disraeli, Heinrich Heine, Ferdinand Lassalle, and Felix Mendelssohn) and 25 “eminent” Jews (including Abraham Geiger, Heinrich Graetz, Karl Marx, Moritz Steinschneider, and Leopold Zunz) among a population of 1.5 million in the period 1785–1885, in contrast to the combined 22 or 23 one would find among the same number of Englishmen.⁸⁴ It was undoubtedly one of the weaker of Jacobs’s publications in this series of studies of Jewish identity, with tortured digressions into subjective assessments of any particular individual’s rank. What it accomplished was two-fold: it offered a bulwark against antisemitism in its statistical demonstration of the Jewish contribution to world culture and knowledge and, with its careful categorizations into types of activity, it offered a chance to describe – and explain – Jewish genius and ability in more precise terms than had been possible before. Summarizing a table that compared Europeans with Jews over a range of occupations, he observed: “Jews have no distinction whatever as agriculturalists, engravers, sailors, and sovereigns. They are less distinguished than Europeans

83 Joseph Jacobs, “The Comparative Distribution of Jewish Ability”, *Journal of the Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland* 15 (1886): 351–79; he was highly embarrassed by the fact that “this paper, which puts Jewish ability in a favourable light, emanates from a Jew” and that he had “had to risk the imputation of bad taste” (366).

84 Ibid., 355–7. He could, however, find only 99 “distinguished” Jews per million in comparison to 233 Englishmen. The categories of “illustrious”, “eminent”, and “distinguished” are taken from Galton’s work.

generally as authors, divines, engineers, soldiers, statesmen, travellers. The two lists are approximately equal in antiquaries, architects, artists, lawyers, natural science, political economy, science, sculptors. Jews seem to have superiority as actors, chess-players, doctors, merchants (chiefly financiers), in meta-physics, music, poetry and philology. On the whole, these results correspond with the rough inductions of common sense.”⁸⁵

In accounting for such results, Jacobs focused on Jewish alienation from the natural world and, once again, Jews’ almost exclusive residence in cities (“always more conducive to the life intellectual”), as well as Jewish child-care and education, Jewish communal solidarity, and the reality that “dissenters generally seem more intellectual because they have early to think out their differences from the generality. In the case of the Jews, persecution, when not too severe, has probably aided in bringing out their best powers.”⁸⁶ While Jewish ability currently lay with the abstract intellect of mathematicians and philosophers, he suggested that in the future one might expect inventors, biologists, and painters once “they have had time to throw off the effects of their long exclusion from Nature.” But, in addition to these social factors, Jacobs ended his analysis with a more eugenic consideration, that “the weaker members of each generation have been weeded out by persecution which tempted them or forced them to embrace Christianity, and thus contemporary Jews are the survival of a long process of unnatural selection which has seemingly fitted them excellently for the struggle for intellectual existence.”⁸⁷

Nature versus nurture: the Jews as a test case

In 1899, Jacobs drew together and summarized much of his earlier research in an article entitled “Are Jews Jews?” published in *Popular Science Monthly*. The article was written as a response to a claim made that Jews were not a race but a people and, as such, had no claim to be considered in the context of the racial geography of any land. This claim had been made by the US economist William Ripley⁸⁸ who had theorized that modern Jews could not

85 *Ibid.*, 363.

86 *Ibid.*, 365.

87 *Ibid.*

88 William Z. Ripley (1867–1941) was a professor of economics (MIT) and political economics (Harvard) whose book, *The Races of Europe: A Sociological Study* (1899), presented an influential racial taxonomy that sought to correlate anthropometrics (such as cephalic indexes) with geographical data. In 1908 he was awarded a medal by the Royal Institute of Anthropology.

be descended from their alleged Middle Eastern ancestors since they were round-headed while their modern Arab cousins remained long-headed.⁸⁹ Jacobs set himself two objectives in his article: firstly to demonstrate the reality of Jewish race, which he accomplished mainly by reference to the historical evidence he had provided in his earlier writings,⁹⁰ and, secondly and more interestingly, to make the case that Jews represented a unique opportunity to examine the vexed anthropological question of nature versus nurture. Specifically, Jacobs sought to reinterpret Ripley’s evidence of the Jewish cranial shapes and sizes, augmenting it with his own research, to argue for a radical revision of the science: rather than see head shape as an indicator for race, he argued from a Larmarckian perspective that it could be used as an indicator for brain development. He began by arguing that contemporary Jewish round-headedness correlated with the historical evidence of the Jewish necessity to “live by their wits” over the millennia. In support of this argument, Jacobs presented information on the cranial sizes of a hierarchy of races, from aboriginal “Australians” (75 cubic cm) to “Teutons” (93.5 cubic cm). He summarized the findings by suggesting that a Larmarckian mechanism was at play:

Every indication seems to point out that in races where progress depends upon brain, rather than muscle, the brain-box broadens out as a natural consequence . . . From the nature of the sutures of the skull it is tolerably

89 Cited in Joseph Jacobs, “Are Jews Jews?”, *Popular Science Monthly* 55 (1899): 502–3.

90 Jacobs also considered the evidence of the Khazars, whom, he explained (505, 509), were often cited by those who contested the purity of the Jewish race because they were said to constitute the nucleus of Russian Polish Jews, who formed a majority among present-day Jews. But Jacobs discounted this from a historical perspective (there was no historical source that mentioned the Khazars in Poland during the eighth to eleventh centuries, when they flourished, and their Yiddish language was evidence of a German ancestry) and also from a demographic perspective, arguing that a small number of German Jews could easily have propagated to Jacobs’s estimated five million such Jews in Eastern Europe. Jacobs also considered the large number of quasi-Jewish names (such as Davis, Harris, Phillips, and Hart) in the Gentile population, which Ripley cited as evidence for admixture. But, in an allusion to Darwin’s theories on biological mimicry as a defence, Jacobs argued: “As a matter of fact, it can be proved that . . . these names among the Jews have been adopted for ‘mimicry’ reasons from the corresponding Christian names which are mostly derived from the Bible. But, at the best, Professor Ripley’s argument would merely prove a certain amount of Jewish blood among the Christian populations of Europe and America, which nobody would deny. That Jews, under the pressure of persecution or for other reasons, have abjured their faith, married Christian wives, and become merged in the surrounding populations, is undoubtedly a fact, but does not in any way affect the relative purity of the ‘remnant’ which has remained true to its faith.”

obvious that if brain capacity produces an enlargement of brain [sic], the consequent internal pressure on the skull will be lateral and tend to produce brachycephalism. The application of all this to the case of Jews seems obvious. If they had been forced by persecution to become mainly blacksmiths, one would not have been surprised to find their biceps larger than those of other folk; and similarly, as they have been forced to live by the exercise of their brains, one should not be surprised to find the cubic capacity of their skulls larger than that of their neighbour's [sic].⁹¹

He also referred to his previous survey of "Jewish ability" whose findings concerning the disproportionate number of superior individuals, he suggested, provided further support for his new claim. Scientists of race had made a serious error and the study of Jews had brought this error to light. Thus,

Skull capacity and cephalic index are not so much indications of race as of intellect. If it is found that, as a rule, each race, and even each people, tends to have a uniform cephalic index, that would merely imply that the sociological conditions of the said race or people were tolerably uniform as regards intellectual development. Australians, who have had no opportunity of pitting their wits against any other competing race, and have depended for their existence on the fleetness of their legs and the capacity of their stomachs to carry food from one orgy to another, have used their brains less than all other human races, and have the narrowest skulls of all. Teutons, who have had the largest sphere for intellectual rivalry with their neighbours, have the broadest skulls of all except the Jews, who have, so to speak, lived by their wits the last two thousand years.⁹²

He continued: "Altogether I remain unconvinced by Professor Ripley's arguments as to any large admixture of alien elements among contemporary Jews as unvouched for by history, and not necessarily postulated by anthropology. The broad skulls of the Jews, if they differ from those of earlier date (of which Professor Ripley has produced no evidence whatever), are due to the development of Jewish capacity, owing to their consistent attention to education and to the conditions under which they have pursued the struggle for existence."⁹³ As a result, Jacobs could declare in triumph that the historical and anthropological evidence had

91 Ibid., 507.

92 Ibid., 508. Jacobs went on to explain that "The evidence produced by Professor Ripley of long-headed Jews among the lower developed communities only shows that where the brain is not much exercised the skull is not broadened."

93 Ibid., 510.

converged in his new theory, once the anthropological evidence had been properly interpreted. (Although Jacobs failed to persuade the scientific establishment, the case that the cephalic index was not a useful marker for race was made by Franz Boas several decades later.⁹⁴) What the Jewish case demonstrated was the importance of a familiarity with Jewish history and an understanding of the environment in which Jews, past and the present, found themselves. As he put it,

The significance of this result for the science of anthropology cannot be overrated. The great question of the science is that expressed by Dr. Galton as "the struggle between Nature and nurture" – the difference that social influences can produce on men of the same race. Jews afford the science almost the sole instance in which this problem can be studied in its least complex form. My own investigations have shown that social environment has a direct influence on such anthropometrical data as height and breathing capacity . . . Similarly, if the argument I have previously adduced is correct, the brachycephalism of the Jew is a proof that intellectual development produces broad heads, and that, roughly speaking, the cephalic index is a key to intellectual capacity.⁹⁵

By the time Jacobs was writing his entries on "Purity of Race" and "Anthropology" in the *Jewish Encyclopedia*, published in 1901–6, he was making explicit mention of Darwin's proposed mechanism of sexual selection and was even able to incorporate the new Mendelian genetics. In spring 1900, Hugo de Vries and others had published their rediscovery of Mendel's laws (originally published in 1866), having successfully replicated his experiments in their search for a theory of discontinuous inheritance (in contrast to the prevalent blending theory). Jacobs, who was obviously keeping up with the scientific literature, could augment his argument for racial purity and common descent. Thus, he wrote,

On the other hand the remarkable unity of resemblance among Jews, even in different climes, seems to imply a common descent. Photographs of Jews taken in Bokhara [in Uzbekistan] resemble almost to identity those of Jews in Berlin or New York. Such similarity may be due to the existence of a type which has caused social, and thus sexual, selection, but the fact

94 The German-American anthropologist Franz Boas (1858–1942) conducted a comparative intergenerational study of Jewish immigrants to the US and their children in 1908–10 and noted the significant differences in cephalic indices, which appeared to undermine the significance of the racial dimension. Initial findings were published in Franz Boas, *The Mind of Primitive Man* (New York: Macmillan Company, 1911).

95 Jacobs, "Are Jews Jews?", 511.

that it remains constant would seem to prove the existence of a separate variety . . . Wherever such a type had been socially or racially selected, the law of inheritance discovered by G[regor] Mendel would imply that any hybrids tend to revert to it, and a certain amount of evidence has been given for the prepotency of the Jewish side in mixed marriages.⁹⁶

Overview

In summary, Jacobs's views on evolution and the Jewish race were much more complicated than Wolf's. While he readily acknowledged the reality of a Jewish race, he distinguished sharply between what he called the Jewish (or intrinsically racial) and the Judaic (or socio-religious) dimensions.⁹⁷ The first category, that of Jewish racial characteristics, corresponded in his mind to permanent, intrinsic characteristics. Some of these were simply reported as markers of a distinct Jewish race, such as Jewish nostrility, the relative infertility in intermarriage between Jews and non-Jews, and the relatively uniform distinctive features of Jewish women (which he believed reflected Mendelian dynamics), while others were presented as the result of the selective pressures of Darwinian natural selection, such as a dark complexion and, possibly, the high proportion of male births and early menstruation. But many other allegedly distinctive Jewish characteristics, which some might have regarded as racial and permanent, Jacobs regarded as more plastic and temporary, and these he placed within a second category, Judaic characteristics, which he attributed to a variety of social and environmental selective pressures. Some of these he presented as the result of Lamarckian (use-it-or-lose-it) mechanisms of evolution,

⁹⁶ Joseph Jacobs, "Purity of Race", in Singer and Adler, *Jewish Encyclopedia*, vol. 10 (New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1901–6), 284; the relevant volume was actually published in 1905. It is not clear whether Jacobs had taken fully on board that Mendel's laws, while certainly supporting the idea of prepotency of characteristics or dominant traits within hybrids, nevertheless did so in terms of strict ratios of dominant to recessive characteristics, rather than in absolute terms. In any case, he was careful to present an eirenic tone, concluding the entry with the observation that "[a]ltogether, the question is a very complex one, on which no decisive answer can at present be returned. All history points to the purity of the race; some anthropological facts are against it."

⁹⁷ In 1889 Jacobs privately printed the chapter outlines for a grand study entitled *The Jewish Race: A Study in National Character*: there were to be nine chapters under the heading "Traits" and twelve chapters under the heading "Historical Causes", which indicates again the distinction he made between the "Jewish" (racial) and "Judaic" (socio-historical) dimensions of the race question; see Mayer Sulzberger, "Joseph Jacobs", *American Jewish Yearbook* 18 (1917): 73.

such as skull shape and high levels of genius. Other characteristics, such as relatively higher levels of insanity, blindness, deaf-mutism, and colour blindness, and, probably, the high proportion of male births, were best explained by a historical appreciation of their environment, which included prolonged urban habitation, malnutrition, and long experience of persecution. The Judaic dimension, which encompassed the environmental and social factors, also included the Jewish religion. Centuries of religious observance of the Law, he argued, had shaped the Jewish character and affected their biometrics, including the phenomena of early marriage and relatively short and narrow body types, high levels of marriage with near kin leading to correspondingly low birthrates but a high number of children per capita, longevity, and, possibly, the high proportion of male births. But, without ever articulating his precise rationale, he regarded all the Judaic effects that resulted from societal and environmental influences as non-permanent, and thus non-racial, phenomena. On balance, Jacobs portrayed Judaism as the product of Jews, and not Jews as the product of Judaism. Rather than view Judaism as a kind of evolutionary mechanism by which certain traits of the Jewish race were selected, as Wolf had argued, Jacobs retained his early conception of Judaism as an evolving belief system shaped by the historical and cultural experiences of Jews. In his efforts to identify and distinguish between racial and environmental explanatory factors of Jewish distinctiveness, Jacobs came to see the Jewish case as offering a unique opportunity for the scientific understanding of human nature and evolutionary theory in relation to the nature–nurture debate. The result, one cannot help but notice, was that race was practically irrelevant for debates about Jewish emancipation; for, while Jewish race remained a historically valid and scientifically legitimate category, according to Jacobs, Jewish racial differences were much exaggerated and offered no obstacle whatsoever for social integration since the differences that mattered most were actually socially conditioned and thus impermanent. As for the claims of racist antisemites, Jacobs's quantitative survey work of all aspects of Jewish life convinced him that anti-Jewish hostility was based on a Gentile resentment of racial and social stereotypes of Jews with little or no basis in reality; it was his conviction that this kind of irrationality could best be countered by the collection of the kind of scientifically reliable data to which he dedicated his life.

Conclusion

There are important differences between the theories of Jewish race offered by Wolf and Jacobs. In contrast to Wolf who presented Jews as a highly superior race, Jacobs acknowledged no hierarchy of races.⁹⁸ Wolf's was a much more schematic, abstract presentation that approached race in exclusively evolutionary terms, whereas Jacobs's account of the interconnections between the Jewish race and religion, while informed by evolutionary theory, was much more heavily augmented by historical contextualization. Such differences reflected the fact that they did not conceive of evolution in quite the same way: Wolf understood it in the strongly progressive sense that was common to much Victorian thought, with the environment selecting for traits that would maximize racial hygiene and permanently and continually improve the character of the Jewish race over time. Jacobs's understanding was not as simplistic and, in particular, he was not convinced of the progressive character of evolutionary change; while drawing on history to demonstrate how new environments had generated a variety of selective pressures, he emphasized that their effect, although profound, was temporary and, in defining the few truly racial characteristics of Jews, he concluded that they had remained largely unchanged for millennia. Furthermore, religion functioned in widely different ways in their respective theories. For Wolf, the Jewish religion fully accounted for the essential character of the Jewish race, which was his chief interest; for Jacobs, religion was one of several environmental factors in the Jewish case study that he believed threw new light on the understanding of human nature, specifically, the nature–nurture conundrum, which had become his prime concern. Nevertheless, despite all these differences, Wolf and Jacobs are of interest for their common project to adopt an evolutionary perspective and to reinterpret the nature of the relationship between Jews and Judaism so as to counter the claims of antisemites that threatened Jewish integration within European society. Later Jewish social scientists such as Simmel and Boas implied that Jewish difference was no impediment to emancipation since it was not racial but rather

98 This is true relatively speaking, although Jacobs's research on Jewish genius might be said to undermine this claim and on occasion he was capable of suggesting that Aryans and "dark haired races" (such as Jews) were fitter for survival, to some extent; see, e.g., Jacobs, "On the Racial Characteristics", 35.

a social construct. Wolf and Jacobs likewise sought to present Jewish difference in a non-threatening way, although the conception of race remained central for both: in exploring the nature of the relationship between Jewish race and religion, Wolf presented Jewish difference as paradigmatic of the potential for human evolution, while Jacobs portrayed Jewish difference as largely the result of social environment, with the remaining racial characteristics as of interest only to the scientific community. While they came to differing conclusions in this regard, there is no doubting each one's determination to ground his study of religion and race in evolutionary theory in the late nineteenth century. What is it that might explain this particular interest? And why was it that, among contemporary Anglo-Jewish thinkers, these two stand alone in linking race, religion, evolutionary theory, and antisemitism?

Part of the answer lies in the phenomenon of the role that science played in the Jewish imagination with regard to social emancipation, more generally. Both Wolf and Jacobs prided themselves on their familiarity with the wider culture of the non-Jewish European world that was the result of their Continental studies. Both were ambitious young men out to make their marks in that world and, as such, they were keen to present themselves as self-assured Renaissance men who moved with ease between the realms of literary and historical scholarship, scientific thought, journalism and politics. Science in particular, as a universalist form of knowledge, was perceived as a gateway to participation and recognition in society on an equal footing with non-Jews. So, on one level, the answer is that the authority and prestige of science – in this case, race science – drew Wolf and Jacobs as it would draw many other ambitious young Jews in nineteenth- and twentieth-century Europe.⁹⁹ However, it is also possible to see them as part of a wider intellectual movement within the Anglo-Jewish community, at least with regard to their unfamiliar presentations of Judaism and their concern to confront the threat of antisemitism. And here one might point to their membership of a group of other likeminded Jewish intellectuals known as the Wanderers.

Shortly before the meeting of the Anthropological Institute in February 1885, a small, exclusive group of scholars started meeting together

99 For an overview of the way in which modern Jews, often denied cultural participation in wider society, have historically been attracted to the universalist ethos of science as a means of finding a kind of integration and acceptance, see Noah J. Efron, *A Chosen Calling: Jews in Science in the Twentieth Century* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2014).

regularly in London. Because theirs was a Jewish society with no fixed abode, they called themselves the Wanderers.¹⁰⁰ They were united mainly by a shared conviction that the Orthodox Judaism espoused by the Chief Rabbi and the United Synagogue was outdated, over-dependent on the wealthy Anglo-Jewish oligarchy, and too concerned with its own authority, and that it was therefore entirely appropriate, Jewishly speaking, to shrug off this yoke and to look for ways to revitalize Jewish life through intellectual and cultural initiatives.¹⁰¹ In addition to Jacobs and Wolf, the Wanderers included the scholars Solomon Schechter, Israel Abrahams, Claude Montefiore, the novelist Israel Zangwill, and the journalist Asher Myers, with others joining them from time to time.¹⁰² Before long, the group was regarded by the *Jewish Chronicle* as representative of a new stage in Anglo-Jewish scholarship.¹⁰³ All were committed to

100 See Norman Bentwich, "The Wanderers and Other Jewish Scholars of My Youth", *Jewish Historical Studies: Transactions of the Jewish Historical Society of England* 20 (1959–61): 52.

101 While there existed a Literary and Debating Society (established only in 1882) that met in Bloomsbury under the auspices of the Orthodox rabbinic seminary Jews' College (which most of them continued to support as individuals), its association with the Orthodox establishment had soured it for them to the extent that they could not regard it as their own forum for debate and discussion. Recorded contributors included A. Neubauer, I. Abrahams, M. Gaster, S. Schechter, J. Jacobs, and C. Montefiore. Having begun in 1882, they "continued for a quarter of a century and then expired peacefully and gradually"; Albert M. Hyamson, *Jews' College London, 1855–1955* (London: Jews' College, 1955), 54–5.

102 The group tended to meet in one another's houses in Kilburn and St John's Wood, more often than not at Myers's or Schechter's; Myers, who had started the group, had asked Schechter to join around 1885 and Schechter remained its guiding spirit until he left for Cambridge in 1890. Other members included Oswald Simon, Arthur Davis, Herbert Bentwich, and Solomon J. Solomon; see David G. Dalin, "America-bound: Wissenschaft in England", in *The Jewish Legacy and the German Conscience: Essays in Memory of Rabbi Joseph Asher*, eds. Moses Rischin and Raphael Asher (Berkeley, CA: Judah Magnes Museum, 1991), 103–4; David Cesarani, *The Jewish Chronicle and Anglo-Jewry, 1841–1991* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 90. Several commentators (e.g. Dalin and Cesarani) also include M. Gaster among the Wanderers, following Norman Bentwich, *Solomon Schechter: A Biography* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1938), 12, a passing mention. But in Bentwich's "The Wanderers", where he carefully sets out biographical details of all the members and associated members, including his own father, he does not mention Gaster once. Nor do any of the contemporary and later references to the Wanderers in the *Jewish Chronicle* include Gaster among the usual suspects. Presumably, as a friend of Schechter, Gaster would have attended the gatherings on occasion.

103 In the *Jewish Chronicle*, 29 July 1887, 8–9, and 17 May 1889, 11, its editor, Myers, heralded the last two decades of the nineteenth century as a "Jewish revival" in England, with the older scholars Neubauer, Friedländer and Schiller-Szinessy being joined by "a

the interests, values, and aspirations of *Wissenschaft des Judentums*, and especially to the explanatory power of combining the historical critical method with a sceptical attitude towards received tradition, although there were severe clashes regarding what it all meant for contemporary Judaism. Underlying much of the debate were differing understandings of the causes of antisemitism and what to do about the threat it posed for social integration. Was antisemitism a racial, theological, or political phenomenon? Over time, the individual Wanderers committed themselves to different positions. For example, Schechter and Montefiore would quarrel over theology; Montefiore's progressive religious reforms, which incorporated the higher criticism of the Bible, were denounced by Schechter as a cowardly concession to the antisemites and their "Higher anti-Semitism". And Zangwill and Montefiore would later fall out over the politics of Zionism, which the first regarded as the solution to the problem of antisemitism and the second as a contributing cause.¹⁰⁴ Arguably, the work of Wolf and Jacobs can be seen as a contribution to this broader debate.¹⁰⁵ Along with their readiness to challenge the received wisdom and tradition about Judaism and its history, they shared with other young Anglo-Jewish scholars an obsessive need to diagnose the disease of antisemitism and to find a contemporary cure so as to facilitate

new band" of young Jewish scholars including Gaster and Schechter "among foreign imports" and Montefiore, Abrahams, Jacobs and Wolf "among native products" and at the vanguard of "Judaism as a Science".

104 For the substance of the debates between Montefiore and his critics Schechter and Zangwill, see Daniel R. Langton, *Claude Montefiore: His Life and Thought* (London: Vallentine Mitchell, 2002), 75–6, 117–18.

105 Morris-Reich, *Quest for Assimilation in Modern Social Science*, 127–8, argues that there is a close connection between the universalization of the Jews and their representation as assimilated or integrated into the wider society. "As long as the Jews are at the center [of the scientific study] (as in *Wissenschaft des Judentums* and in Jewish social science), they are represented as other; with their decentralization, their representation as self emerges. Somewhat paradoxically, as long as attempts to forward Jewish integration or assimilation are embedded in a framework whose particular object of research is the Jews, these attempts are automatically negated. The centrality of the Jews as objects defeats the intention to promote integration or assimilation, because the mere fact that it deals explicitly with Jews and their future in society reveals a special interest in them. Because Simmel and Boas developed general social sciences, their representations of the Jews can appear, at least to some degree, as disinterested." To the extent that this is true, Wolf's and Jacobs's focus on Jews, which was inevitable considering their commitment to *Wissenschaft des Judentums*, doomed their emancipatory efforts, regardless of any attempts they made to argue that their work had significant implications for more general evolutionary science.

social integration. Unlike most of the others who were coming across antisemitism mainly in the context of the study of Judaism and the Bible, Wolf and Jacobs tended to come across it in scientific and journalistic contexts, where hostility towards Jews was expressed in more overtly racial terms. Eventually, theological and political solutions came to dominate among the Wanderers and the wider Anglo-Jewish community, but before this happened Wolf and Jacobs faced the racial charge head on, convinced as they were that the roots of the problem of antisemitism could best be solved by analysis of the relationship between Jewish religion and evolution, using the tools of race science itself. Of course, in terms of offering solutions to the problem of antisemitism, they were naïve. Wolf's essay, written in response to the biological-racist antisemitism of Goldwin Smith, had accepted Smith's premises (that the Jews were a biological race shaped by a religion that was, in its essence, merely legalism), and his strategy had been to attempt to reverse the value judgment. As Sander L. Gilman has observed, however, "such simple reversals are rarely an effective rebuttal to anti-Semites who see their contentions supported."¹⁰⁶ Likewise, Jacobs had believed that it was possible to maintain the idea of a biologically distinctive Jewish race without being antisemitic. In responding to the work of Ernest Renan (whose essay had undermined racial antisemitism but at the cost of viewing the Jews as a race), Jacobs had attempted to use both historical and anthropological evidence to challenge the claim that history showed the Jews to be racially mixed. But Jacobs had overestimated his own ability to convince others that most allegedly racial characteristics were, rather, due to environmental factors, and had underestimated the ability of many, such as Renan himself, to justify their antisemitism in cultural, social, theological, or political terms.¹⁰⁷ Neither theories had any long-term influence within the Anglo-Jewish community (the meeting of the Anthropological Institute in 1885 was one of a kind) and both men soon lost interest in attempting to explain

¹⁰⁶ Sander L. Gilman, *Smart Jews: The Construction of the Image of Jewish Superior Intelligence* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1996), 72.

¹⁰⁷ For example, Ernest Renan, *Études d'histoire religieuse* (Paris: Michel Lévy Frères, 1857), 88: "We understand now [from considering Judaism] how this race, so eminently endowed for the creation and diffusion of religions, was destined in the paths of secular existence, not to pass mediocrity. A race, incomplete from its very simplicity, it has neither plastic arts, nor rational science, nor philosophy, nor political life, nor military organization. The Semitic race has never comprehended civilization in the sense which we attach to the word."

antisemitism in terms of race science.¹⁰⁸ Nevertheless, the fact that this particular approach flourished only for a brief moment in Britain makes it no less interesting an episode in the story of Jewish evolutionary thought.

¹⁰⁸ While both men's interest in race theory stemmed from a concern with antisemitism, the connection was not always present in their writings. Jacobs had already in 1883 argued (half in jest) in an essay entitled "The True, the Only, and the Complete Solution of the Jewish Question", *Jewish Chronicle*, 5 Oct. 1883, 4 (repr. *Jewish Ideals and Other Essays*, 96–102) that antisemitism was the result of the Jew's aggressive, argumentative character. And, as noted earlier, he went on to work on Jewish race as a case study for nature versus nurture, without referring to antisemitism. Wolf went on to work on antisemitism without reference to race theory. In his "Anti-Semitism", *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 26 years later, Wolf made no reference to this theory, preferring to focus on social dynamics and in particular Gentile resentment of Jewish emancipation and integration into wider European society.