

*“Every True Friend of the Fatherland”:
Gustav Schmoller and the “Jewish Question”
1916–1917**

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I

As is well known, the Imperial German military was a bastion of antisemitic prejudice. Though the officer corps was formally opened up to Jews during the First World War, they were still hindered by the powers of cooptation and veto retained by individual regiments. It is therefore all the more remarkable that of the roughly 84,000 Jews who fought at the front, some 29,874 were decorated for bravery and no fewer than 19,545 moved up in rank. Of these more than two thousand attained officer commissions.¹ Measured in relation to the overall German population, this was about average. Given the discrimination and hindrances Jews faced, these figures were testament enough, if it were needed, to the extraordinary degree of Jewish patriotic commitment during the war.

Antisemites and those sympathetic to them within the officer corps and War Ministry were hardly persuaded by such evidence and did not cease spreading defamatory rumours of Jewish wartime shirking and profiteering. With the debacle of the battles of the Somme and Verdun, acute manpower problems, strikes and riots in response to growing food shortages, and right-wing dissatisfaction with the Government of Bethmann Hollweg and Progressive and Social Democratic efforts to sue for a negotiated peace without annexations, the force of antisemitic suspicion became so bitter that on 11 October 1916 the Minister of War, Adolf Wild von Hohenborn, was pressed to order an internal survey—it would become notorious—of Jewish participation in the war effort.² This *Judenzählung* or “Jew count” sought to determine how many Jews fit for military duty were serving in German army units

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¹Jacob Segall, *Die deutschen Juden als Soldaten im Kriege 1914–1918. Eine Statistische Studie*, with a foreword by Heinrich Silbergleit, ed. by Ausschuß für Kriegsstatistik, Berlin 1921, p. 35.

²On the complex of motivations behind the “Jew count”, see Werner T. Angress, ‘The German Army’s “Judenzählung” of 1916: Genesis—Consequences—Significance’, in *LBI Year Book*, vol. 23 (1978), pp. 117–135, here pp. 117–125.

and whether their service was on the front line or in non-combat posts. A little over one week later, the Centre Party leader Matthias Erzberger, who had himself learned of the military's *Juden-zählung*, requested that the Chancellor conduct a survey of income and religious affiliation of those employed in various war agencies (*Kriegsgesellschaften*).³ While this was never granted, this request along with revelations of the military's internal survey on the floor of the *Reichstag* on 3 November 1916 sent shockwaves through the German Jewish community.⁴ The confessionalisation of the German war effort made antisemitic rumour and innuendo respectable. It marked an important moment in the history of the Jewish experience in Germany because it called into question, in the starkest possible manner, the basic premises of emancipation, integration and assimilation; it dishonoured the sacrifices Jews had made in the war and alienated those in the field whose loyalty and willingness to sacrifice their lives were essential if Germany hoped to prevail against numerically and materially superior foes.

In December 1916, in the shadow of the *Juden-zählung*, Gustav von Schmoller, the grand old man of German economics, reviewed two books for his *Jahrbuch für Gesetzgebung*. The books were Hans Delbrück's *Regierung und Volkswille* (1914) and Hugo Preuß's *Das deutsche Volk und die Politik* (1915), both tackling thorny questions about the proper relationship between the German people and their political leadership.⁵ In most respects the review was typical of the hundreds Schmoller had penned for his *Jahrbuch*. A monarchist and Prussophile, he took issue with Hugo Preuß's claim that Germany's political development had been retarded by the perpetuation of authoritarian structures hindering the involvement of citizens in politics. Entirely out of character, however, were his comments about Preuß's activities as "one of the chiefs of Berlin's municipal left-liberals, who, socially supported by Semitic millions, more or less rule our city".⁶ He also mentioned that in such circles both the political horizon and general judgment suffered from a conviction that "in their midst there is such a superiority of intelligence, character and talent that it is unjust and damaging for the state and society that their tightly-knit circle has not fully conquered the universities, the army, and the senior civil service the way they have [conquered] the city of Berlin and its administration".⁷

While Schmoller conceded there was a kernel of truth in Preuß's claims and praised his scholarly credentials, he did not agree that Germany's authoritarian

³*ibid.*, p. 125; Werner Jochmann, 'Die Ausbreitung des Antisemitismus', in Werner E. Mosse and Arnold Paucker (eds.), *Deutsches Judentum in Krieg und Revolution 1916–1923*, Tübingen 1971 (Schriftenreihe wissenschaftlicher Abhandlungen des Leo Baeck Instituts 25), pp. 409–510, here p. 424.

⁴Angress, pp. 125–127; Jochmann, pp. 426f. The banker Max Warburg, confiding to his brother Aby, observed that "conditions in Germany are highly gloomy. The entire clique around Reventlow [Count Ernst zu Reventlow, 1869–1943, a leading German antisemite] is disgusting and now the Reichstag has behaved stupidly in the matter of the Jewish question/war agencies". Warburg Institute Archives, IV. 69, M. Warburg to A. Warburg, 29 October 1916.

⁵Gustav Schmoller, 'Obrigkeitsstaat und Volksstaat. Ein missverständlicher Gegensatz', in *Schmollers Jahrbuch*, vol. 40 (1916), pp. 2031–2042; reprinted in Gustav Schmoller, *Walter Rathenau und Hugo Preuß. Die Staatsmänner des Neuen Deutschland*, Munich and Leipzig 1922, pp. 21–43.

⁶Schmoller, *Walter Rathenau und Hugo Preuß*, p. 24.

⁷*ibid.*

system violated the constitutional guarantee of legal equality because some of its citizens still happened to suffer discrimination due to national origin, religious convictions, political views, or membership in the labour movement.⁸ He retorted that:

... it is far from generally correct [to state] that we grossly injure the legal equality of our constitution because individual offices are still not accessible to each unbaptised Jewish applicant, because certain regiments still use their free voting rights to exclude Jews, because not yet all of the many Jewish lecturers in the universities become professors as rapidly as they believe their talent deserves.—The great ideal of political and legal equality of rights can only be implemented as swiftly as the popular consciousness [*Volksbewußtsein*] has adapted itself to the standpoint of the law. Its execution finds hindrances from time to time where a minority of race, of faith, etc. seeks rapidly, through free admittance, to make itself the intolerant ruler of the state, the administration in question, the relevant organs, respectively. How rapidly have Jewish lecturers and professors grown in number! How rapidly have Jews achieved it that for years in individual clinics only Jewish assistant physicians have been employed, how true has the prophesy turned out to be that in certain faculties the first Jewish full professor would be followed in ten years by five and more. Prejudice against Jews in Prussian political life is close to disappearing and currently it seems to be making room for the opposite in certain places.⁹

II

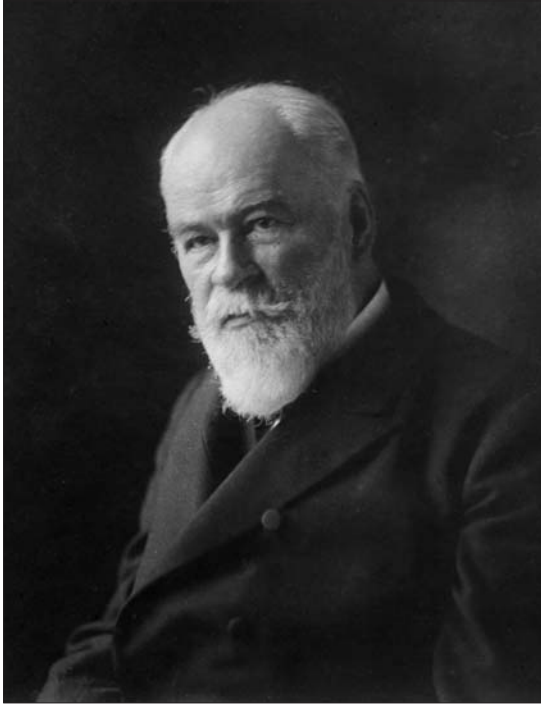
Without knowing who Schmoller was, one might be tempted to suspect these statements as emanating from one of any number of obscure scribblers or eccentric politicians on Germany’s noisy extreme right. However, Schmoller was no marginal or eccentric figure, and before his review’s appearance there is, as far as this author knows, no evidence that he made antisemitic public statements or had moved in antisemitic circles. Schmoller had spent a highly successful career as a prominent professor of political economy, first at Halle, then Strasbourg, and, from 1882, at the illustrious University of Berlin, where he had enjoyed a long and influential tenure. Whether in such matters as German social reform, economic policy, the fleet, or the colonies, Schmoller had been a public intellectual whose scholarship, opinions and activities found frequent discussion in newspapers, and he himself also frequently contributed to the Reich’s press.¹⁰ Complicating matters further, there is evidence that over his long career Schmoller aided Jewish scholars and those with Jewish backgrounds, among them Georg Simmel, Leo Arons and Siegmund Adler.¹¹ By his seventieth birthday in 1908, Schmoller had harvested just about every laurel

⁸*ibid.*, pp. 23, 24–25.

⁹*ibid.*, pp. 26–27.

¹⁰See, for example, the collection of essays and speeches in Gustav Schmoller, *Zwanzig Jahre deutscher Politik 1897–1917. Aufsätze und Vorträge*, ed. by Lucie Schmoller, Munich and Leipzig 1920.

¹¹Erik Grimmer-Solem, *The Rise of Historical Economics and Social Reform in Germany, 1864–1894*, Oxford–New York 2003, pp. 28, 264–265; on Simmel and Schmoller, see especially Erwin Schullerus, ‘Simmel und Schmoller. Briefliche Zeugnisse’, in *Simmel Studies*, vol. 10, no. 2 (2000), pp. 221–251.



Gustav von Schmoller
©Bildarchiv Preußischer Kulturbesitz

available to him in Prussia including the title of privy counsellor, ennoblement, membership in the Prussian *Herrenhaus*, and the position of official historian of Brandenburg and Prussia. His many students held influential academic posts not only in Germany but also elsewhere in Europe, Japan and the United States. If anything, Schmoller had been known for his moderation and reasonableness, which make the statements published in his review of Hugo Preuß all the more puzzling and distressing. For this reason, too, the damage such statements could do to Germany's Jews, especially those still committed to integration or assimilation, was far greater than the familiar shrill attacks coming from the antisemitic *völkisch* right.

Scholarship on Gustav Schmoller has seen something of a renaissance since the late 1980s,¹² yet this newer research has until recently not grappled with the full complexity of this man who, while a pioneering social scientist and advocate of far-sighted social and economic reforms, was also an avid supporter of the Imperial

¹²For an overview of this literature, see Helge Peukert, 'The Schmoller Renaissance', in *History of Political Economy*, vol. 33, no. 1 (2001), pp. 71–116.

German Fleet and aggressive German colonial expansion overseas.¹³ This complexity includes an unexplored antisemitic dimension. Indeed, it would seem that some have preferred overlooking this embarrassing blemish on Schmoller's career, or even attempted to obscure this aspect of his public life. His essay on the "Jewish Question" has, for example, been omitted from a supposedly exhaustive collection of his articles and reviews.¹⁴

Following the important work of Peter Pulzer, Reinhard Rürup, and Andrew Whiteside,¹⁵ since the late 1970s much of the scholarship on the German and Austrian antisemitic right has focused on the growing role of radical right-wing populism within the *Kaiserreich*.¹⁶ Relatively less attention has been paid to the empire's academic elite as opinion leaders and as active and passive enablers of antisemitism and right-wing radicalism.¹⁷ The publication of Daniel Goldhagen's *Hitler's Willing Executioners* in 1996 and the ensuing controversy over its claims invited a renewed critical look at the alleged continuities and uniqueness of German "eliminationist" antisemitism, with many leading historians of Germany taking a critical stance regarding Goldhagen's claim that German society was axiomatically antisemitic before 1933.¹⁸ Since then scholarly attention has shifted to the antisemitism of ordinary Germans while leaving significant moments in the

¹³Erik Grimmer-Solem, 'Imperialist Socialism of the Chair: Gustav Schmoller and German Weltpolitik, 1897–1905', in Geoff Eley and James Retallack (eds.), *Wilhelmianism and Its Legacies: German Modernities, Imperialism, and the Meanings of Reform, 1890–1930*, New York–Oxford 2003, pp. 106–122; *idem*, 'The Professors' Africa: Economists, the Elections of 1907, and the Legitimation of German Imperialism', in *German History*, vol. 25, no. 3 (2007), pp. 313–347.

¹⁴Gustav Schmoller, *Kleine Schriften zur Wirtschaftsgeschichte, Wirtschaftstheorie und Wirtschaftspolitik*, ed. by Wolfram Fiedler and Rolf Karl, 6 vols., Leipzig 1985–1987.

¹⁵Peter G. J. Pulzer, *The Rise of Political Anti-Semitism in Germany and Austria*, New York 1964; Reinhard Rürup, *Emanzipation und Antisemitismus. Studien zur Judenfrage der bürgerlichen Gesellschaft*, Göttingen 1975; Andrew G. Whiteside, *The Socialism of Fools: Georg Ritter von Schönerer and Austrian Pan Germanism*, Berkeley–Los Angeles–London 1975.

¹⁶See, *inter alia*, Shulamit Volkov, *The Rise of Popular Antimodernism in Germany: The Urban Master Artisans, 1873–1896*, Princeton 1978; *idem*, *Germans Jews and Antisemites: Trials in Emancipation*, Cambridge 2006; Geoff Eley, *Reshaping the German Right: Radical Nationalism and Political Change after Bismarck*, New Haven–London 1980; Roger Chickering, *We Men Who Feel Most German: A Cultural Study of the Pan-German League, 1886–1914*, Boston 1984; Mosche Zimmermann, *Wilhelm Marr, the Patriarch of Antisemitism*, New York 1986; Werner Jochmann, *Gesellschaftskrise und Judenfeindschaft in Deutschland, 1870–1945*, Hamburg 1988; Marilyn Coetzee, *The German Army League: Popular Nationalism in Wilhelmine Germany*, New York 1990; Michael Imhof, "Einen besseren als Stöcker finden wir nicht." *Diskursanalytische Studien zur christlich-sozialen Agitation im deutschen Kaiserreich*, Oldenburg 1996; Stefan Schell, *Die Entwicklung des politischen Antisemitismus in Deutschland zwischen 1881 und 1912. Eine wahlgeschichtliche Untersuchung*, Berlin 1999.

¹⁷There have of course been a number of important studies of right-wing radicalism and antisemitism within the German academic elite. See, for example, Fritz K. Ringer, *Decline of the German Mandarins: The German Academic Community, 1890–1933*, Cambridge, MA 1969; Konrad Jarausch, *Students, Society and Politics in Imperial Germany: The Rise of Academic Illiberalism*, Princeton 1982; Bernhard vom Brocke, "Wissenschaft und Militarismus": Der Aufruf der 93 "An die Kulturwelt!" und der Zusammenbruch der internationalen Gelehrtenrepublik im ersten Weltkrieg", in William M. Calder III, Hellmut Flashar, and Theodor Lindken (eds.), *Wilamowitz nach 50 Jahren*, Darmstadt 1985, pp. 649–719; and Notker Hammerstein, *Antisemitismus und deutsche Universitäten: 1871–1933*, Frankfurt–New York 1995.

¹⁸For example, Fritz Stern, "The Goldhagen Controversy: One Nation, One People, One Theory?" in *Foreign Affairs*, vol. 75, no. 6 (1996), pp. 128–138. On this controversy and its historiographical repercussions, see Geoff Eley (ed.), *The Goldhagen Effect: History, Memory, Nazism—Facing the German Past*, Ann Arbor 2000.

evolution of German antisemitism such as the *Judenzählung* and the impact of academic opinion on this process relatively underexplored.¹⁹ At the same time the thought and activities of prominent German Jews in response to the challenges posed to their integration and assimilation during the First World War have remained surprisingly obscure.²⁰

One historian who has given antisemitism within Imperial Germany's universities closer scrutiny is Notker Hammerstein, who argues in *Antisemitismus und deutsche Universitäten* that a number of German scholars who were not antisemites in a strict sense produced antisemitic comments because of the late Wilhelminian period's prevailing cultural-critical, pessimistic atmosphere. Namely, there was a fear that all too rapid advancement of Jews into positions of power would accelerate rapid change in a way sacrificing the culture and identity of peculiarly German customs and institutions—the inheritance of secularised Lutheranism. Antisemitic attitudes, as well as anti-Catholic and anti-Socialist views, were closely linked to a fear of internationalism, and, with an eye to the USA, Britain or France, to a fear of the consequences of cultural, political and economic modernisation.²¹

While there is no doubt that the Great War was a catalyst for much unsettling change—developments undoubtedly placing a sharper point on existing scholarly antisemitism—many etiological questions remain, including the question of how and why moderate public intellectuals came to express out-of-character antisemitic sentiments during the war. Specifically, were such sentiments evidence of a basic transformation of mainstream German opinion about Jews predating the war? And if so, what role did the empire's scholarly elite play in making opinions normally confined to the *völkisch* antisemitic right publicly acceptable? It is equally important to consider the specific impact of such developments on the formation of German Jewish identity and opinion: to what extent did antisemitism within mainstream German scholarship lead to an abandonment of liberal, integrationist positions among some German Jews? In this framework, Schmoller's sudden entrance into the debate over the "Jewish Question" invites much closer scrutiny than it has received so far.²² A reconstruction of the unfolding debate between Schmoller and members of the German Jewish community in 1916–1917 may thus help us formulate some tentative responses to the above and related questions.

¹⁹Examples of this newer scholarship include Christhard Hoffmann, Werner Bergmann, and Helmut Walser Smith (eds.), *Exclusionary Violence: Antisemitic Riots in Modern German History*, Ann Arbor 2002; Helmut Walser Smith, *The Butcher's Tale: Murder and Anti-Semitism in a German Town*, New York 2002; Wolfgang Benz and Angelika Königseder (eds.), *Judenfeindschaft als Paradigma. Studien zur Vorurteilsforschung*, Berlin 2002; Alan T. Levenson, *Between Philosemitism and Antisemitism: Defenses of Judaism and Jews in Germany, 1871–1932*, Lincoln 2004.

²⁰See here Ulrich Sieg, *Jüdische Intellektuelle im Ersten Weltkrieg. Kriegserfahrungen, weltanschauliche Debatten und kulturelle Neuentwürfe*, Berlin 2001, pp. 10–11, 173–174.

²¹Compare Notker Hammerstein, 'Professoren in Kaiserreich und Weimarer Republik und der Antisemitismus', in Peter Alter, Claus-Ekkehard Bärsch, and Peter Berghoff (eds.) *Die Konstruktion der Nation gegen die Juden*, Munich 1999, pp. 126–33.

²²Aspects of this episode are touched on very briefly in Hartwig Wiedebach, *Die Bedeutung der Nationalität für Hermann Cohen*, Hildesheim–Zurich–New York 1997, pp. 45–47.

III

The initial reaction to Schmoller's review of the books by Preuß and Delbrück was swift. By late December 1916/early January 1917 most of Germany's papers had reported on the review and taken a position on it. It is astounding that a book review relegated to the back pages of an academic journal could have had such a public impact. This can only be explained by the sensitive climate of opinion produced by the *Judenzählung* and the prominence of the person making the antisemitic arguments. One of the first and pithiest papers to comment was the *Berliner Tageblatt*, which noted that in trying to protect the old "Obrigkeitsstaat", Schmoller was "in part exaggerating the facts to an extraordinary degree, and in part appealing to base instincts".²³ The *Frankfurter Zeitung* was appalled by what it saw as "tactless antisemitism" on Schmoller's part that was normally confined to the ultra-conservative and antisemitic press.²⁴ Papers with a specifically Jewish readership did not hide their profound disappointment that a man of Schmoller's stature would stoop to such lows. The *Deutsche Israelitische Zeitung* wrote: "One has the impression that the great Herr von Schmoller is sensitive to the fact that discrimination against Jews could end. That is why he has put himself on the antisemitic nag. Not pretty from a man of the reputation of Herr von Schmoller."²⁵ Largely neutral in its assessment was the liberal *Vösische Zeitung*, which was content more to relay the content of Schmoller's review than take any position towards it.²⁶ On the other hand, the antisemitic *Die Wahrheit* praised Schmoller's review because it finally expressed things that others had not dared to say, but it added that Schmoller should have gone further.²⁷

Liberal Jewish papers, such as the C.V.'s *Im deutschen Reich*, took issue with Schmoller's casual use of statistics in supporting his claims about the number of Jewish *Assistentärzte* (assistant physicians) and professors in German universities. In fact, it claimed, only one per cent of German professors were Jewish.²⁸ The editor of the *Deutsche medizinische Wochenschrift* took this even further by refuting, with hard figures, Schmoller's statements about the supposed Jewish dominance of certain medical clinics. In fact, there was not a single Jewish full professor in any of the German medical faculties, only a few converted Jews.²⁹ With some bitterness he wrote: "Every true friend of the fatherland must be most painfully moved when he

²³Geheimes Staatsarchiv Preussischer Kulturbesitz [GStA PK], VI. HA, NI Schmoller, Nr. 1, Bl. 547, clipping of "Schmoller gegen den Berliner Freisinn", in *Berliner Tageblatt*, 27 December 1916.

²⁴GStA PK, VI. HA, NI Schmoller, Nr. 1, Bl. 548, clipping of 'Volksstaat und Gleichberechtigung', in *Frankfurter Zeitung*, 9 January 1917 (evening edition).

²⁵Professor von Schmoller bei den Antisemiten', in *Deutsche Israelitische Zeitung*, 4 January 1917, pp. 1–2, here p. 2.

²⁶GStA PK, VI. HA, NI Schmoller, Nr. 1, Bl. 543–544, clipping of 'Schmoller über "Neuorientierung"', in *Vösische Zeitung*, 30 December 1916 (morning edition).

²⁷GStA PK, VI. HA, NI Schmoller, Nr. 1, Bl. 539, clipping of 'Die Zurückgestellten', in *Die Wahrheit*, 13 January 1917.

²⁸Anon., 'Exzellenz von Schmoller's Universitäts-Statistik', in *Im deutschen Reich. Zeitschrift des Centralvereins deutscher Staatsbürger Jüdischen Glaubens*, vol. 23, no. 6 (June 1917), pp. 241–245, here p. 243.

²⁹GStA PK, VI. HA, NI Schmoller, Nr. 1, Bl. 328–335, J. Schwalbe to Schmoller, 11 January 1917.

has to own up to the fact that in this area of culture Germany is not on the same level as our Western enemies".³⁰ He concluded by noting that Schmoller's status as a respected scholar would give his opinions about Jews wide circulation in the daily press and thus work to legitimate the tenor of antisemitic newspapers. It seems few were satisfied with what Schmoller had written.

Even the normally reserved and cautious Hamburg banker Max Warburg was compelled to respond to Schmoller's comments. In a letter to Schmoller he wrote as follows:

Your recent comments about Preuß and Delbrück induce me to send you a manuscript that I have recently completed and which deals with the Jewish Question. I also attach a small excerpt from the will of Frederick the Great.

The Jewish Question interests me not only as a Jew, but also in the German public interest. I do not have the impression that you, as far as I understand your comments, do justice to this so important question. I do not seek anything for myself but am simply inspired by the wish to make use of those strengths in Germany which we necessarily need. If we do not do this then the struggle in which we are now engaged would in some respect be a mistake. At your convenience, it would interest me much to hear of your views of my manuscript, which I ask you to treat with confidentiality.³¹

Warburg's manuscript was titled "The Jewish Question in Relation to Overall German Policy". An initial draft of it had been penned in June 1916, but this was significantly revised with the aid of his brother Aby in light of the growing German antisemitism in the late summer and autumn of 1916.³² Indeed, Warburg had been one of the first prominent German Jews to express his resentment about the *Juden-zählung* publicly in November 1916.³³ In his piece on the "Jewish Question", Warburg sought to secure an enduring civil peace by overcoming the ongoing hostility to Jews in Germany. Antisemitic prejudices, in particular the exclusion of Jews from reserve officer commissions and the execution of the notorious "Jew count", had given Germany a negative image abroad. Such discrimination also discouraged those whose talents and strengths the country needed to prevail in war. Warburg, making reference to Jewish emigration from Germany, noted that antisemitism had cost it many able-bodied and talented people, many of whom now enriched states aligned against the country. It was above all necessary to teach religious tolerance in schools, which had too often become academies for antisemitism. Likewise, Germany was one of the few countries where Jews were not promoted to senior positions in government. Humanism and tolerance, he concluded, would greatly improve Germany's position abroad.³⁴

Schmoller was himself sharply stung by these and other criticisms, so much so that he immediately penned a response and did not wait to publish it in the next number

³⁰*ibid.*

³¹Hessisches Hauptstaatsarchiv [HHStA] Abt. 1088, Nr. 11, Warburg to Schmoller, 6 January 1917.

³²Warburg Institute Archives [WIA], IV. 69, M. Warburg to A. Warburg, 13 June 1916; WIA, FC, A. Warburg to M. Warburg 25 [Oct. or Nov.?] 1916; WIA, IV. 69, M. Warburg to A. Warburg, 25 November 1916.

³³Angress, pp. 128–130.

³⁴HHStA Abt. 1088, Nr. 11, 'Die Judenfrage im Rahmen der deutschen Gesamtpolitik', November 1916.

of his *Jahrbuch*. Thus on 16 January 1917 'Die heutige deutsche Judenfrage' ('The Contemporary German Jewish Question'), was published in the *Tägliche Rundschau*, a newspaper read widely by those in the liberal professions.³⁵ In this piece Schmoller was unrepentant about his antisemitic remarks, noting that in his review of Preuß and Delbrück he had "added a few completely harmless comments about the fact that many people find [that] these mistreated citizens appear here and there in this and that influential position almost as prevailing elements".³⁶ He wrote that he was taken by surprise by the storm of anger in the Jewish and philosemitic press and praise in the antisemitic press, all of which he chalked up to inadequate discussion of the content of his review. Since he was in no position to respond to the "mountains of mail" he had received, he had chosen to write a response articulating his position on the "Jewish Question." He began his arguments by making mention of the fact that he himself had lifelong neither been a philosemite nor an antisemite and that he had "some of my best friends amongst Jews and half-Jews", in effect underscoring the racial definition of Jewishness he had introduced in his book review.³⁷

Taking a historical perspective, Schmoller discussed the evolution of the relationship between "different races, peoples and religious communities", referring to the fate of the European Jews in the Middle Ages as "the fate of racially alien minorities everywhere in cultural history".³⁸ He then referred to the dawning realisation of human equality accompanying the eighteenth-century Enlightenment—a realisation expressed in nineteenth-century political ideas, notably the idea of legal equality. But for Schmoller, if such ideas were to bear fruit they needed to be combined with an assimilation already occurring in the upper classes of this "racially alien minority".³⁹ Schmoller then noted that the assimilation of upper-class Jews in Germany had made great progress since 1848–1870: it was marked by the growing conversion of Jews to both Christian confessions. Nevertheless, the process was far from complete. Rather, it had been hindered by "Jewbaiting by those Germans [*Germanen*] hit by Jewish competition and by the steady immigration of non-assimilated Eastern Jewish elements, [and] by the still existing closed-off nature of Jewish circles, especially among middle and lower class Jews".⁴⁰ Unlike in France and Britain, where the number of Jews was far smaller and where Jewish immigration had involved an aristocracy of assimilated or semi-assimilated Jews from Italy, Portugal and Spain, Germany's Jewish immigrants came from the east and resisted assimilation for one or two generations. The agents of assimilation were common schooling and university education, literature, a common world of thought, social intercourse, and most intensively, intermarriage.⁴¹

³⁵Gustav Schmoller, 'Die heutige deutsche Judenfrage', in *Tägliche Rundschau*, 16 January 1917; also published in *Schmollers Jahrbuch*, vol. 41 (1917), pp. 563–567; reprinted in Schmoller, *Zwanzig Jahre*, pp. 177–181.

³⁶Schmoller, *Zwanzig Jahre*, p. 177.

³⁷*ibid.*

³⁸*ibid.*, p. 178.

³⁹*ibid.*

⁴⁰*ibid.*, pp. 178–179.

⁴¹*ibid.*, p. 179.

Asking himself what could be achieved, he concluded that

an expulsion of all Jews from Germany is impossible, would be a barbarity, would do harm to our culture. All higher culture, the current stock of highest-standing cultures, rests on a mixing of races. ... We thus have no cause to think that the existence of 615,021 Jews in a German population of 60 million is problematic. Yes, it would seem that there are convincing reasons to speak of the contrary.⁴²

“Western German Jewry”, Schmoller added, was “entirely the more assimilated [Jewish population and] a favourable addition to the Germanic race. It gives us the intellectual strength that we more or less lack, or which we lacked in the past; it has very much benefited the German economy.”⁴³ But, he observed:

[I]t carries with it the danger that through its commercial superiority, which it still often exploits by many dubious means, it generates social discord and struggles. The tendency of the Jew, where he enters into an influential, dominant position, to wrong the Germans [*Germanen*] and Christians is still frequently at hand, so that real setbacks in the Jew-friendly attitude of all liberals recur, and ill-feeling among conservative, peasant, small trade, and cottage industry circles has not yet disappeared to the extent it has in Western Europe. It is thus in the interest of the Jews that they should not dominate certain positions, occupations, and offices excessively and should avoid making such dominance too visible.⁴⁴

Having established what he saw as a way to master the current challenges to full Jewish assimilation, Schmoller returned to some of the issues that had animated his review of Preuß’s book, namely Jewish dominance of Berlin’s city government and the discrimination of Jews in the officer corps, in effect justifying certain remaining discriminations against Jews in the interest of social harmony.⁴⁵ He concluded his essay with a reference to Lessing’s *Nathan der Weise*: “If we only had *Nathan-Naturen* among the 600,000 German Jews there would today hardly be a Jewish Question; but we also have *Shylock-Naturen*, and the majority of Jews perhaps stand somewhere in between these two extremes.”⁴⁶ He finished with a call for conciliation between Christians and Jews, voicing his certainty that in a century most sources of complaint on both sides would be overcome. But he added a caveat: “The existing beliefs of the masses and the corresponding customs cannot be changed from one day to the next.”⁴⁷

As his essay on the “Jewish Question” makes very clear, Schmoller had a basically racial understanding of both “Germanness” and “Jewishness”; while he acknowledged the cultural value of racial mixing, this was only desirable in as much as the racially alien element was eventually wholly dissolved into the host race. That is, Schmoller’s notion of assimilation had as its final consequence the elimination of Jews as both a people and a religion. It is in this respect particularly revealing that he

⁴²*ibid.*

⁴³*ibid.*

⁴⁴*ibid.*, pp. 179–180.

⁴⁵*ibid.*, p. 180.

⁴⁶*ibid.*, pp. 180–181.

⁴⁷*ibid.*, p. 181.

was willing to discuss Jewish expulsion from Germany, even if he then rejected it as a “barbarity” and as culturally harmful. Instead, Schmoller preferred elimination by way of assimilation. Other aspects of Schmoller’s antisemitism, notably the social and economic aspects, were part of a very familiar repertoire of prejudices that in effect made *Jews* responsible for antisemitism; as such they do not merit much unpacking or additional comment. These prejudices amounted to Schmoller’s justification for the remaining discrimination against German Jews, which he believed would give way over time, and through assimilation, to full equality. Following Schmoller’s strained logic, however, that equality was predicated on the disappearance of Jewry.⁴⁸

As Peter Pulzer has argued, this notion of assimilation—as a process leading ultimately to a uniform, equal citizenry—was itself a relic of a dogmatic Enlightenment that had animated German administrative practice since the beginning of the nineteenth century and that had since made its way into definitions of German nationhood because of the premium placed on cohesion in circumstances of de facto national disunity.⁴⁹ This exclusivist definition of the nation along with the slow pace of Jewish emancipation and the retention of Christian federal states within a formally secular empire after 1871 perpetuated the “Jewish Question” in Germany long after it had been resolved elsewhere.⁵⁰ From this perspective, the “Jewish Question” was, as Peter Pulzer has put it, a byproduct of “the failure of the German nation at large to arrive at a satisfactory relationship between nationality and citizenship”.⁵¹ That is, the “Jewish Question” was in effect the mirror image of a larger “German question”.

IV

The response to Schmoller’s provocative essay on the “Jewish Question” was, like the reaction to his earlier book review, quite critical, but it also revealed shifts in positions suggesting a convergence of opinion. The liberal Jewish press responded with indignation. For example, the *Deutsche Israelitische Zeitung*, making reference to the concluding sentence of Schmoller’s essay where he mentioned the impossibility of overnight changes to public attitudes, wrote: “That today has already lasted 150–200 years. Is that not enough?! It is time that it becomes morning and tomorrow [*daß es morgen und Morgen wird*]. When one reads the sentence ‘an expulsion of the Jews from Germany is impossible’ one has to wonder if it is really 1917 or rather 1519.”⁵² The

⁴⁸It should be noted that Schmoller’s position on Jewish assimilation bore some resemblance to arguments first made by Bruno Bauer and Karl Marx; see Bruno Bauer, *Die Judenfrage*, Braunschweig 1843 and Karl Marx’s 1844 review of Bauer republished in *Zur Judenfrage*, ed. by Stefan Grossmann, Berlin 1919.

⁴⁹Peter Pulzer, ‘Why was there a Jewish Question in Imperial Germany?’ in *LBI Year Book*, vol. 25 (1980), pp. 133–146, here pp. 135–136.

⁵⁰*ibid.*, pp. 138–39.

⁵¹*ibid.*, p. 142.

⁵²‘Nochmals Herr von Schmoller’, in *Deutsche Israelitische Zeitung*, 25 January 1917, pp. 1–3, here p. 3.

Israelitisches Familienblatt was even less sparing.⁵³ Schmoller's effort to elaborate his position, the paper indicated, was a fudge, combining the trivial with the untrue and thus demonstrating the impossibility of turning antisemitism into a science—it was an instinct: “Two heterogenous spirits struggle against each other within Schmoller, [and] the one believing in [the concept of] race [*Rassengläubigkeit*] defeats scientific progress [thus] giving birth to half-measures and concessions that come to the fore.”⁵⁴ A few weeks later the *Jüdische Rundschau* observed that every few months the German Jewish community was hearing of yet another German of high intellectual standing expressing antisemitic views—a special embarrassment in Schmoller's case since he offered “no other lesson ... than that within the bounds of an undoubtedly important teacher there can also reside a petty, insignificant politician. So petty that he does not scorn lending support to the most banal antisemitism of the street and to that of ‘society’ if they can be used against an opponent.”⁵⁵ In a later issue of the *Deutsche Israelitische Zeitung*, Schmoller's racialism was roundly criticised: “Where in Germany is it possible to track down authentic *Germanen*? This is the way Stöckerite terminology operates.”⁵⁶

On the opposite end of the spectrum, antisemitic papers and journals criticised Schmoller's argument that the Jews were best assimilated into the German people through intermarriage. In the radical nationalist magazine *Hammer*, the antisemitic firebrand Artur Dinter argued that the German and Jewish races were too alien and thus should not be mixed by intermarriage, in this way dismissing Schmoller's “humanitarian-liberal ideas” out of hand.⁵⁷ Likewise, Adolf Bartels in *Natur und Gesellschaft*, drawing heavily on ideas of the notorious biological racist Houston Stewart Chamberlain, criticised Schmoller's assimilationist ideal on the grounds that taking such an approach was impossible with the Jews, who in fact comprised a state within the state. A mixed race would, in any case, lead not to higher culture but to cultural degeneration. The Jewish Question could only be solved by pure segregation.⁵⁸

As in the case of his review of Hugo Preuß, Schmoller also received much mail in response to his article on the “Jewish Question”. One such letter was from a young Jewish soldier from Mannheim serving on the front in a *Landwehr* regiment. Referring to acts of discrimination he knew only too well from experience he wrote of the difficulty he had had in advancing beyond the rank of non-commissioned officer.⁵⁹ It was the same, he noted, for his four brothers, likewise serving in the field. He went

⁵³‘Herr von Schmoller und die Judenfrage’, in *Israelitisches Familienblatt*, 1 February 1917, p. 2.

⁵⁴*ibid.*

⁵⁵‘Der Fall Schmoller’, in *Jüdische Rundschau*, 23 February 1917, pp. 67–69.

⁵⁶‘Eine gründliche Abfuhr des Geh-Rats Prof. v. Schmoller’, in *Deutsche Israelitische Zeitung*, 1 March 1917, p. 1. The reference was, of course, to the antisemitic court preacher and Christian Social Party politician Adolf Stöcker (1835–1909).

⁵⁷GStA PK, VI. HA NI Schmoller, Nr. 1, Bl. 101–103, clipping of Artur Dinter, ‘Zur Frage der Rassenmischung’, in *Hammer*, vol. 16, no. 353 (1917).

⁵⁸GStA PK, VI. HA NI Schmoller, Nr. 1, Bl. 86–88, clipping of Adolf Bartels, ‘Die heutige deutsche Judenfrage’, in *Natur und Gesellschaft*, vol. 4, no. 6 (1917). A similar racist antisemitic position is found in ‘Gustav von Schmoller’, in *Auf Vorposten*, vol. 4, nos. 9–10 (1917), pp. 220–230.

⁵⁹GStA PK, VI. HA NI Schmoller, Nr. 1, Bl. 409–410, Willi Major to Schmoller, 23. February 1917.

on to describe insults and degradations many of them had suffered—most recently the systematic shifting to the front of those Jews who were usually stationed in non-combat posts. This, he indicated, would result in thousands of young Jewish businessmen emigrating from Germany after the war, similar to what had occurred in the 1860s and 1870s:

Germany may be happy to be rid of a part of its Jewish elements ... but the new homeland will be even happier to have found new forces for commerce in world-wide competition. The Wall Street multi-billionaires in New York (bankers) are native Germans or of German descent. They have consistently fought against the delivery of munitions [to the Entente powers] and have not participated in purchasing English and French war bonds.

I thought that I was German and had as my religion the Jewish faith just as one might claim to be a Catholic etc. But now those in highest authority are not playing fair. Does His Excellency know how many billions of war bonds were bought by the German Jews? How many Jews [are] wounded or dead? How many have been decorated [for exemplary conduct] in enemy action, and how few [were made] officers? So, if we were not Germans, do we know for what we are bleeding?⁶⁰

This time around bigger guns also entered the fray. Hermann Cohen, perhaps the most learned and articulate voice of liberal German Jewry, responded in a two-part article in the *Neue Jüdische Monatshefte*.⁶¹ Cohen rejected Schmoller's deployment of relativistic historical comparisons as a basis for any valid judgment about the treatment of Jews in the modern state, just as he questioned Schmoller's projection of modern notions of race onto the past.⁶² He then examined Schmoller's claim that the Enlightenment idea of legal equality would only bear fruit with full Jewish assimilation:

Is the Enlightenment—in and of itself—not a ripe fruit which is capable of further growth and its own higher development, but which should not be judged first and foremost by its fruits? The author continues: "so it must be combined with assimilation." This, then, is the core of the fruit that is expected from the Enlightenment. Thus the Enlightenment is itself unripe and its development is not dependent on the expansion of its principle but on a heterogeneous matter, namely the assimilation of the "racially alien minority". Thus, in the difficulties of politics, the equality of man before God becomes a pious phrase that even the Enlightenment is incapable of endowing with a more solid content.⁶³

According to Cohen, the sort of assimilation Schmoller had in mind was

...nothing but a false word invented and used to conceal a tendency which had already left its brand on the Enlightenment: [namely] to seek to eliminate and eradicate a religion and its adherents. Rather than driving out and eradicating one says assimilation. What goal does it have? The nation which forms the state? Is the modern nation-state limited

⁶⁰*ibid.*

⁶¹Hermann Cohen, 'Betrachtungen über Schmollers Angriff', in *Neue Jüdische Monatshefte*, vol. 1 (1917), pp. 222–230; 256–260; reprinted in Hermann Cohen, *Jüdische Schriften*, ed. by Bruno Strauß, vol. 2, Berlin 1924, pp. 381–397.

⁶²*ibid.*, pp. 384–385.

⁶³*ibid.*, p. 385.

by one nationality? Or is its modernity not based on the task and ability to unite various nationalities in the idea of the state into a single nation, a national state?⁶⁴

German citizenship, Cohen insisted, had *not* been extended to Jews on the condition that they would give up their religion. Quite the contrary: the strength that Jews derived from their belief in a singular God and their adherence to enduring moral-ethical teachings had allowed their successful integration into the German people.⁶⁵

In Cohen's view, in the face of Schmoller's attacks, made at a time of extraordinary Jewish sacrifice, the Jewish courage to hope, normally boundless, was failing.⁶⁶ Behind Schmoller's use of terms such as "half-Jews" Cohen saw, accurately, a racial view of Jewishness that he rejected categorically.⁶⁷ At the same time, he maintained, the war, and in particular the experience of Germany's wartime alliance, had shown that the existence of various *nations* was important for unitary and federal states. If Jewish monotheism was to survive in the face of the sort of ill-will and intolerance exemplified by Schmoller, it would only be in the form of its own nationality. In turn it was in the German state's interest to advance this Jewish nation, because only in this way could the Jewish religious tradition be assured survival.⁶⁸ This was quite a striking change of position on the part of a great philosopher who had been one of the most persuasive and influential advocates of Jewish assimilation, and one of the most vociferous and persistent critics of Zionism.⁶⁹

By late 1917 a similar drift in position was evident among many other prominent liberal Jews in the *Centralverein*. For example, Eugen Fuchs would himself proclaim that the task at hand was no longer assimilation but a renaissance of Jewry.⁷⁰ Zionists like Max Brod, Martin Buber, Nahum Goldmann, and Arnold Zweig were of course willing to go even further. These young Zionists defined Jewish nationality within the parameters of the then prevailing Nietzschean cultural critique, borrowing heavily from German *völkisch* nationalism. Indeed, the evidence suggests a convergence of opinion about the "Jewish Question" between this younger generation of German Zionists and *völkisch* nationalists during the First World War.⁷¹

V

What are we to make of this distressing episode, and what tentative answers can we formulate to the questions raised earlier? There is no doubt that a new climate of opinion prevailed following the *Juden-zählung*. Long suppressed or stifled

⁶⁴*ibid.*, pp. 385–386.

⁶⁵*ibid.*, p. 386.

⁶⁶*ibid.*, p. 381.

⁶⁷*ibid.*, pp. 382–383.

⁶⁸*ibid.*, p. 383.

⁶⁹Compare Hermann Cohen, 'Deutschum und Judentum mit grundlegenden Betrachtungen über Staat und Internationalismus' [1915], in *idem*, *Kleinere Schriften*, vol. 5, ed. by Hartwig Wiedebach, Hildesheim–New York 1997, pp. 465–560; *idem*, 'Religion und Zionismus. Ein Wort an meine Kommilitonen jüdischen Glaubens' [1916], in Cohen *Jüdische Schriften*, pp. 319–327.

⁷⁰Sieg, p. 245.

⁷¹*ibid.*, pp. 246–252.

animosities—animosities that could not be given vent and would not have had such a broad and receptive audience—found their expression after October 1916. Men like Schmoller dared say things they had perhaps long felt but shied away from articulating when a more civilized climate of opinion prevailed. In fairness, Schmoller did not reject Germany's Jews as unassimilable and acknowledged their contributions to German society. Yet on their own terms and gauged by the angry responses they elicited from the German Jewish community—in particular the outrage of normally reserved liberal Jews like Max Warburg and Hermann Cohen—Schmoller's comments were startling in their immoderation and hostility, especially in light of his public stature, usual restraint, and the absence of such views in his scholarly oeuvre or his many public statements before the war. At the same time, Schmoller's arguments did not go far enough for those like Artur Dinter and Adolf Bartels on the *völkisch* antisemitic right. Indeed, far from satisfying these elements, Schmoller may have inadvertently fanned the flames of their further radicalisation. After all, in legitimating a racialised definition of Jewry aimed at total assimilation and hence religio-ethnic dissolution, he lent credibility and authority to old, deeply embedded German and European hatreds. In light of the fact that Gustav Schmoller was an exemplary figure in the Kaiserreich's scholarly establishment, the extent to which racial antisemitism with an eliminationist valence had attained a degree of normality and legitimacy is striking. The fact that Schmoller himself did not perceive his comments as antisemitic and was as surprised as he was at the hostile reactions they elicited suggests that this "soft", assimilationist form of antisemitism had attained wide currency by the last years of the Kaiserreich.

There can be little doubt that this now forgotten controversy contributed to a questioning and eventually abandoning of the project of liberal integration and assimilation, and thus to a redefinition of Jewish identity along national lines within a small but influential group of German Jews. The controversy also reveals a growing convergence of opinion between mainstream assimilationist antisemites like Schmoller and rejectionist *völkisch* antisemites, on the one hand, and disillusioned mainstream liberal integrationists like Cohen and the younger generation of German Zionists, on the other: being simultaneously German and Jewish was increasingly perceived as problematic, and in the minds of a growing number of German Jews and Gentiles, as undesirable or even impossible. Indeed, the *Juden-zählung* and the resulting debate over the "Jewish Question" sparked by Schmoller's writings reveal how the fragile wartime *Burgfrieden* was compromised and how the perception of two distinct, racially-defined nations emerged, together with a flexible victim-perpetrator binary structure that could rationalise failure in war, reflecting the unresolved tension between nationhood and citizenship that had bedevilled Germany ever since its unification.

